DIY Ikebana

Ikebana is the Japanese art of flower arranging. It dates back hundreds of years and was influenced by the Buddhist tradition of making floral offerings. Ikebana masters train for years to learn the artform, which aims to bring out the inner qualities of flowers and to express emotion.

Learn the basics behind the art of ikebana and present someone you love with an arrangement inspired by this tradition!

Ikebana Basics:

Usually ikebana is done with three (3) main components:

- A long branch or blossom
- A branch or blossom that is ¾ the size of the first
- A branch or blossom that is ¼ size of the second one

These three branches (or stems) represent heaven, earth, and human. An ikebana arrangement follows the principles of minimalism, shape, line, form, and balance.

USC Pacific Asia Museum
Supplies Needed:

- Flowers, branches, foliage (leaves)
- Shallow container (a jar or small vase works well too)
- Scissors
- Play-doh (or any homemade modeling clay, like salt dough)
- Optional: small rocks, marbles, or pebbles; traditional flower frog

Instructions:

**Step 1**

Go for a walk around your neighborhood (or out to your garden if you have one) and gather the flowers, branches, and leaves for your arrangement. When selecting the plants, consider the following questions:

- What are your favorite colors?
- What shapes and lines in the blossoms, leaves, or branches do you find interesting to look at?
- If this is a gift for someone, which flowers/plants remind you of that person’s personality?

**Step 2**

Arrange your materials on a clean work surface. Arrange your flowers to have three height levels, as described above in “Ikebana Basics”. You can use scissors to trim any stems needed to fit the approximate dimensions. You can also remove leaves from a branch as you see fit.
Step 3

Take your play-doh (or whatever dough you are using) and place it inside the container. Begin inserting the floral elements into the dough and arranging them so that an interesting and balanced composition is created. You may need to add more play-doh to hold some stems in place.

You can experiment with different arrangements until you find the one you like best.

The dough is being used as a flower frog, which is an item used in traditional ikebana to help flowers stand up in a shallow container. It is usually made with metal pins sticking up from a small round dish.

*Note: If you are using a vase and not a shallow container, you can skip the dough part and just arrange the flowers in the vase with water.

Step 4

If you like, you can fill the container with a few small rocks, marbles, or pebbles, to either cover up or accent the dough.

Step 5

Your ikebana is ready to display or gift to someone you love!

USC Pacific Asia Museum
This project was designed by Valentina M. Quezada, Youth and Family Programs Specialist, for the USC Pacific Asia Museum Education Department

USC Pacific Asia Museum