

Speedball®

Ikebana Vases

History – Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging, originated many centuries ago. There are several types of Ikebana. Heika uses a tall vase and has many rules of arrangement while Moribana uses a shallow container with a kenzan.

Moribana is only about 100 years old and does not have as many rules governing the acceptable flower types and arrangement. **Note:** These make great gifts when finished with an arrangement.



by Nancy Sowder

Materials

- Moist earthenware, cone 6 stoneware, or cone 6 porcelain clay
- Speedball Underglazes, Earthenware or Stoneware Glazes
- Brushes
- Tools including; slab roller or rolling pin, rubber rib or brayer, knife or needle tool for cutting, serrated rib and a scoring tool (a serrated rib works for this, or a fork or small wire brush)
- Leaves (and other flora if desired)
- Kenzan; also called a Pin Frog (This is a holder with many sharp points onto which the flower stems are placed. They are available at most floral shops and craft centers.)

Description - You will use patterns from nature to form clay components. These will be shaped and combined to create a vase for ikebana. They will be stained with underglazes or painted with colored glazes.

Step 1 – Select a few leaves to use as patterns. Those with more pronounced veins will provide the most detail in the clay. A piece of bark may also be useful. If you can find two leaves of the same size you can use them for front and back of the clay slab since in most instances the back will also be visible. Heart shaped leaves are the easiest to shape. Long slender leaves would be difficult.

Step 2 – Roll a slab ¼” or thinner from the moist clay. Using a rubber rib, smooth away any texture left from the canvas. Lay the leaves on the clay (most textured side down) and press them firmly with a rib, or roll with a brayer so that the veins on the leaf are pressed into the clay. Cut the leaves out with a knife or needle tool. You may want to thin the edges by pressing with your fingertips to produce a more natural look. Leaving the leaves on the clay while forming will prevent the texture from smearing and allow easier handling.

Step 3 – Take one of the clay leaves and shape it so that it will have a reservoir to hold the kenzan and water. Make sure it is deep enough as the water will evaporate quickly from open forms such as these. Score and slip and press firmly wherever the clay overlaps.

Step 4 – To support the vase and make it stand at the proper angle, use one or more additional clay leaves. For a different type of base, press a slab onto a piece of bark, shape as desired and attach the shaped leaf.

Step 5 – Make a flat area where the kenzan will be attached. Remember that it will shrink so make it a little larger than the kenzan. Allow to dry slowly. When completely dry bisque fire to cone 04.

Step 6 – Finishing may be done in two different ways.

A - The first simply uses colored, semi-transparent glazes to finish the leaves. Brush on 2 – 3 coats of one or more colors creating monochromatic or variegated patterns or highlights. Once the glaze dries, re-fire to cone 05 or 06.

B - The second method uses underglazes for staining. Apply the chosen color of underglaze to the leaves and then go over them with a wet sponge. This will remove the color from the raised areas. The color that remains in the recessed lines will accentuate the veins of the leaf. When dry, apply a clear or light colored semi-transparent covering glaze. The outer leaves may remain unglazed if desired, but at least the interior of the bowl portion which will hold the water should be given a coating of glaze.

Step 7 – Attach the kenzan to the vase with a strong epoxy. If students are doing this project, for safety and because epoxies are difficult to clean up, this step should be done by the teacher.

Variations: Use stoneware or porcelain clay and stoneware glazes. Choose transparent celadon-like glazes, or those which produce a color change where applied thickly. The variation inherent in the glaze will highlight the incised lines of the leaves.



Evaluation: If done by students, they will be evaluated on:

- Composition of vase elements
- Skill in manipulating the clay forms
- Successful use of the score-and-slip technique
- Execution of construction