

# Designing Corsages and Boutonnieres

**T**HE TRADITION of wearing corsages and boutonnieres goes back centuries and continues to this day. Corsages and boutonnieres are fixtures for major high school dances, such as homecoming and prom, and for wedding parties. This unit focuses on the supplies needed and the techniques used to make corsages and boutonnieres.



## Objective:



Describe design mechanics and techniques in creating corsages and boutonnieres.

## Key Terms:



boutonniere

floral spray

ribbon

corsage

floral tape

stem dyes

daisy-hook method

floral tint

stitch method

design mechanics

florist wire

tip spraying

dip dyes

gauges

tulle

double-pierce method

hairpin method

wrap-around method

finishing dips or sprays

nestled boutonniere

wrist corsage

floral glitter

pierce method

## Corsages and Boutonnieres

A **corsage** is an arrangement of flowers worn as a fashion accessory by a girl or woman. It consists of a single bloom or a small group of blooms and is usually pinned to the dress, jacket, or blouse or worn on the wrist. A **boutonniere** is a flower or a small grouping of flowers attached to the left lapel of a boy's or man's jacket.

## SUPPLIES

Some floral supplies are specifically intended for the manufacture of corsages and boutonnieres. Essential supplies are floral tape, florist wire, and ribbon.

**Floral tape** is a tape made from paraffin-coated paper and is used to cover wires and stems. The tape is not sticky until it is stretched. It comes in  $\frac{1}{2}$ - and 1-inch-wide sizes. Typically, the narrow size is used for corsage construction. Floral tape comes in several colors, of which the most commonly used is dark green.

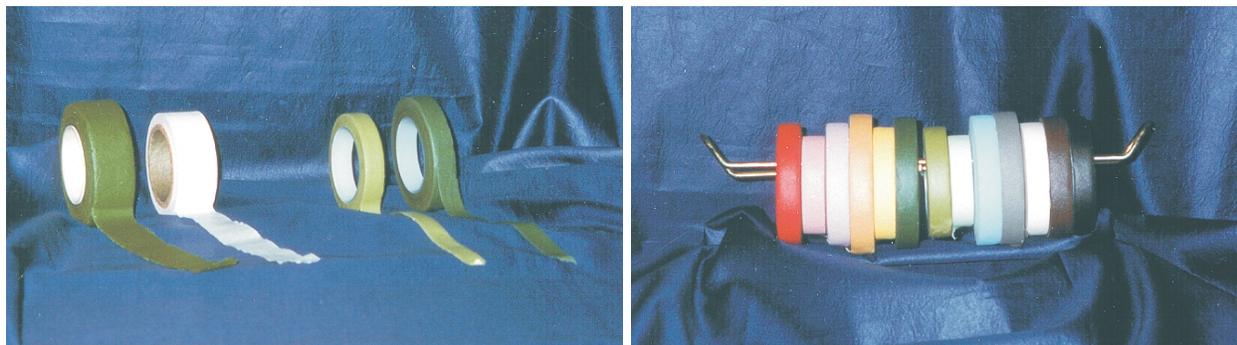


FIGURE 1. Floral tape is available in two widths and several colors.

**Florist wire** is sold in 18-inch lengths and comes in a variety of **gauges**—measurements of the diameter of the wire. The higher the number given a wire, the smaller the diameter.

Common sizes used in corsage construction are #26 for bows, #24 for medium-weight flowers, and #22 for heavy flowers, such as roses.

**Ribbon** is available in a number of sizes. The higher the number given a ribbon, the greater the width. In corsages, #3 ribbon is used. The most commonly used ribbon finish is satin; others are cotton, silk, sheer, paper, and bur-lap.

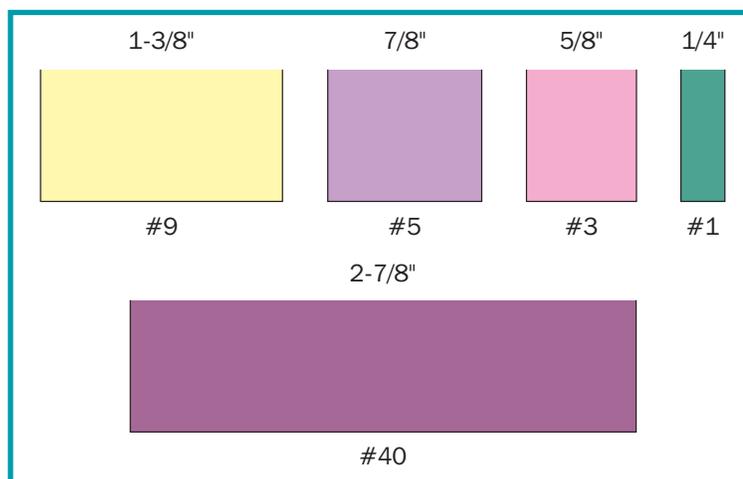


FIGURE 2. Ribbon comes in many widths and finishes.

### Color Changing Supplies

**Floral spray** is an opaque paint that will cover any color of flower. **Floral tint** is a translucent paint that will allow color from underneath to show through. **Floral glitter** gives flowers a metallic finish, creating a glimmering touch.

Steps for using floral sprays, tints, and glitter follow.

1. Find a well-ventilated area, and protect surfaces from the paint.

2. Shake the paint can thoroughly.
3. Test the paint flow on the lid of a box or on a piece of scrap cardboard.
4. Hold the nozzle approximately 12 inches from the flower.
5. Press the nozzle down in quick bursts while moving the can from side to side.
6. Let the sprayed material dry thoroughly.
7. Use a second application if needed, but avoid heavy layers of paint.
8. Before storing the paint, turn the can upside down and press the nozzle until only air comes out. This helps prevent clogging of the nozzle.

**Tip spraying** is a technique used to color only flower petal edges. Steps for tip spraying follow.

1. Wire and tape the stem.
2. Place a corsage bag or paper towel around your hand.
3. Gather the bag around the flower head and hold the head tightly, exposing only the edges of the petals.
4. Spray a light coat of paint.
5. Allow the flower to dry completely.



**FIGURE 3.** Floral sprays are great color tools for the floral designer. Color was applied to a carnation in the normal way (right side) and with the tip spraying technique (left side).

**Stem dyes** are color solutions transported through the xylem and into the petals. Wholesalers will often provide this service before the flowers are shipped.

**Dip dyes** are semi-transparent; dyeing is achieved by dipping the head of the flower into the color solution.

### Other Supplies

In the making of corsages or headpieces, small flowers are attached with glues and adhesives. This is considered an advanced technique in the industry. When glue is used, it is melted in a small pan or applied with a low-temperature glue gun. The advantage of glue over adhesive is that glue dries more quickly.

Cotton balls are often used to extend the life of flowers in corsage work. A moistened cotton ball is placed at the base of a flower stem before taping.

Miscellaneous items typically used include silk leaves, pearl sprays, rhinestones, chenille letters, butterflies, bees, and tulle.

**Tulle** is a florist netting that can add color, texture, and support to the corsage.

### Packaging Supplies

Packaging supplies are materials that will protect the corsage until it is to be used. **Finishing dips or sprays** seal the stomata of the flowers, preventing any further loss of water. A misting bottle can be used to apply a fine mist into the bag in which the corsage will be placed. Corsage bags are made of plastic or cellophane and come in a variety of sizes. They are used to prevent moisture loss and protect corsages from temperature extremes. A corsage pin likely has a pearl ball on the blunt end. A florist usually provides a pin in the corsage and seals the bag with a second pin. The two pins can be used for attaching the corsage. Boxes are often made of cardboard but may also be made of clear plastic. A box provides added protection from smashing or crushing the corsage.



FIGURE 4. Other corsage supplies include silk leaves, tulle, and pearl spray.

## DESIGN MECHANICS

**Design mechanics** are employed to hold the components of a corsage securely together. Good mechanics provide the foundation for floral design work. Proper wiring, taping, and bow making are essential to creating the desired corsage.

### Wiring Techniques

Florist wire is used to replace most of the bulky flower stem. The stem is removed except for approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch below the flower head. The most common wiring methods include pierce, double pierce, daisy hook, wrap around, hairpin, and stitch.

The **pierce method** involves placing a wire through the calyx and bending the wire parallel to the stem. Taping is started at the calyx, covering the pierced area. The length of the wire is taped. The pierce method is often used with carnations and roses.

The **double-pierce method** involves placing two wires through the calyx, one at a 90-degree angle from the other and slightly lower, bending both wires parallel to the stem and taping from the calyx.

The **daisy-hook method** involves placing a wire up through the stem of the flower head, forming a small hook with the wire about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch long, and slowly pulling the hook back into

the flower head until it disappears. Taping starts at the stem and continues the length of the wire. This method is best for chrysanthemums and daisies.

The **wrap-around method** is used on a cluster of small flowers. It involves placing half the wire parallel with the cluster of stems and wrapping the other half around that wire. The taping begins wherever the wire begins.

The **hairpin method** is used on multi-flowered stems and is achieved by bending the wire into the shape of a hairpin and placing this “hairpin” through the flower cluster where support is needed. The wire is pulled through until the hairpin rests on the stem. Then, one part of the wire is gently wrapped around the stem and the other part of the wire just below the lower florets or leaflets. Taping is started at the site where the first part of the wire starts. This method is used for freesia.

The **stitch method** is used with solid and wide leaves, such as salal and ivy. A #24 wire is inserted from the back of a leaf, over the midrib, and back through the leaf. The stitch should be a little bit past the halfway point of the leaf length. The midrib should be at about the midpoint of the wire. The two ends of the wire are bent down. One end is wrapped around the petiole and the other part of the wire. The visible wire is taped.

Other wiring techniques include the combination method, the non-piercing method, and the use of manufactured stems.

## Taping

Taping is done after the flowers have been wired. One reason for taping is to hide the wiring mechanics. Also, floral tape is treated with wax that reduces water loss and extends the life of the flowers. When taping, stretch the tape so that it overlaps and the tape sticks to itself.

## Bows

Most consumers feel a corsage is not complete until a bow is applied. Although a bow is usually the final step, it is not always necessary. In boutonniere construction, a bow is not added, although a small color-treated ribbon might be used to commemorate an occasion. Techniques for making bows vary from designer to designer.

## CORSAGE AND BOUTONNIERE DESIGN

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There are numerous styles of corsages and boutonnieres.

### Corsages

Multi-flower corsages use a variety of flowers to create the floral pieces. The most common are two-flower and five-flower corsages. The steps involved in making a five-flower corsage are as follows:

1. Select five flowers that range from small buds to fully open flowers.

2. Remove the stems; then wire and tape the flower heads.
3. Add foliage and filler to each of the five flowers. Keep proportion in mind as you apply these materials.
4. Place the corsage flowers by starting with the smallest flower at the top and increasing the size as you work down. Zigzag from left to right as you work, filling in holes with foliage or filler flowers. Tape each flower into place as you continue to work toward adding the fifth flower. The fourth and fifth flowers are added at somewhat of a downward angle.
5. Position the bow in place and tape.
6. Add foliage to the back of the corsage if needed.
7. Determine and create the stem finish.
8. Before packaging the corsage, make sure that the back is flat enough to allow the corsage to be worn correctly.

Single-flower corsage construction uses a large flower, such as an orchid, to create a corsage the size of a multi-flower corsage.

A **wrist corsage** is a light-weight corsage worn on the wrist instead of on clothing. A wrist corsage can be attached in several ways. A plastic latch-type band or an elastic band is most commonly used.



**FIGURE 5.** Corsages are made in many different designs, such as this wrist corsage.

## Boutonnieres

A single-flower boutonniere is the most common type of boutonniere in the marketplace. It consists of a medium-sized flower, foliage, and filler. The steps involved in making one are as follows:

1. Wire and tape the flower head.
2. Add filler by taping it to the stem.
3. Add foliage by placing it behind the flower and taping it into place.
4. Choose a stem finish.

A multi-flower boutonniere uses a variety of smaller flowers to create a boutonniere sized in proportion to the single-flower style. The steps are the same with the addition of positioning the various flower heads. The second and third flowers are angled slightly forward.

Placing a small flower, such as a rosebud, in the center of a carnation to create a special look creates a **nestled boutonniere**. The only additional step in this style is placing a wired smaller flower down through the head of the larger flower.

## WEARING CORSAGES AND BOUTONNIERES

A corsage is worn on a girl's or woman's left shoulder. This practice has roots in the Victorian Age, when flowers were placed over the heart of a loved one.

A corsage should be placed higher than a boutonniere and secured with two pins. One pin is placed through the stem, and other is placed higher, through the flowers, to keep the corsage from shifting. There is less chance of the pins sticking the person if the blunt ends are to the outside and the points are toward the center of the body.

A wrist corsage is worn on a girl's or woman's left wrist. It should be made relatively small so that it is comfortable for the person wearing it.

A boutonniere is placed on a boy's or man's left lapel near the buttonhole. One pin should be sufficient to secure it in place. The ball on the blunt end of a boutonniere pin is generally black.



**FIGURE 6.** A boutonniere can be composed of a single flower or of multiple flowers, like this one.

### Summary:



A corsage is an arrangement of flowers worn by a girl or woman. A boutonniere is a flower or a small grouping of flowers worn by a boy or man.

Essential supplies are floral tape, florist wire, and ribbon. Floral sprays, tints, and glitter are used to alter flower colors. Glues and adhesives are used to attach flowers to corsages or headpieces. Packaging supplies protect corsages and boutonnieres.

Proper wiring, taping, and bow making are essential to creating the desired corsage. The most common wiring methods include pierce, double pierce, daisy hook, wrap around, hairpin, and stitch. Taping hides the wiring mechanics and reduces water loss from flowers.

A multi-flower corsage uses a variety of flowers to create the floral piece. The most common boutonniere is the single-flower type.

A corsage is worn on the left shoulder, and a wrist corsage on the left wrist. A boutonniere is worn on the left lapel.

### Checking Your Knowledge:

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1. How do corsages and boutonnieres differ?
2. What supplies are used for corsage and boutonniere work?
3. What are the common wiring and taping techniques?
4. How are corsages and boutonnieres made?
5. How should corsages and boutonnieres be worn?

### Expanding Your Knowledge:

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Seek hands-on experience by making corsages and boutonnieres. You might make corsages and boutonnieres to fill orders for students attending school dances. This could be done in class or independently.

### Web Links:

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#### How to Make a Corsage

<http://www.save-on-crafts.com/cormakbas.html>

#### Selecting and Wiring Flowers (PowerPoint presentation)

<http://72.14.203.104/search?q=cache:EK15NNYkYuQJ:lr010.k12.sd.us/wiring.ppt+wiring+and+taping+techniques&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=15>

#### Flowers

<http://promadvice.tripod.com/flowers.html>

#### How to Make a Bow

<http://www.save-on-crafts.com/howtomakebows.html>