

Easy Planned Extractions for Digital Scrapbooking
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A very popular way to add embellishments for Digital Scrapbooks is to scan or photograph items that would otherwise not be possible or practical to add. This may include flowers, ribbons, bows or more personal items such as medals, small toys and other trinkets. However, extracting these items - removing the item from their backgrounds - can sometimes be a little tricky. With a little planning and a little know-how extractions from either scans or photographs can be much easier.

Here is a finished extraction including a shadow added later in Photoshop.



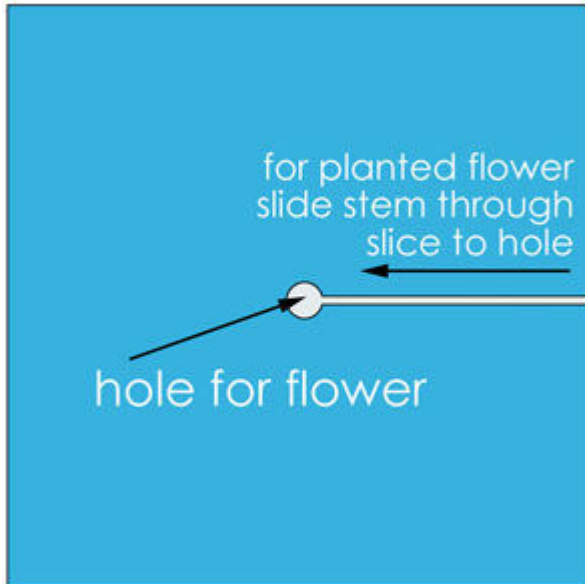
First we will talk about planned extractions - extractions from scans or photographs that are predetermined to be used on a page as an embellishment. In this case planning is everything. The first thing you'll need is a background with a strong contrast to your embellishment. Usually a black or white paper or fabric will work, but I have also used a fluorescent green and orange for contrast. The idea is to use a color that is not present in the main image so that the extraction will be easier once the image is in Photoshop. You will also need excellent lighting. I usually use my front porch. It is a covered porch which creates "open shade" shade that is soft and won't create harsh shadows.

For my first example I'm using a flower that I will be photographing. I've chosen a blue piece of cardstock as my background. Because my flower is yellow, the contrast should work well. Now I've taken the following steps to capture the image of the flower:

1. Cut a small hole in the center of the 8X11 paper. The hole should be just large enough to accommodate the stem of the flower. If you are photographing a flower from a flower

garden or pot, slice half-way through the paper to the hole you've created. This way you can surround the flower with the paper without damaging the flower.

2. Drop the cut flower through the hole so that the blossom is resting on the surface of the paper. OR if you are using a planted flower slide the paper around the flower so that it rests in the hole in the middle of the paper with the blossom on top. See the screen shot to see what I mean.



3. If you are using a cut flower, position the flower so that you have some open shade. Even if you are in bright light, you can create some open shade with your body, just by turning your back to the sun and standing over the flower. You can often do the same thing with a planted flower.

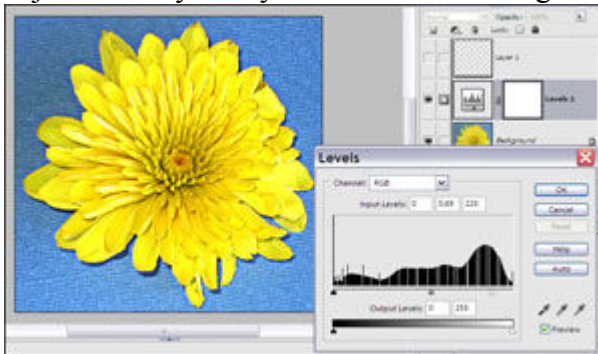
4. Snap several photos. You want to use a small aperture setting to get a nice crisp image. If your camera has a macro setting, you will want to use that and also be mindful of the minimum focus distance for your lens. Getting too close will result in a blurry shot.

Now for the extraction.

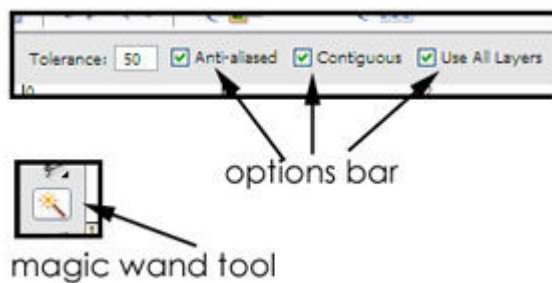
1. Open the image in Photoshop or your editing software. Edit the image as you see fit using levels, sharpen, etc. First duplicate the image to avoid damaging the original. Then change the resolution to 300 dpi without resampling. The physical size of the image should get smaller.

2. Double click on the background layer to make it a regular layer. This is also the time to perform any image correction such as sharpening, contrast adjustment, curves or levels, color correction. etc.

3. Now create a Levels Adjustment layer to create an exaggerated contrast in the image. For this image, I moved the right slider over a bit to exaggerate the lighter pixels and the middle slider over a bit to exaggerate the midtones. Please note - this is a temporary adjustment layer so you don't need to merge these layers.



4. Now choose the magic wand tool from the tool box. Look in the options bar beneath the tool bar. If there is plenty of contrast between the flower and the background a tolerance of 75-100 should be just right. Also make sure that Contiguous and Use All Layers is checked.



5. Now click on the background of the flower. You may need to click several times holding down the shift key to add to the selection. You may also want to zoom in to get the shadow area around the flower. Look closely to see the marching ants in this example.



6. Now choose the flower layer and click delete. The background should disappear.

7. If necessary, go back and using the magic wand tool again, clean up any missed areas.



8. Now we need some final clean-up using the selection tools. Cntrl+Click the image's layer thumbnail to select it.

9. From the toolbar, choose select/modify/contract and input 2 pixels. Choose OK.

10. Now with the selection still active, choose select/modify/Smooth and input 2 pixels. Choose OK.

11. Now choose select/inverse and hit delete on your keyboard. The rough edges should disappear. See a side by side of my sample image below.



Notes:

a. Here's a little trick I learned from Kim Hill, www.cgessentials.com. To check for stray pixels, put a thick red stroke around the image on a separate layer. This will make finding and erasing stray pixels easy. To do this just select the layer by Ctrl+Clicking on the layer thumbnail, add a new layer and go to edit stroke.

b. Sometimes, it is easier to use the magic wand to select the color that you want to keep (instead of the one you want to delete) Then you can invert your selection and delete.

For the next example, I'll be scanning a blue and white gingham bow. Again, I'll choose a contrasting background. In this case, I've used a piece of black felt, which blocks out light while producing a contrasting background. 1. Scan at a high resolution, such as 600 dpi. This lets you get a close-up image to erase any stray pixels.

Create your own lightbox:

http://www.luckyoliver.com/big_top/tips/tips_0107