



Tree of Life Mandala Dorset Button
Skill Level: All

Designed by Eileen Patterson
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What is a Dorset Button?

“A Dorset button is a style of craft-made button originating in the English county of Dorset.” ¹

A Little Bit of Dorset Button History

Dorset buttons had their origins in the 1600s in the Dorset area of England. The buttons were designed from locally sourced linen thread that was wrapped over horn rings taken from the sheep population. Later, in the mid-1700s, a nonrusting metal alloy that was used as a foundation for wire button rings. The wire rings gave a great boost to the already economically significant Dorset button industry. Although the first button was the conical high-top, which was used primarily for men’s waistcoats, the Dorset Cartwheel, which is formed over a ring foundation, is the most recognizable.

The button industry supported many families until button making machines were invented in the 1850s. Small buttons were used for undergarments and baby clothing, larger for men’s coats. Many were decorative, not functional. The tradition was nearly lost, except for the efforts of a few women at crucial points in the following years. Today jewelry and art hangings often use the button technique. The techniques that were used are every bit as artistic and useful today. ² The traditional steps—casting (covering the ring with blanket stitches), slicking (turning the cast “bumps” to the inside of the ring), laying (wrapping thread spokes), and rounding (filling in the spokes)—form the basis for many regional and contemporary variations. ³

¹ Wikipedia

² Wright

³ Olski

As stated in the paragraph above, jewelry and art hangings often use the Dorset button technique. This project was inspired by the Dorset button and the Live Oaks trees at my home.

Materials in the kit:

2-inch ring

1/2 skein of DMC Satin Thread

Brown and gray threads for the tree trunk and branches

Green thread for spring and summer trees, orange, red, yellow threads for fall trees

Tapestry needle

Embroidery needles

In addition, you will need

Light and magnification, as needed

Needle threader

Scissors

Step 1: Casting, or Loading the Ring

Thread the tapestry needle with approximately 2-2.5 yards of rayon thread. To start, work over the tail with several close blanket stitches. Continue around the ring adding blanket stitches, all very close, to cover the ring. When the ring is covered, secured the thread by passing through the first stitch.

Step 2: Slicking

Step 2 - "Slicking" is the next step, which means turning the ridge to the back. These two steps can be combined by pulling the casting stitch to the back as it is tightened, which must be done if a flat ring like a washer is used. Some modern buttoners leave the ridge on the outer edge. Ending and starting of all threads should be with a tiny knot or

weaving under finished stitches on the back side, under the casting stitches or at the center after the laying is worked.

Step 3: Laying The Spokes to Make the Tree

When making traditional Dorset Buttons the spokes are laid at even intervals around the ring; however, this Dorset is not traditional. Laying the spokes is where we will make our tree design.

Using 2 strands of brown or gray threads (or a combination of both), place the spokes on the ring wrapping each one from bottom to top. The lower side spokes should be fairly close together since they will make up the tree trunk but spaced far enough away from each other, approximately 1/8", to create the tree roots. From there, the spokes will spread out to the sides for the branches.

First, decide how the branches should grow. Because this tree is a live oak the branches should be gnarly and bumpy. The live oak's shape is umbrella-like with a large spreading canopy. The branches reach out and almost touch the ground.

To wrap, use 2 strands of the same floss used for the spokes. Lay a small tail of thread on the tree trunk and wrap it approximately 3-4 times to secure the thread. Wrap the spokes, or trunk, covering the tail. From there, wrap the spokes creating the branches as you wrap.

To achieve the bumpy and gnarly branches, layer the wraps making the layers thick in some places and thin in others. From there start wrapping the branches with forks when necessary. Shape the branches by tightening the wraps as they are built.

Step 4: Leaves

Once the branches are complete start making the leaves. The leaves are made with 1 strand of 6-strand embroidery floss. A small knot can be used on one of the branches to secure the thread. Use the detached chain stitch to make the leaves using layering to add fullness. Use French knots or beads for flowers or fruit.

Step 5: Finishing

Continue adding leaves until the tree is full. At this point the tree is complete. A frame is unnecessary because the hoop with Satin thread is the frame. The only thing needed is a ribbon for hanging.

For additional information about making Dorset buttons, I recommend the following sites and books:

Embroiderer's Guild of America Petite Project "Dorset Buttons" by Hope A. Wright. https://egausa.org/app/uploads/2021/04/protected-DorsetButtons_PP.pdf Complete tutorial for traditional Dorset making.

Piecework Magazine, "A Dorset Crosswheel Button To Make", Allyne Holland, August 31, 2020.
<https://pieceworkmagazine.com/a-dorset-crosswheel-button-to-make/>
Traditional Dorset button making.

Pat Olski "Crafting Thread Shawl Pins" 2022. Yarn Whirled Press.
Untraditional Dorset buttons made to use as shawl pins or barrettes.

Wikipedia "Dorset Buttons"
"https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorset_button"



