

The Learning Circle

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Straightening Feathers

Turkey feathers are naturally curved. To make them look like Eagle feathers it is necessary to flatten the feather quill without damaging the feather blade. In our example here we will use commercially dyed white turkey wing feathers.

There are a number of methods used by crafters over the years and all of them involve a heat source. So this is a project that requires your personal safety and the supervision of young folks trying it. One of the safest ways is to use a clothes iron, keeping your hands away from the heat. The work is done on a table or ironing board with an old terry cloth towel as the ironing surface.

You will have to experiment with the heat level of your particular iron, but it needs to be near the cotton range. (Figure 1) Do not use water in a steam iron. If the iron is too hot, it will quickly burn and curl the vane of the feather, so experiment on throw-away feather stock to establish your settings..

The first step (Photo 2) is to heat the quill on the underside of the feather. Stroke the tip of your iron along the quill until it is quite warm.

Then turn the feather so it is facing up. (Photo 3) Flatten the curved quill against the surface. Slightly pull up on the quill base of the feather, leveraging the middle to top against the towel surface. Now slowly stroke the quill with the tip of the iron, giving the most heat to the thickest part of the quill. With experience you will know when enough heat has built up.

As the quill straightens from this heat and bending pressure, slowly move the quill several inches to a cooler part of the towel and continue the bending pressure. Experience will show you how much pressure bend against the curve is needed. As the feather cools a bit, set the iron in it's upright resting position. pick up the feather in both hands and bend the quill sideways against the quill side curve. (Photo 4)

If the blade edges have curled slightly with this over-bending, lay the feather back on the surface (Photo 5) and lightly stroke the curled part of the vane. Turn the feather over and stroke the underside edge of the vane again. These are very light and quick strokes.

Quickly move the hot feather to a cool surface to bring down the temperature. We use shelf boards for this. (Photo 6) For very curved feathers, such as pointer wing feathers, before the quill cools, flex the quill backwards against the curve again and it will straighten better. You may then have to re-iron the blade edge one last time. Leave them flat overnight between two boards with weights on them. (Photo 7)

Trim the tips from the top with a sharp scissors, (Photos 8 and 9) so it is shaped more like an Eagle feather than a turkey feather.

These are the basics, but there are a lot of variables, such as the air temperature and humidity where you are working in, and your own feel of what is happening to the feather as you apply this much heat. Expect to scorch a few along the way. But be sure to keep your hands well away from danger of the hot clothes iron.



Natural Curved Turkey Wing Straightened Turkey Wing

