

Colonial Tinsmithing at Home

Follow these steps to replicate the work of a colonial era tin smith, making a lantern cover out of aluminum foil. Tinsmithing is one of many hands-on activities done at Historic Hudson Valley's Van Cortlandt Manor (Croton-on-Hudson, NY).

Supplies

1. **Aluminum foil** (heavy duty works best)
2. **Pattern** for your design (historic templates attached, or try your own design)
3. Scotch **tape** or masking tape
4. **Heavy duty work surface.** A cutting board, either wooden or heavy-duty plastic works well. You need something sturdy and large enough to accommodate your pattern. This activity will leave punch marks, so choose a cutting board or other surface that you don't mind getting marks on.
5. **Tool for punching holes**—a small Philips head screwdriver, nail, or even a thumbtack works
6. **Hammer** or other unbreakable household object to drive your punch. (This item not needed if using thumbtacks.)

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Select a pattern.
2. Cut a sheet of aluminum foil large enough to cover your pattern.
3. Tape the pattern to the foil by adding small pieces of tape along each side or near each corner. This will make sure that your punched holes stay aligned with your pattern.
4. Place your pattern and foil on the work surface. Make sure you have a sturdy place to work, like a countertop or even the floor. If working on a table, make sure that the legs are strong and will not wobble.
5. Holding your tool for punching holes, position the tip of the tool on top of a dot on the pattern.

- a. If you are using the screwdriver or nail, position the tip of the tool directly on top a dot on the pattern. The tool should be standing straight up, perpendicular to the work surface. Be sure to keep your thumb and fingers clear of the top of the tool, so you do not hit them accidentally! Using your hammer, hit the upright end of your punching tool. Repeat for every dot on your pattern.
- b. If you are using a thumbtack, place the thumbtack on one of the dots of your pattern. Hold it in place with your finger. Carefully pull the taped-together pattern and foil sheets upward just enough so that the thumbtack makes a hole in the foil. Repeat for every dot on your pattern.

If you want to see your progress, turn the foil and paper. If you hold the foil up to a light, light will shine through in the places where you have punched through the foil.

6. When you have punched through every dot on your pattern, turn your paper and foil over and hold it up to the light, to make sure that all the holes have been punched through. If necessary, you can go back over any punched holes to make them larger. When you're satisfied with how the design looks, carefully remove the pattern from the foil by peeling or cutting the tape from the pattern with a pair of safety scissors.
7. Tape your tin design to a lampshade or glass candle jar to see the pattern of light cast through your "lantern door."