Maple Syrup Ornament

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I'm always happy for gift suggestions for the guys, so when DH floated the idea of a mini maple syrup ornament for our tree, I naturally jumped at the idea.

I started out by having a look on line. Who'd have thought there were so many ornaments out there on that very theme? They ranged in style from glass to laser-cut wood, from flat discs to stuffed felt, and in price from $15 to $39 and up.



I was prepared to purchase an ornament, but as you can imagine, I really liked the idea of making my own. I could certainly have made my own versions of some of the styles I found on line: for instance, I could have used my button machine to create a flat disc style like the one on the left, above. Or I could have digitized and stitched a felt one like the one at right. Or I could even have decoupaged or painted an image onto a flat hardboard cut-out.



I considered these options, but in the end I decided to go for a 3D style ornament, and for that I'd need a suitable small bottle. The maple syrup that my husband buys comes in a round jug similar to this one, with a thumb handle. (In fact, nearly all of the ornaments I found also had a similar handle, though some of the bottles were flattish.)

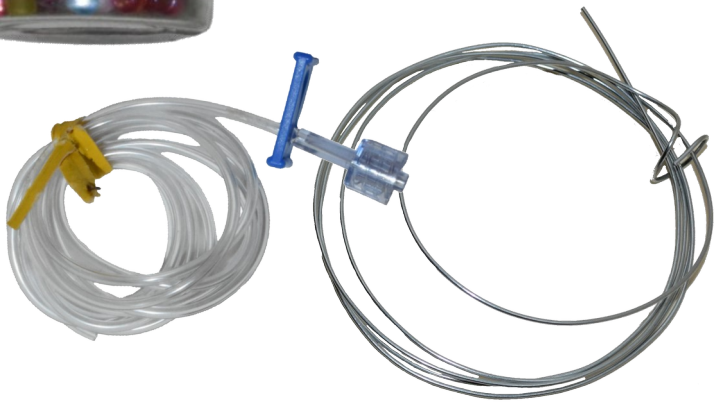
I watched at the thrift stores for an appropriate container, and finding none, I cast around in my stash of odds and ends to see if I had something that would work.

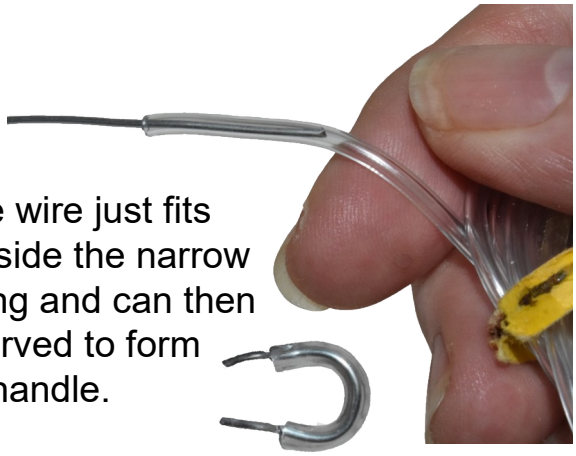
As it happens I do have several of these small glass sample bottles, saved from my previous cat's insulin medication. I thought they'd work in a pinch, though I thought I might have to forego the thumb handle.





Then quite by accident I stumbled upon this little bottle-shaped bead container that I'd forgotten I had. It's the exact shape I needed and the perfect size for an ornament. And because it's plastic, I can easily make holes to add a thumb handle. I even had just the materials on hand to fabricate the handle: some 18-gauge aluminum wire and a bit of narrow plastic tubing.





The wire just fits inside the narrow tubing and can then be curved to form a handle.



I originally intended to drill tiny holes with my rotary tool, but the plastic turned out to be soft enough that I could simply poke through using an awl. I made two holes along the seam in the side of the bottle, one on the neck just below the rim, and one on the upper part of the shoulder.

That done, it was a simple matter to push the wire ends through the holes and bend them against the neck of the bottle to hold them securely in place. Ta-da: a perfect little jug with thumb handle. It's adorable.



You might think that making the handle was the hardest part of this project – I know I did. But it actually turned out to be the simple part. I don't think I was quite prepared for what came next.

I needed to coat the inside of the bottle with something to make it look like there was maple syrup inside. I figured my best option would be a paint/glue mix, so I mixed some copper and gold acrylic paints with clear glue, and swirled it inside the bottle. The effect was perfect . . . as long as I kept rotating and swirling the liquid.



Unfortunately, whenever I stopped rotating the bottle, the liquid did not cling to the walls. Instead, it pooled in the bottom. I thought I could keep swirling until the paint dried enough to cling, but it just did not want to dry. I guess the narrow opening in the top of the bottle was too small to allow for sufficient air circulation.

Next, I tried mixing the paint with some Mod Podge, thinking it might cling better than the clear glue. Wrong again. Wash the bottle *again* and start over once more.



If only those initial attempts had worked: the colour and translucency would have been perfect, as you can see from the dried paint/glue in the container where I mixed them.

Next I decided to try the paint on its own. I mixed some metallic copper and gold and tried yet again, but the paint on its own didn't cling either. By this point I'd spent a couple of hours on this palaver and I still didn't have a suitable result! And I was getting tired of cleaning out that tiny bottle. I suppose if I had any sense, I'd have given up on this one and digitized an ornament to embroider. But I didn't. I can't resist a crafting challenge, and I was sure that I could make this work, if only I could find the right liquid.

My next thought was to try wax, so I melted a bit of paraffin with some bits of metallic crayon in copper and gold. I figured the paraffin would lend the crayon a bit of a translucent effect, and surely the wax would cling to the plastic.



Nope. In order to pour the wax into the narrow neck of the bottle, it needed to be completely melted, but in that state it wasn't viscous enough to stick to the sides of the bottle. Worse yet, it looked as though the crayons and the paraffin were separating. Once again, a failure. Argh! (I had a heck of a time cleaning out the wax from the bottle, and I think the thin plastic might even have distorted a bit from the heat).

I had one more thing to try: melted crayons on their own. I feared that this method wouldn't give quite the translucent effect that I was after, but I figured it was my last option.





The melted crayons clung nicely to the sides of the bottle, and solidified much more quickly than the paraffin/crayon mix. It wasn't quite the lovely translucent effect that I had hoped for, but at least there's syrup in the bottle now.

The next step was to create and print a suitable label. I made this oval one and sized it to 1" wide. I gave the front a skim coat of glossy Mod Podge, then affixed it to the bottle with tacky glue.





As for a lid for my syrup bottle, it turns out that one of the shells from my 7/8" button machine just fits. For a colour match, I painted the lid with metallic copper nail polish.

Finally, to hang my ornament, I made a hole in the centre of the cap using a jeweller's punch, then added a loop and a beaded link. It's done . . . FINALLY!



I think it will look pretty on the tree.



Despite all the challenges involved in making this ornament, I'm actually pretty satisfied with how it turned out. And my experimenting actually taught me a few tricks that will come in handy if I ever want to make a similar ornament in future.

I like the ornament well enough, but the main thing really is whether DH will like it. He likes miniatures, and he certainly loves maple syrup, so I don't see how this one can miss. In fact, I have a hunch it may end up being added to his list of favourite handmades.