

Dotty's Enchanted Art Table

To bring enchantment right into your family room, amply supply a table with art materials for use at any time.

Requirements to Preserve Your Sanity, Carpet, and Walls

1.
Table: Not precious, stable (card tables are rickety), and able to withstand hot glue, paint, and permanent markers. Can be covered with clear plastic. Tuck the plastic under the table and duct tape it in place so it doesn't move when kids are working. The height of the table depends on the age of the kids: low for young kids, regular height for older kids.
2.
Chairs: Appropriate to the table height, back support, not easily tipped, not precious (they will be decorated in color and glue).
3.
Floor: Set the table on top of an old rug or scrap of carpet/vinyl.
4.
Children: Hang men's button-down short-sleeved shirts (bought at a thrift store) on a coat rack or hooks on a wall near the table. These can be donned backward (buttons down the back) as smocks to protect clothes.
5.
Walls: If the table butts up against a wall, affix a long strip of butcher paper about a foot high.

A Glorious Array of Supplies

1.
Painting: Tempera, watercolors, acrylics, puff paints, finger paints, fat brushes, thin brushes, foam brushes, sponges cut into stamps for printing.
2.
Writing: Washable markers (Crayola makes inexpensive ones), oil pastels, Prismacolor colored pencils, charcoal, Flair black pens for outlining, highlighters, Sharpies in all colors (careful: these markers are permanent), chalk, drawing pencils, whiteboard markers (pro tip: put colored electrical tape on whiteboard markers to make it clear they are not meant for paper), regular number 2 pencils, gel pens for black paper.
3.
Surfaces: Colored and white paper, stationery with pretty borders, brown paper bags, butcher paper, sticky notes, notecards, cardboard, wrapping paper, aluminum foil, poster board, cardstock, envelopes, canvas, wooden blocks, river stones, a mirror, a whiteboard, glass votive candleholders, scraps of fabric, sand paper, coloring books, felt, black paper for gel pens, small journals and notebooks.

4.

Fasteners: Lots of glue sticks, Elmer's white glue, hot glue guns and crazy glue (used with supervision), fabric glue, stapler, brads, hole punch and rings, Scotch tape, double-sided tape, masking tape, clear packaging tape, duct tape, electrical tape in multiple colors.

5.

Accessories: Googly eyes, pipe cleaners, glitter (careful!), confetti (careful times two!), stickers, rubber stamps, stencils, yarn, string, embroidery floss, modeling clay, Sculpey baking clay, fabric scraps, catalogs, magazines, pompoms, rickrack, Popsicle sticks.

6.

Storage: Washed empty tin cans make great holders for paintbrushes and writing utensils. A shower caddy holds packages of googly eyes, pipe cleaners, glue sticks, and glitter. Hang a laundry line nearby with clothespins to display artwork and to get it *off* the table. A bulletin board mounted on a wall can serve a similar purpose (cover it in colorful wrapping paper to go with decor, if you'd like). Keep a shelf free on a bookcase to display projects that can't be hung. Use heavy-bottomed glasses (the short kind for cocktails) to hold water for cleaning paintbrushes between colors. These tip less often than tin cans. Modeling clay can be kept on small cookie sheets under the table and then lifted to the top when in use.

7.

Location: Put the table in your way—underfoot and near you. Tables in basements and bedrooms are lonely.

Time to play!

The magic of the table is that it's ready to use any time. Begin with a few supplies: perhaps the paints, markers, clean white paper, glue, and googly eyes. Add fresh items (each week or every few days). Rotate old, crusted materials off the table to be replaced by fresh, new ones.

Surprise your kids! Let kids awaken to a table of twigs, bark, moss, and acorns. They might discover you already at work making fairy houses. Will they join you? Find out. Bring home smooth stones from the creek and paint them to make paperweights or stack them and glue them together to create sculptures.

Add quill pens and ink wells—write by candlelight.

A table reset is appropriate once a month. A time may come when the table becomes "wallpaper" and no one notices it anymore. Clear it up and try a different idea in this book.

Modification: For crowded homes that can't support a dedicated art table, stock a cabinet with lots of hidey-holes, drawers, and cupboards near the kitchen table.