

# Besloten Hofjes

## Reliquary Flowers from Belgium and West Germany

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I've been working on this project for a few years now. Most of my time thus far has been spent on the basic research of silk flowers in medieval Belgium and Northern Germany. I am happy to report that I have now visited all of the shrines that I am aware of and have moved on to duplicating flowers.

The flowers that exist date as far back as 1480 though the majority of them still in existence date from about 1520 to 1550. There is very little written about these shrines and most of the current data is in Dutch or German.

I have tested various kinds of silk and vellum to find what works and what doesn't. At the same time, I took the photos I have collected from the various shrines and used them to assist me in replicating the flowers. I alternate flower making with reading and research because my fingers can't handle too many flowers in a row.

You can find additional information by visiting [www://roxelana.com/new](http://www://roxelana.com/new)

I visited Germany and Belgium in November of 2014 and completed my self-imposed "task" to see and photograph the remaining shrines. At that time I was fortunate enough to be allowed to visit the Utopia project where the curators were refurbishing three of the shrines currently housed in Mechelen. I was able to see and photograph the shrines under the condition that I not post or publish the photos. They are for research purposes only and if you need additional information on a specific flower type please contact me directly and I will assist as I'm able.

What follows here are the instructions for creating flowers of your own.



## Required Supplies:

**Silk:** While it doesn't have to be silk thread that you use, I'm a purist at heart so I only used silk. Silk comes in two types: filament and spun. I prefer filament for its nice glossy look and my preferred brand is Trabizod as it is a three-ply, lightly twisted silk. I use one ply at a time to get a nice even coverage and the lightly twisted is much easier to separate into individual strands.

**Vellum:** Pergamena.net has an Assorted Parchment Scraps item that you can purchase which comes in a half or full pound size. The half-pound is more than enough for flower making. You can also use pieces that are unsuitable for calligraphy projects because they are too small, oily, or have mistakes on them. The easiest pieces to use will be almost velvety soft and fairly thin or lightweight. Deer vellum is best for support structures because it is too heavy for flowers.

**Wire:** There is evidence that lots of different wires were used in the construction of the shrines so which metal/color/size you use will be up to you. I use mostly 28 gauge in copper. Most of my wire is Artistic from beadalon.com.

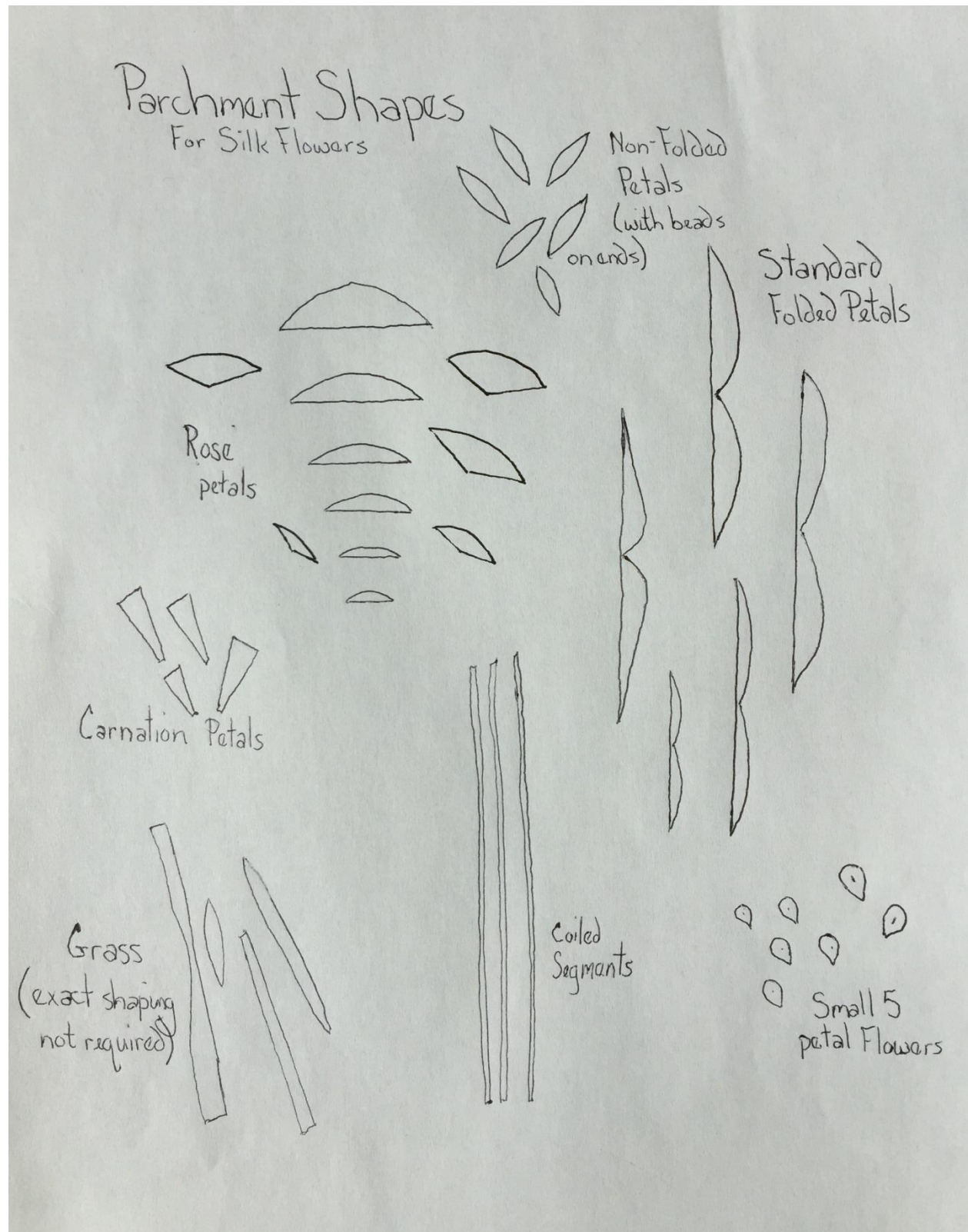
**Purl:** Purl is a type of wire that is coiled into nice little springs. Kreinik.com carries metal purl. Thistle-threads.com carries silk-covered purl in historical colors but I find the smaller size (tiny) is too small for even me!

Assorted tiny metal charms, stone or glass beads, cherry pits, and small swatches of silk fabric can also be used to good effect but are not required.

Tools for these projects are a good sharp scissors, a small sharp needle, and a small pliers or forceps.

There are three main types of flowers: Parchment based, Wire based, and Fiber based.

# Parchment Based Flowers



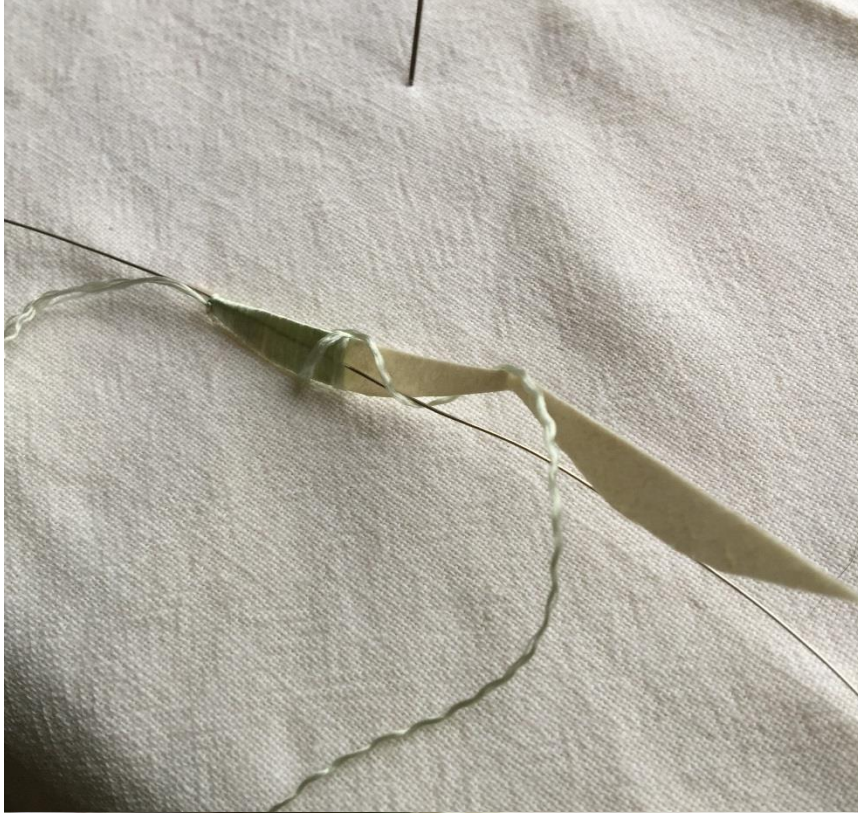


Parchment based flowers are the majority of flowers seen from this period. The flower petals get their shape from the parchment and how the parchment is cut. The steps are fairly easy and consistent among all parchment based flowers; Cut the parchment to the desired shape, wrap in silk thread, bend to form, assemble flower, wrap stems and clean up ends. It looks something like this:



First you cut the parchment to the shape you wish to use. Stab the corner of the parchment with your needle to secure the thread. Please note that the parchment is far more flexible when it's wet so if you dampen the corner of the parchment before inserting the needle it is likely to go in much easier. Allow the parchment to dry before wrapping it though for best results. After the parchment dries, secure the thread and a small wire by tying a knot.





Start wrapping your thread around the parchment, being mindful not to twist or bend your threads. What you want to do is lay the threads flat against the parchment and as close to the neighboring row as possible. You're looking to have a nice even surface without bulges or gaps. You also want to keep the wire on one



side of the parchment as this will serve as the means to attach this petal to the rest of the flower later. You may find it easier to grasp the petal and wire in forceps to steady it while wrapping. Wrapping is easier to accomplish when there is a gentle ascending slope rather than going downhill. Keeping the threads directly next to each other will help.

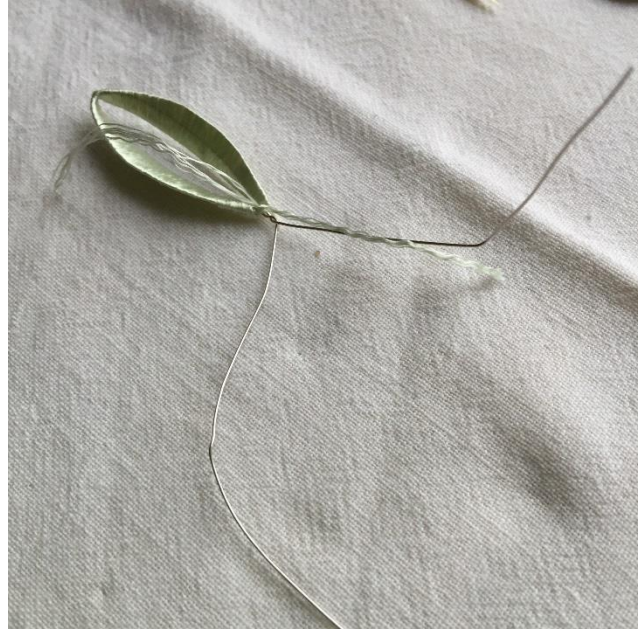




When you have completed wrapping the petal, secure the working thread and cut it from the spool. You will want to leave enough thread to tie the starting and ending threads together.

You can use a paper or vegetable based parchment and I understand that it works just fine but I personally have a difficult time making it work. Best results come from using a soft, velvety parchment. There are some modern flower makers who use double-sided sticky paper as well – clearly this is not a period option.

If you are adding surface decoration like exposed wires or cordon you will need to add it at this time before you secure the petal ends together. When you have completed wrapping the petal, take the two end threads and tie them together nice and tight. Then twist the two wire ends together. Generally, I like to twist the thread ends in with the wire so there are no loose ends hanging around.



*Completed parchment-based petal!*





*The underside of the petal will have a visible wire.*



When you don't have a wire wrapped in the petal you will have to attach one after wrapping – either by adding a decorative wire on the top or securing a stem wire in with the knot. There are very few petals that do not have a wire wrapped in with the parchment. Most of the wire-free petals I saw were used as grass or within bush-like groupings.





*A fancy twist to the parchment before securing the ends.*



## Wire Based Flowers

When making wire based flowers, a coiled wire, called Purl, becomes the foundation for your flower. You can create your own purl by first wrapping a wire in silk and then coiling the wire around another wire or a needle. You can also use unwrapped wire that is coiled. If you are going to use a finer gauged coiled wire you will also want to run a straight wire up the middle of the coils to help the petal maintain its shape. Some wire-based flowers are built on straight wires (not coiled) and instructions are the same.





How far apart you pull the coils will determine the thread spacing on your petal. Ideally you will pull the coils far enough apart to lay a single thread in each of the spaces and still have good coverage for the flower. Cut your purl to the desired length either before or after stretching the coils a bit. Run the guide wire up the middle of the coils and bend the petal into shape. Be sure to catch the ends of the purl into the twist of the guide wires when shaping your petal. A stable purl will make the wrapping much easier.



This particular flower will have the threads in a fan-like pattern radiating out from the stem. It would not be necessary to have coils on the sides closest to the stems except the original flower had them so I left them there. Tension will be very important as too much will flatten out the petal and too little will have the threads sliding. It will also be more difficult to assemble complicated flowers because you will need to maintain the petal shape even while trying to twist all the stem wires together. Wrap the petal from the middle to the outside edges, first one side then the other, and secure both starting and ending threads together.







This particular flower has 12 petals in four basic sizes, 3 in each size. Assembly starts at the center.



Create a center for your flower – this can be a single bead, a small circle of gold purl, silk covered wire twisted to look like stamen, or you can forgo a center if you prefer. Starting at the center, add the smallest petals first. You can twist the wires together or wrap the wires with a very fine wire (34gauge) when twisting would cause too much stress to the petals. Adding the petals in small numbers and securing with forceps before twisting will also reduce the stress on the petals. Add one layer of petals at a time, securing as you go.







Once all the petals have been added and arranged/bent to the desired shape, it's time to take care of the stem. Stems are most frequently just wrapped with thread. Additional leaves or flower stems can be wrapped into a single stalk. On this particular flower I cut some unusual shaped parchment to wrap and add to the flower to make a more realistic carnation stem.





## Fiber Based Flowers

Fiber based flowers are not seen as often as parchment or wire based flowers but deserve mention because they can be easier to create. Fiber based flowers get their structure from something other than the wire or parchment, with the exception of flowers created using a detached buttonhole stitch which is stitched into a wire frame but included here because it is more similar to the fiber based than the wire based.

In this group are flowers that are made using pompoms, which are not seen frequently, the stitched flowers and the fabric buds or fabric covered cherry pits sewn to resemble grapes.



Additional Flower Shapes:



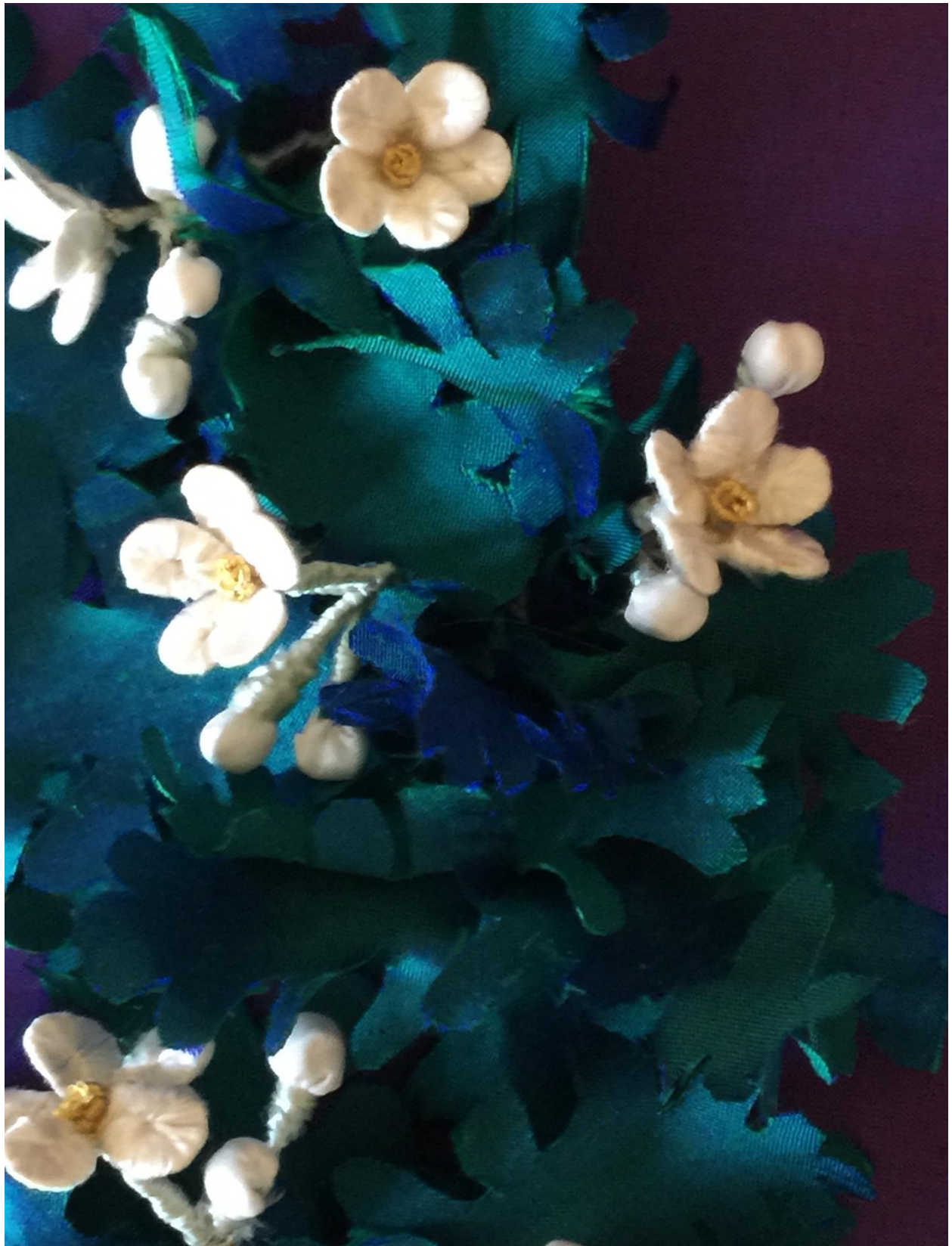
*Lilies with decorative top wire. Parchment based.*





*Carnation with purl edging on a parchment base. Pompom center with wire trimming.*





*Small five petal parchment flowers with knotted centers, Fabric cut leaves and buds.*





*Coiled Parchment over standard folded parchment petals*



*Wire based with additional coiled wire accents*



Parchment based Rose petals



*Buttonhole stitched over parchment based.*