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Making Canned Halloween Monstrosities



Round out your mad-science lab or witch's larder with just a few dollars and a little imagination

The above items were made for only a couple dollars each! It's easy if you have a few things around the house and a dollar store nearby. You just need a little imagination and an eye for mixing and matching.

Who needs off-the-shelf seasonal Halloween decorations when you can make your own in an afternoon for a fraction of the price and get ten times the quality - not to mention something wholly unique?

This is a process, rather than a specific How-To. Use a similar process on your own to mix and match different items to make your own jars. Wander through the dollar store and look at the various items in a whole new way!

The most important thing is to think of a story behind each creation. This will direct your efforts. Once you have a concept in mind, the rest of the jar will pretty much make itself.



Here is how the above items were made. Expand on this and make your own!

Shrinking Potion Test Subject #13

SHRINKING POTION TEST SUBJECT #13, MALE AGED 23 YEARS, SURVIVED 8 MIN 9 SEC

Ah, unlucky 13. Of course, there's no reason to think number 1 through 12 were any better off.

This is one of the simplest specimens. It shows how even simple components can be mixed to create something greater than the sum of its parts.

The Jar and Specimen



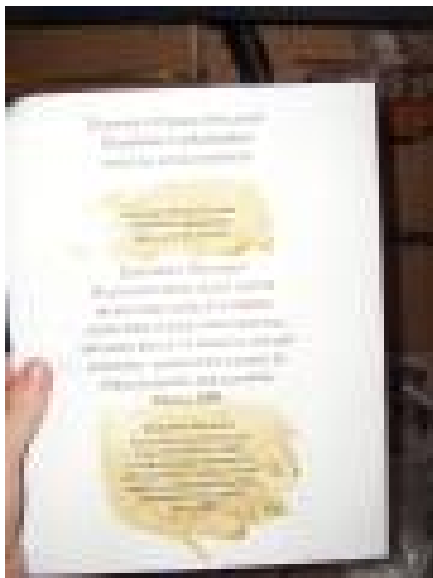
All it took was a jar and a small Halloween prop skeleton (both 1\$ each at the dollar store), a label, and some contact cement.

The jar is square and the glass thickness is a little uneven, which is excellent because it distorts the skeleton inside just enough to give it that little *je ne sais quois*.

The skeleton itself is cheaply made, and while it is possible the joints are easy to pop apart. This also worked to advantage, because in pushing the skeleton into the jar some of the joints came apart. As a result, the jar contains a twisted and awkwardly-posed skeleton - which really looks pitiful.

What you put in the jar can be an important as HOW you put it in the jar. This small plastic skeleton is in an awkward position, and many of the joints popped loose. It looks broken and pitiful. Did an asymmetrical shrinking process horribly dislocate bones? Was that part of the reason for the sadly short survival time? Or the result of a brutal experimenter careless stuffing the deceased into a jar?

The Label



The label is extremely important! The label will be looked at and read by everyone who examines your jar.

It not only sets the "mood" but it should hint at a story behind the contents of the bottle.

The following items should be kept in mind:

- **The Font** - Use a suitable font that matches what you imagine is the story behind the specimen. In the case of *Shrinking Potion Test Subject #13* I used an antique-typewriter looking font. The clear block letters reflect the scientific approach behind the testing, cataloging, and

classifying involved. Of course, if you'd prefer a childish scrawl for a label, simply write with your off-hand.

- **The Text** - Use words that reflect the how, why, and when of the specimen. In the case of this test subject the text reflects the impersonal and scientific process poor #13 was subjected to. It also hints at more - where are subjects 1 through 12? Were there any after 13? Also, #13's sad fate is alluded to with "Survived 8 minutes 9 seconds." And where is his *skin*?
- **The Paper** - Personally, I think the label should always look old and worn. To get the look I obtained for *Test Subject #13* I printed the label on an inkjet (whose ink is water-soluble, keep in mind) and liberally coated both sides well with rubber-based contact cement. Then once dry, I glued the label onto the jar with more contact cement, not being particularly neat about it. I find it gives an old-style pasted-on look. Remember that if you print on an inkjet printer the ink will run if exposed to water! Photocopies or laser printed labels will not run.



Rhytididae Cephalopodiae

UNKNOWN HYBRID SPECIMEN, *RHYTIDIDAE*
CEPHALOPODIAE, PICKLED; FANGS REMOVED.

This specimen is a little more complex than *Shrinking Potion Test Subject #13* but at its heart it consists merely of a pickle jar (lid painted black) and an expands-in-water octopus from the dollar store.

The specimen itself is a toy found in many novelty and thrift shops. It looks like a hard plastic animal, but when placed in water it expands and grows greatly! They are excellent for putting in jars like this!

I particularly like this one because of the tentacles which grew and crowded each other out. It has a kind of trapped-animal sinister look to it, and of course the "Fangs Removed" part of the label brings its own suggestions -- especially when you notice the small blood-smears (just red food coloring and a few grains of salt for texture) on the label.



The only thing that was done for this specimen, other than adding water, was to add a single drop of green food coloring, which gave the water a slight greenish tinge.

Also, when water is used in a jar which is meant to be permanent I would suggest adding a sanitizing agent to the water to prevent any possible bacterial growth. While stuff growing in the jar might look cool, it's probably not particularly healthy to have around - especially if it accidentally breaks.

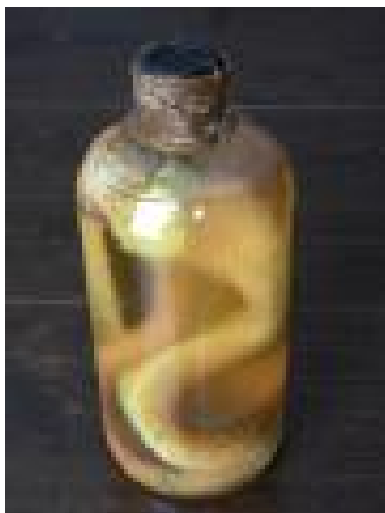
Some suitable sanitizers would be a small amount of disinfectant, such as a household cleanser or - if you are a wine or beer-maker - some bottle sanitizer.

The Jar Top

The top of the jar was made to look less like a pickle jar by not only painting the lid, but also wrapping it in jute (twine). You can glue it in place as it is wrapped, then paint it with coffee or strong tea so it looks darker and older.

I have had also had good luck with:

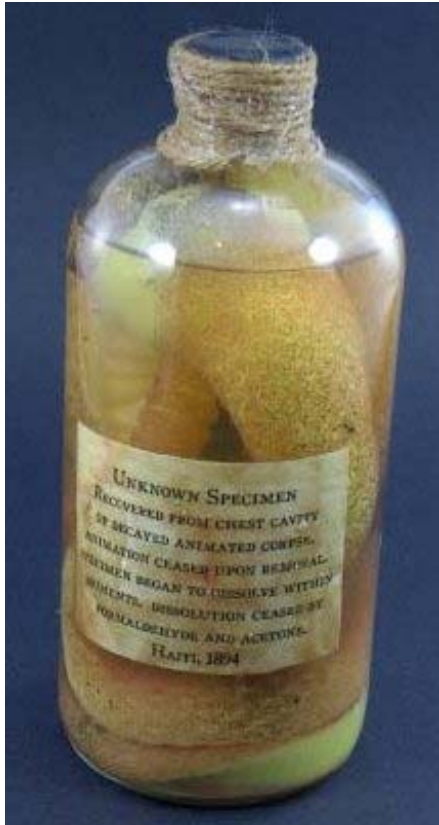
- Dipping the top of a jar into melted wax (either with or without twine wrapped underneath.)
- Liberally coating the top of the jar with more rubber-based contact cement (which gives a different sealed-up look than wax does).



Unknown Specimen

RECOVERED FROM CHEST CAVITY OF DECAYED ANIMATED CORPSE. ANIMATION OF CORPSE CEASED UPON REMOVAL. SPECIMEN BEGAN TO DISSOLVE WITHIN MOMENTS OF REMOVAL FROM HOST. DISSOLUTION CEASED WITH FORMALDEHYDE AND ACETONE. HAITI, 1894

This specimen is very similar to the previous one. It's really just an expands-in-water snake in a bottle.



A few things are done differently with this one that I would like to point out:

- The snake was cut up a little before being put into the jar to make it look somewhat decayed when it expanded.
- A few grains of instant coffee were added to the water to give it a murky brown look.
- A small spoonful of used coffee grounds was added to the water to enhance the "decayed" sort of look.
- The text on the label is much longer than I usually make. This was for several reasons. Firstly, the bottle is quite large and there was room. Secondly, the large label makes it hard to make out exactly what the thing inside is - although you can clearly see it resembles a snake-like or worm-like slug. Finally, the text of the label reads more like a diary entry rather than a clinical label -- this, I felt, was in keeping

with the "Unknown" nature. Rather than a precise label it's more like a curiosity, and the text suggests a background story.

Sometimes Less Is More

While the label text is far more wordy than I would usually do, sometimes *less* is more. For example, with the large label covering up much (but not all) of the specimen, it looks less like a snake and more like a "what *is* that?"

Final Words

It can be really fun to see what can be made! Jars can be saved and washed, or purchased cheaply at thrift stores. Old toys, plastic animals, fishing lures and all sorts of other things offer great possibilities.

A good talent to develop is what to show and what to cover. Colored or murky water can be used to shadow or otherwise obscure specimens that you don't want seen in too much detail. Strategically-placed labels can cover up bits that don't look quite right. Adding things to the inside of the jar (like sand, rocks, fake plants, etc) can also conceal or highlight things on the inside.

Knowing what to highlight and what to conceal can go a long ways to making a good specimen great! Have fun, and remember that if you don't like how it looks you can always start over!

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