Orange Pomanders

Clove-studded oranges cured in orris root, so they dry hard and keep

The first time I made pomanders, about fifteen years ago, I studded a beautiful batch, set them on a drying rack, and watched most of them mold. So I went looking for why. The answer is a step almost nobody mentions: rolling the studded fruit in orris root powder and cinnamon before it dries. This is the whole method, the way I make them now.

WHEN TO START

Curing takes 2 to 4 weeks, and a big orange in a damp house can take 6. Count back from the day you want them finished.

- **Out for Thanksgiving:** studded and curing by the middle of October
- **Christmas gifts and the tree:** studded and curing by the middle of November
- **Running late:** use clementines or small lemons. Small fruit cures fastest.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Firm oranges with thin skin and no soft spots. Clementines and lemons work too.
- Whole cloves, about 1 to 1½ ounces for each orange you cover completely. Buy them in bulk. The little grocery store jars will cost you a fortune.
- A thumbtack, for piercing
- A chopstick or a pencil with an eraser, for pushing the cloves in
- Rubber bands and painter's tape, for marking lines
- A brown paper bag
- A soft, dry paint brush or pastry brush
- Ribbon, for the finished pomanders

MY CURING BLEND

2 tablespoons	powdered orris root
1 tablespoon	ground cinnamon

Mix it in a small bowl before you touch the fruit. Making a big batch? Keep the same ratio: two parts orris root to one part cinnamon.

WHY ORRIS ROOT?

Orris root is the dried, powdered root of an iris. It is a fixative, which means it holds on to scent and lets it go slowly. The cloves and cinnamon bring the fragrance. The orris is what makes it last, and the coat of powder helps the skin dry evenly instead of going soft. You will find it online or at an herb shop, not at the grocery store, so order it before you buy your fruit.

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The Method

Mark first, stud second, then cure

1. **Choose and dry the fruit.**
Pick firm fruit with thin skin and no soft spots. Wash it, dry it well, and let it sit out until the skin feels completely dry. A bruise or a damp skin is where mold gets its start.

2. **Mark your pattern.**
Choose a design from page 3. For a straight line, stretch a rubber band around the fruit and stud right along its edge. For a ribbon channel, wrap painter's tape over the top in a cross, the way you would tie a parcel. Mark first, stud second, and your lines stay straight.

3. **Pierce with a thumbtack.**
Why a thumbtack? Because the flat head gives you something to hold on to, and you can feel exactly how deep you have gone. Push it in nearly to the head. A deep hole lets the clove slide in with a light press, and that saves your thumbs.

4. **Push the cloves in.**
Press each clove into its hole with the blunt end of a chopstick or a pencil eraser instead of your thumb. The clove heads do not snap, your fingers stay out of the way, and you can see your pattern the whole time. Leave a little room between cloves, because the fruit shrinks as it dries.

5. **Coat it.**
Take off the tape and rubber bands. Set the fruit in the bowl of curing blend and spoon the powder over it, rolling it around until it is thickly covered.

6. **Press the spice in.**
Roll the coated fruit gently between your palms. That light pressure packs the powder into the cracks around the clove heads and over the bare skin, which is right where you want it.

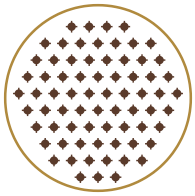
7. **Let it cure.**
Put the fruit in a brown paper bag and pour whatever blend is left over the top. Fold the bag closed and keep it somewhere warm, dark and dry. Paper lets moisture escape. Never use plastic, which holds the moisture in. Turn the bag gently once a day for the first week, then leave it alone for 2 to 4 weeks.

8. **Brush and finish.**
It is cured when it feels hard, weighs much less than it did, and has shrunk a little. Brush away the loose powder with a soft, dry brush. Tie a ribbon into the channels and it is ready to hang or to give.

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Clove Patterns

Seven designs for oranges, clementines and lemons



The Classic

SIDE VIEW

Cover the whole fruit in rows, each row nudged half a step so the cloves nest together. The most fragrant and the most traditional.



The Spiral

TOP VIEW

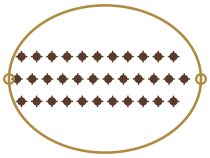
One line of cloves winding out from the stem end and down around the fruit. Quick to make and pretty in a bowl.



Snowflake Crown

TOP VIEW

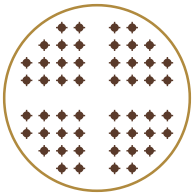
A six-point snowflake on top with a ring of cloves around the shoulder. Fewer cloves, so it is a good one when you are making a crowd of gifts.



Lemon Bands

SIDE VIEW

Three rings around the middle of a lemon. Simple and striking. Lemons are firmer than oranges, so pierce a little deeper.



Ribbon Ready

TOP VIEW

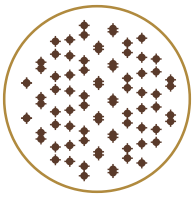
Two bare channels cross over the top so a ribbon sits flat for hanging. Mark the channels with painter's tape before you start.



Meridians

TOP VIEW

Eight lines from the stem end to the base, like the lines on a globe. On clementines, follow the faint segment lines under the skin.



Diamond Lattice

SIDE VIEW

Crossing diagonal lines that make diamonds all the way around. Elegant, and it shows off the fruit between the cloves.

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Good to Know

Troubleshooting, storing and giving

If Something Goes Wrong

- **A soft spot or any mold.** Throw it out. It cannot be saved, and it will spread to the others. The usual causes are a bruised fruit, a damp skin, a missed spot in the coating, or a humid room.
- **Cloves working loose.** Push them back in during the first week, while the skin is still soft.
- **Sore thumbs.** Make the thumbtack holes deeper and push with a chopstick instead of your thumb. A thimble helps your fingers but hides your pattern. You can also stud half tonight and half tomorrow. It will wait.
- **Lines wandering.** Go back to the rubber band. Stud right along its edge and turn the fruit, not your hand.

Storing Your Pomanders

- **On display:** hang them or set them in an open bowl somewhere cool and dry. Keep them out of steamy bathrooms and away from the stove, because damp air softens the skin.
- **After the holidays:** wrap each one in tissue or a paper napkin and pack them in a cardboard box or a paper bag. Store them somewhere dry, like a linen closet. Never seal them in plastic.
- **Bringing back the scent:** when the fragrance fades, a drop or two of clove or sweet orange oil brings it back. You can also roll it in a little fresh curing blend.
- **Leftover curing blend:** keep it in a sealed jar, and it is ready for next year's batch.

Giving

- Wrap it in tissue and add a tag with the month and year you made it.
- A pomander is for scenting a room, not for eating. Keep it and the blend away from small children and pets. Orris bothers some people's skin, so wear gloves if yours is sensitive.

GIFT TAGS

Cut along the dashed lines, punch the circle, and tie one on with your ribbon.

Made by hand for you

A clove pomander for your home.
Hang it somewhere cool and dry.

Made _____ 20____

Made by hand for you

A clove pomander for your home.
Hang it somewhere cool and dry.

Made _____ 20____

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