

Mini-lamps made with Christmas lights

Last Christmas, as I started decorating our tree, I discovered that my favorite string of tree lights (candle-shaped lights from the seventies that I had inherited from my mom) had decided to stop working. For lights that had been used every year since 1977, their longevity was certainly stunning. I loved those lights dearly and tried my best to repair them. No success. The lights were dead for good and bound for the rubbish bin.

But you know how it is, getting rid of things you've grown fond of... I kept pulling them out of the rubbish bin, turning them in my hands, trying to figure out whether there was anything I could do to save them... and then, suddenly... a light lit up! In my *brain*, that is. The real lights remained stubbornly dead but... hmm... those little bulbs... are they not, like, the most perfect lampshades for mini lights? Kind of Fin-de-siècle-ish? Art Nouveau-ish, even?

So I unscrewed several bulbs off the string and while at it, also saved the bulbs from an Ikea X-mas ornament (those wooden candle arches you put on your window sills) that had stopped working too. And made a batch of lamps!



If you want to try a similar project, you will need:

- The light bulbs from a X-mas string of lights
- Wired miniature lightbulb (mine are Cir-kit lights as well as the lights of a few old lamps that I fancied altering)
- Ornaments or jewelry bits
- Permanent marker in gold, copper or whatever you prefer
- Instant glue
- Masking tape
- Metal saw, mitre box, pliers, file
- Glass paint or other paint of your choice if you want to color the shades.
- Acrylic paint (raw umber for distressing, eventually gold)

The hardest part was figuring out how to separate the bulb from the metal cap. After I had tried unscrewing them, heating them in order to loosen the adhesive, and even a few methods just too absurd to be described here (breaking several lamps in the process), my partner, who has a more practical mind than yours truly, suggested just sawing them off. Sounds simple enough, doesn't it? (How come that I always go for the most difficult method first?!).

Anyway, that worked fine. But it did work because these lightbulbs are made of plastic, not glass. So this is the first thing I recommend you to check! Please **do not try cutting glass bulbs like this**, you will hurt yourself!!! Now, how can you tell if the bulbs are plastic? Well, my method has no scientific basis, so no guarantee given. It does work for me, though: bite lightly on it. Plastic is very smooth, real glass will grate against your teeth (I learned this from my grandma, who swore on this trick to tell apart real pearls from cheap synthetic pearls, for example. Or a real diamond from a synthetic stone -not that I or my Nan ever had that many occasions to bite on real diamonds, but well, in my grandma's own words, a woman has better be always prepared...)



Cut off approx. 2/3 of the metal part of the bulb using a metal saw and a mitre box. Wear working gloves if you are not sure about the material. Try not to apply too much pressure on the bulb while holding, mine were very thin and therefore easily broken. I wrapped the bulbs in a piece of cloth to cushion the pressure.

Pull out carefully the light filaments from the bulb with the pliers. Using a file, smooth down the edges of the cut metal. Wash and let dry well.



Decide on your design, based on whatever parts are available to you. Paint gold (or any color you prefer) all parts save the plastic lightbulb. Use the masking tape to cover the bulb. I don't like bright shiny gold, so I always distress mine (with raw umber acrylic paint, dry brushed). Now is the moment for that if you want to. Test also whether your mini light is working before proceeding with the assembly of the parts.



To keep the miniature lightbulb centered I threaded the wire through a press stud, that incidentally was the same diameter than the opening.

You can see in the picture on the right that I painted gold the part of the wire that would show once the lamp is hanging in its place. I did NOT use the permanent marker for this but acrylic paint. It does not adhere well to the wire duct BUT the solvents in the permanent marker could, with time, damage the plastic.



Drill a hole in the cap (that will double as the ceiling rose) if you are having one. Pass the mini light wire through it. Glue one end of the chain to the press-stud. Fix a bit of wire at the other end of the chain, thread it through the hole and spread the ends. Glue the ornaments on to the lamp.

Voilà, you're done!

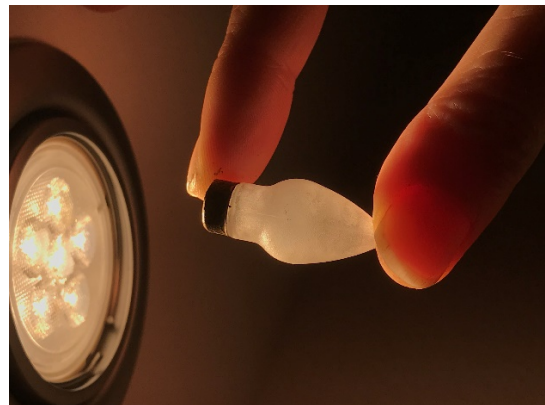
Below are a couple of variations showing which parts I used for each:



Lamp 1 consists of a light bulb from Christmas lights, small length of chain, press stud, ornamental metal border + cap (I bought these at a miniatures fair but I know for sure that they can be obtained in France, please contact me if you are not aware of the supplier), bell pulls -whatever that is- from "Houseworks", bent to fit the light bulb. The metal bit at the bottom of the lamp is an earring stud that had lost its rhinestone. And, of course, a wired light.

Lamp 2: light bulb from Christmas lights, old “Minimundus” lamp (with the old and damaged shade removed), press stud, ornamental metal border

While testing this lamp, I found that its light was too bright/too cold, since the clear plastic of the Xmas lights obviously does not break the light. I experimented a bit with colors - colored the lightbulb itself, *tried* to paint the inside of the lightbulb with glass paint, then with nail varnish, the results were not satisfactory, mainly because I couldn't reach all the corners with a paint brush. At the end I poured in some watered-down wood glue mixed with a little white acrylic and sloshed that around the lightbulb until all inside areas were covered, then poured out the excess paint and let the bulb dry. As you can see in the picture, the result is far from perfect, but the method has -I believe- some potential. With the lamp on, the light really becomes softer and more diffuse.



As a bonus, here also **lamp 3:** an old brooch, painted gold and distressed, with the cabochon removed (heat the brooch with a hair dryer to loosen the glue) and a hole drilled for the wire, the shade is a plastic cap, the little metal flower came from an earring. To color the shade, I filled the plastic cap with water and poured one, two drops of white nail varnish and red / yellow glass paint (since they are solvent-based, these paints react with the water), stirred the mixture with a toothpick, let it set and poured the rest of the water out. I wasn't impressed with the result at first but when the light is on, the shade looks actually quite wonderful, a bit like those old amber lampshades. Must perfectionate this method!

Lamp 4 (included here only because it sneaked into the picture) is just a cheap "Minimundus" lamp colored with a bit of red glass paint and a small volute (which was a broken corner of a small and ornate metal picture frame) glued on it. I added a bit of chain and a bead as a light switch.



And once I had run out of inspiration (and rooms in my dollhouse where I could put another lamp), I went out and bought a new string of lights, candle-shaped, with flickering LEDs *and* remote control, ha!

Assuming they last at least half as long as the old ones, it will be something like 11 years before I can recycle them into mini-lamps... 😊

Hope you had fun reading this tutorial and that it was halfway understandable. My English is not bad but obviously, it's not my mother tongue either. My French, on the other hand, is truly horrible. A big Thank you! to Joc for the translation!

Wishing you all a peaceful advent season, a joyful Christmas and a good start in 2020!

*from *A Dollhouse on Betelgeuze**