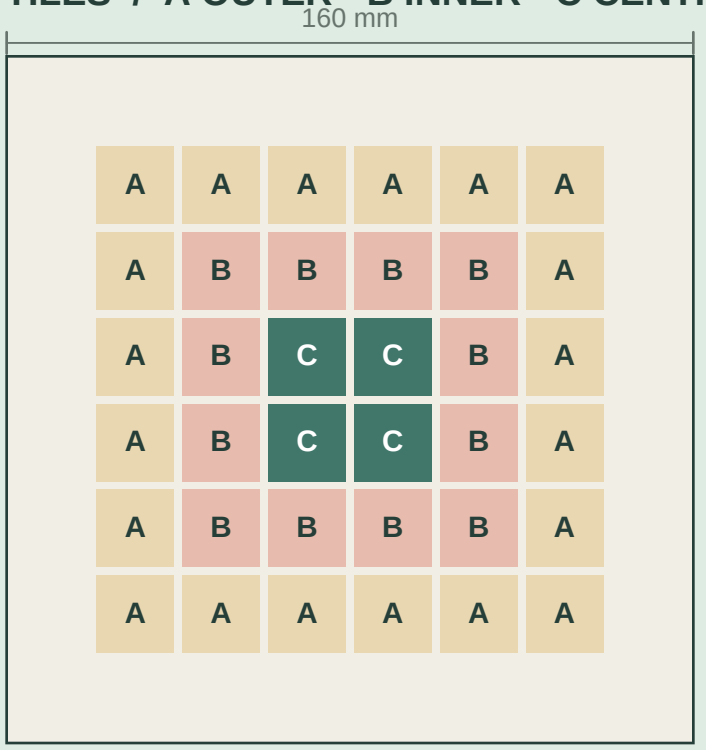
Make a Paper Mosaic from Packaging Offcuts

36 TILES / A OUTER • B INNER • C CENTRE



A = 20 B = 12 C = 4 Total = 36

36 TILES / THREE COLOUR GROUPS

14 practical steps · Sort · arrange · mount

Original diagrams and two printable maker records

Illustrative plans — not physical test results

Before you start

The plain areas of clean paper packaging can become the tiles of a small mosaic. This project uses a six-by-six geometric design with a light outer frame, a mid-tone inner ring and a dark centre. Use only material with known benign history and a sound surface. Avoid recognizable logos, personal information and imagery you lack permission to reproduce. This is a decorative paper craft, not food packaging, a wet-area covering or archival artwork.

Materials: a sound 160 x 160 mm backing card, clean dry uncoated paper or thin card packaging scraps in three colour groups, scissors suitable for paper, metric ruler, pencil, a compatible paper adhesive, matching scrap, dry placement guide and protective table covering. Avoid chemical, medicine, raw-food or otherwise contaminated packaging; avoid sharp metal, glass, mould, staples, foil shards, unknown coatings and printed personal information. Choose plain portions of known clean dry goods packaging.

Plan the project

Mark a 120 x 120 mm field centred on a 160 mm square backing, starting at x = 20 and y = 20 mm. Divide it into six rows and columns of 20 mm cells. Cut 36 nominally 18 x 18 mm square tiles. Centre each within its cell so the tile begins 1 mm inside each cell edge; adjacent tiles have a nominal 2 mm gap and the visible outer margin to the first tile edge is 21 mm. For each row r and column c numbered 1–6, the tile upper-left is (21+20(c-1), 21+20(r-1)) mm from the backing upper-left.

Use colour A for the outer ring (20 tiles), B for the next ring (12 tiles) and C for the central 2 x 2 square (4 tiles). The six rows are AAAAAA, ABBBBA, ABCCBA, ABCCBA, ABBBBA, AAAAAA. Thus 20+12+4 = 36. Keep a few spare tiles in each group to replace damaged edges; these do not count toward the final design. Lay every tile dry before applying adhesive. Packaging paper is not necessarily permanent or acid-free, so do not use it in direct contact with treasured documents.

Steps 01–02

1. Select packaging with a known history

Gather plain paper or thin card from clean, dry non-hazardous consumer goods packaging. Check what it held and how it was stored. Exclude food-stained, chemical, medicine, wet, mouldy, pest-damaged or unknown materials. Do not try to rescue suspect packaging by washing, sanding, heating or applying solvent. Only sound uncontaminated offcuts enter the craft area.

2. Sort by colour and surface

Group the plain usable paper into A light, B middle and C dark. Compare under the same diffuse light. Select stock that cuts cleanly and lies reasonably flat, with compatible surfaces for the chosen adhesive. Reject personal information, recognizable brands and third-party imagery. Keep the colour groups separate even if they have small tonal differences.

Steps 03–04

3. Prepare the backing square

Use a flat 160 mm square card with enough rigidity to support the dry tiles. Cut suitable thin material with safe scissors or obtain it pre-cut; do not force scissors through thick board. Mark the upper-left reference on the back. Inspect for creases and damage. Work on a clean protected flat table, away from food and wet materials.

4. Draw the six-by-six field

Measure 20 mm in from each edge of the backing to define a 120 mm square. Divide that square into 20 mm cells. Mark the guide lightly or prepare it on a separate sheet, since 1 mm of cell margin will remain visible. Check both diagonals and the row and column counts. Do not use a scaled printed illustration as a cutting ruler.

Steps 05–06

5. Cut a tile master and check it

Draw an 18 x 18 mm square on firm scrap. Measure both sides with a ruler. Use this template or mark repeated cut lines at 18 mm intervals on larger suitable strips. Keep fingers clear of scissors and use a supported work surface. Check whether the first few squares fit the 20 mm cells without touching. If the paper is too thick or irregular, replace it.

6. Prepare the required colour counts

Cut twenty A tiles, twelve B tiles and four C tiles, plus optional spare squares. Count each group separately and keep offcuts for future projects. If a colour group is short, substitute a compatible plain piece of similar tone before laying out the pattern. Do not enlarge a tile just to fill an empty cell; every nominal tile shares the 18 mm size.

Steps 07–08

7. Lay the outer ring without glue

Place A tiles in rows one and six, six in each, then in the first and last columns of rows two through five, eight more. Centre each within its cell. Check the outer twenty pieces and the 2 mm nominal gap between adjacent edges. Adjust any irregular tile by replacing it rather than pushing surrounding tiles out of alignment.

8. Complete the two inner rings

Place B in the remaining perimeter of the central 4 x 4 block: four across row two and row five, two in row three and row four. Place C in the four remaining middle cells. Confirm the row codes and counts. Photograph or sketch the dry layout, keeping the backing and the unused adhesive separate. Compare contrast and spacing from ordinary viewing distance.

Steps 09–10

9. Try the adhesive on matching scraps

Read the adhesive label and choose a compatible paper-to-paper method. Use sacrificial examples of each packaging surface and the backing, applying a thin film only to the back as directed. Let the samples fully dry or cure and inspect for staining, lifting and distortion. If a surface is unsuitable, change the material or adhesive rather than using a stronger unknown product.

10. Mount the outer ring

Work in short sections, referring to the dry layout. Lift one tile, apply the approved adhesive method to its back and place it once at the corresponding position. Keep fingers and the guide clean; avoid sliding pieces through wet adhesive. Use clean protective scrap as needed. Do not press heavy books on wet glue or obscure a gap with squeeze-out.

Steps 11–12

11. Mount the inner ring and centre

Use the same method for the twelve B tiles and four C tiles. Confirm that the intended two-millimetre gaps remain visible. If a tile is clearly displaced, reposition it only if the adhesive directions permit; otherwise let it dry and decide whether to remake the affected design. Do not fill a wet gap with extra fragments merely to hide an error.

12. Dry and review the mosaic

Support the backing flat under the conditions specified by the adhesive maker, without placing valuable objects on it. After full drying, inspect every tile for lifted edges, tackiness and curling. Count the actual A, B and C pieces and note any deliberate changes. If adhesive remains tacky or the backing warps badly, hold the piece and revise on scrap.

Steps 13–14

13. Select a protected display method

Use the finished mosaic as a flat decorative picture in a dry protected place. If framing, use an intact suitable ready-made frame and allow clearance for the actual tile profile. Keep it away from food, heat, damp walls and direct strong sunlight. Do not mount it onto a valuable original or claim that recycled packaging is archival material.

14. Complete the mosaic record

Record material histories, actual tile counts and sizes, field size, colour plan, adhesive trial and dry observations. Mark DISPLAY READY, CHANGE/REMAKE or HOLD. Keep clean spare tiles separately; sort waste according to local guidance, including adhesive-contaminated paper. The mosaic pattern is original geometry, not a certification of material safety, adhesion or permanence.

Fix, care and preserve

Gaps close up.
Check actual tile width and use the centre marks; replace oversized tiles.

Colour group is short.
Choose compatible plain offcuts and preserve the total count.

Tiles curl or stain.
Hold the piece and change the adhesive or stock after a scrap trial.

Backing warps.
Let it dry as directed and revise the method on expendable card.

A logo or personal detail appears.
Replace the tile with a plain permitted portion before display.

Source & evidence boundary

Original Steadleaf English prose, calculations, vector artwork, diagrams and maker records. The following sources give general craft-safety or paper-care context, not certification of this design. Follow actual product instructions and local disposal guidance.

Health Canada, Arts and crafts safety

https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/home-garden-safety/use-arts-crafts-materials-safely.html

Canadian Conservation Institute, Caring for paper objects

https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/preventive-conservation/guidelines-collections/paper-objects.html

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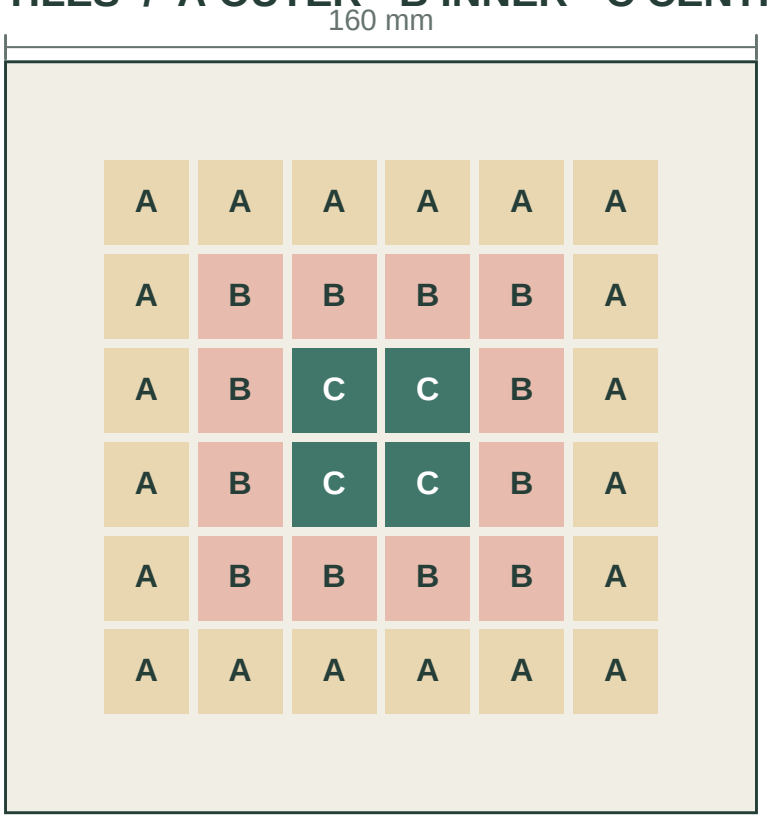
Six-by-six mosaic map

160 mm backing, 120 mm centred field, 20 mm pitch, 18 mm tiles. A outer ring = 20; B inner ring = 12; C centre = 4.

36 TILES / A OUTER • B INNER • C CENTRE

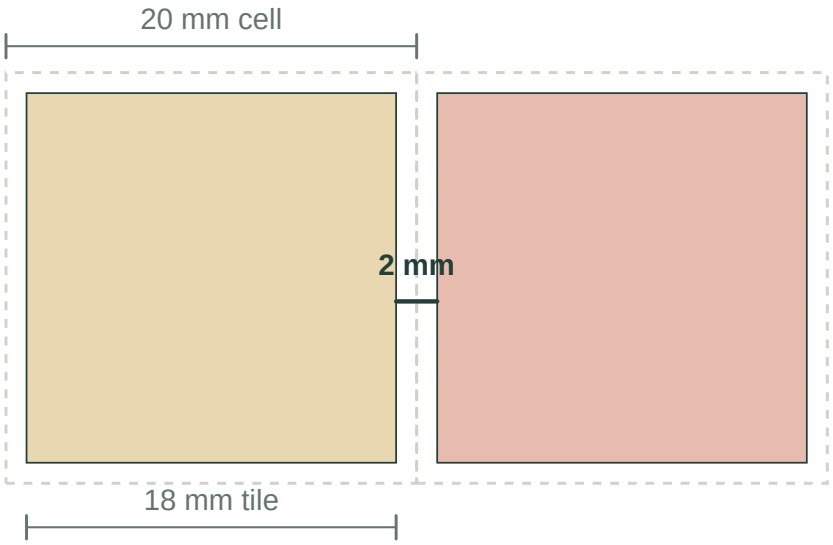


A = 20 B = 12 C = 4 Total = 36

Cell spacing and mounting

Each tile sits 1 mm inside its 20 mm cell, leaving 2 mm between adjacent tiles. Dry-sort before mounting; adhesive goes on the back only.

CENTRE AN 18 mm TILE IN EACH 20 mm CELL



Dry layout first. Lift one tile and mount its back.



Packaging and colour plan

Enter actual observations only. Mark missing information UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED. This is a craft record, not a safety or performance certificate.

Source and former contents

A paper / twenty tiles

B paper / twelve tiles

C paper / four tiles

Actual backing / field / tile sizes

Dry row codes and count

Adhesive / scrap observation

Decision: PROCEED / CHANGE / HOLD

Mosaic finish and display

Enter actual observations only. Mark missing information UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED. This is a craft record, not a safety or performance certificate.

Actual A / B / C count

Gap and border observations

Adhesive / cure date

Lifted edges / backing condition

Rights and personal data check

Disposition: DISPLAY READY / CHANGE-REMAKE / HOLD

Display / storage / waste route

Date / unresolved issue