

An Illustrator tutorial

Two methods to delete overlapping shapes and create a compound element



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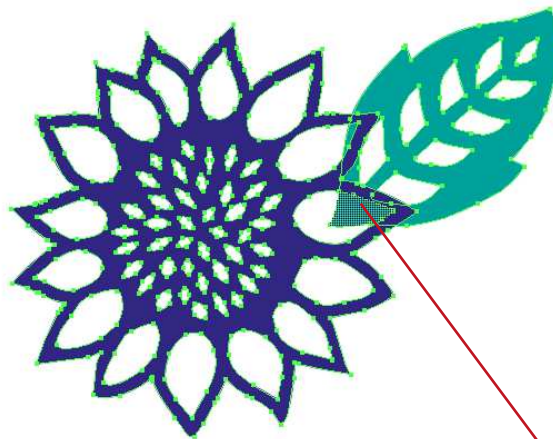
Shapebuilder Tool

I want to create a single compound by removing shapes from the composition below and eventually merging them. I have filled each shape with a different colour to make it easier to see which shape I'm working with in turn.

First I want to remove overlapping shapes visible through the flower petals and leaves.



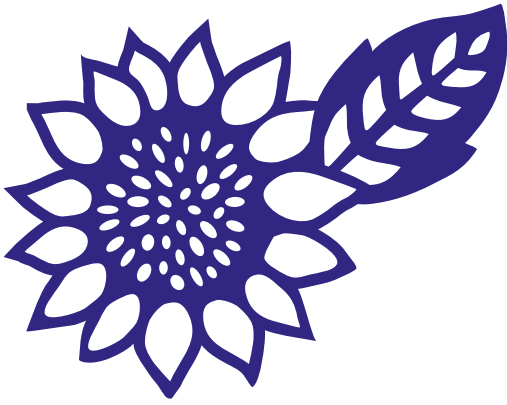
Shapebuilder Tool



Select the overlapping elements and click on the areas you want to remove with the Shapebuilder tool.



Use the Direct Selection tool to click on the overlap and Delete it. These shapes can be merged using the Unite function from the Pathfinder menu.



I have merged them together and they are now a single element.

Note the compound element takes on the colour of the topmost layer.

This works well for a while but if you have many elements or lots of complex overlapping shapes, Shapebuilder can get very slow and painful.

Pathfinder Subtract Method



Here is the original composition. This time we're going to use the Subtract function from the Pathfinder menu.

It has to be done in stages.



I'll start with two of the leaves. I've selected the light leaf and the dark leaf. The light one is in front (Object > Arrange > Bring to Front) and the dark green leaf is therefore at the back.

Copy the light green leaf (the top element)
Select the two leaves with the Selection tool (V)
Go to Pathfinder (Window > Pathfinder or Shift+Ctrl+F9)
Select Pathfinder > Subtract



Paste in Place (CTRL-F) and use the Direct Selection tool (A) to select and delete the bits you want to remove.



To continue, merge the shapes together (Pathfinder > Pathfinder > Unite)





Step 1.

Green leaf bits removed from the red flower



Step 2.

Merged (Red) (Pathfinder > Pathfinder > Unite)



Step 3.

Orange on top, red underneath



Step 4.

Orange on top, green leaf below



Step 5.

Blue flower on top, orange at back, overlaps removed



Step 6.

Blue flower was on top.
Merged and now a compound element