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(54) SLEEVES FORMED OF POLYMERIC MATERIALS HAVING A TEXTURE OR APPEARANCE SIMULATING THE TEXTURE OR APPEARANCE OF PAPER

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Related U.S. Application Data

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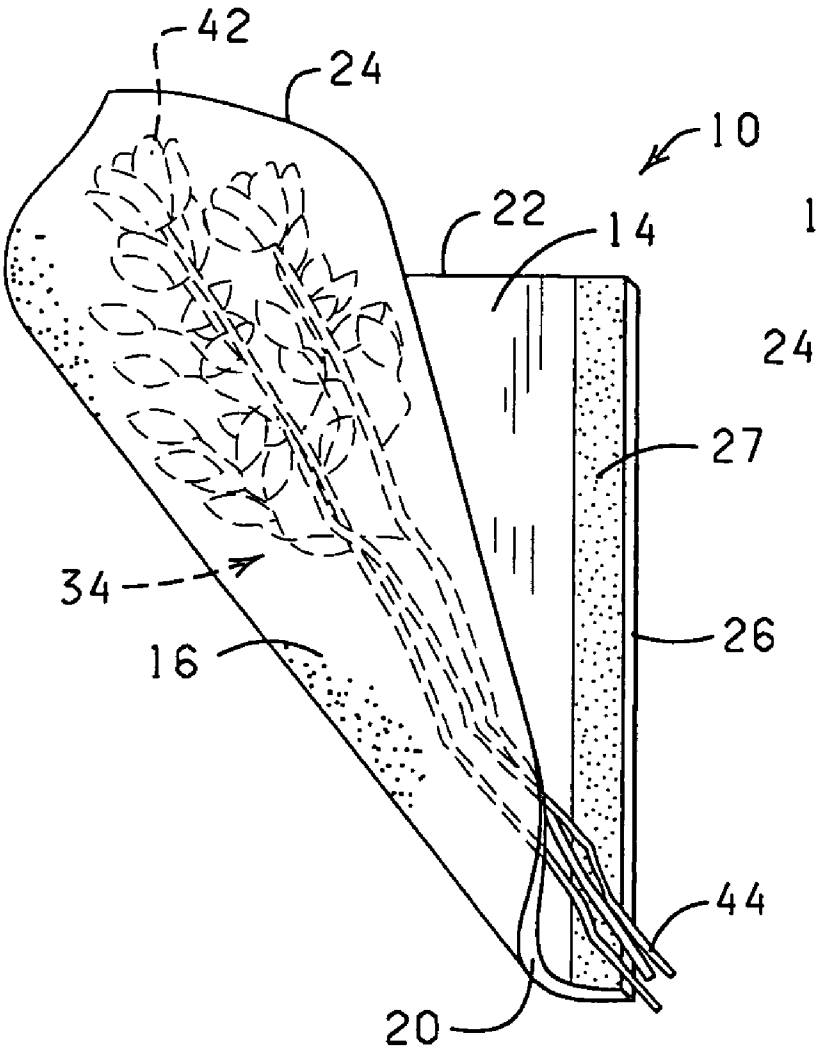
(52) **U.S. Cl.** **53/397**; 53/456; 47/72; 206/423

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Methods of providing decorative covers for flower pots and floral groupings include providing a sleeve and disposing the sleeve about the flower pot or floral grouping. At least a portion of at least one of the inner and outer peripheral surfaces of the sleeve is provided with a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper.



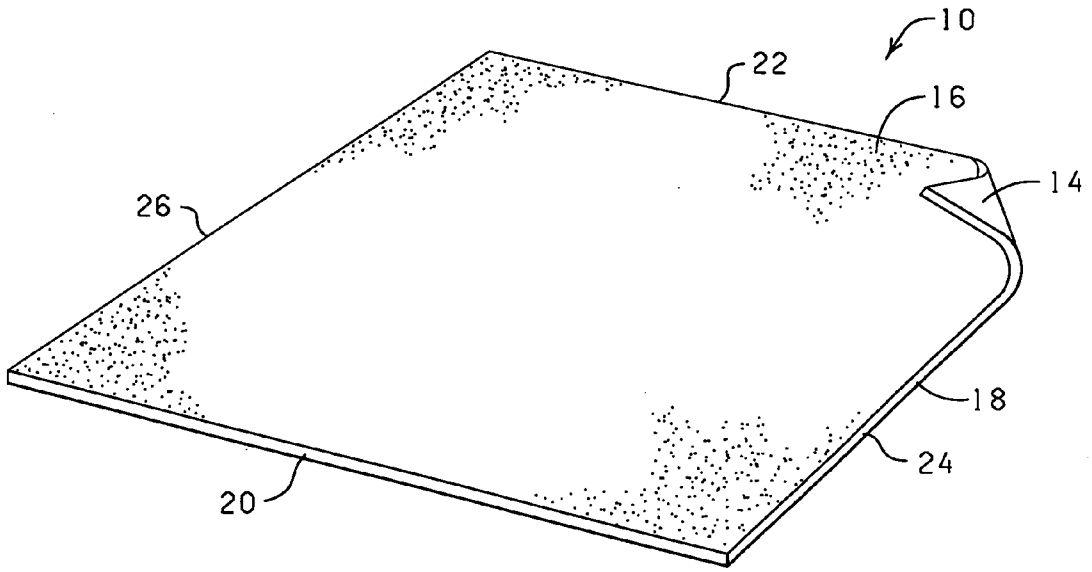


FIG. 1

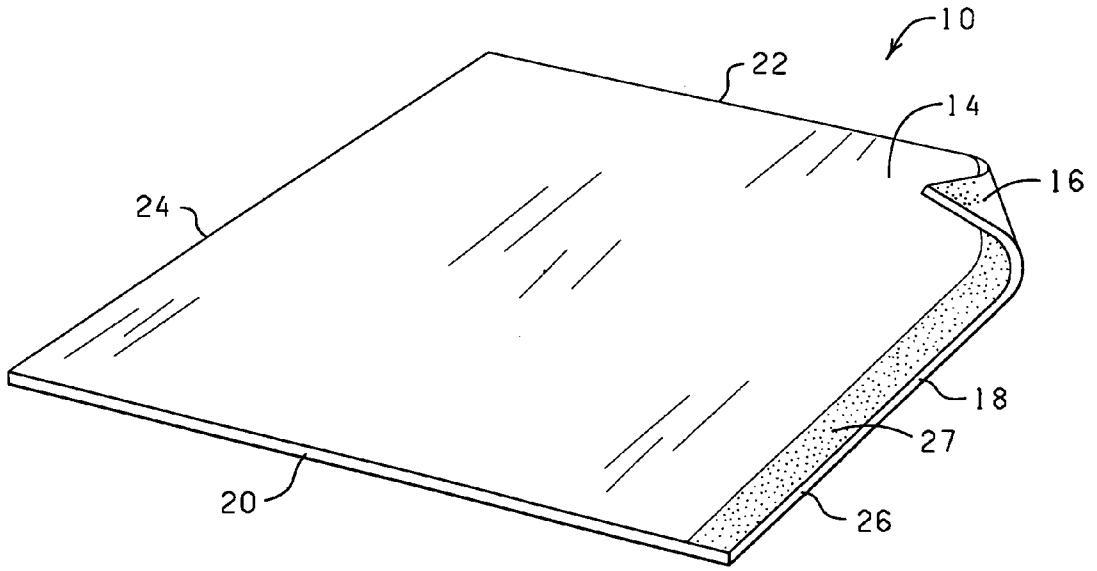


FIG. 2

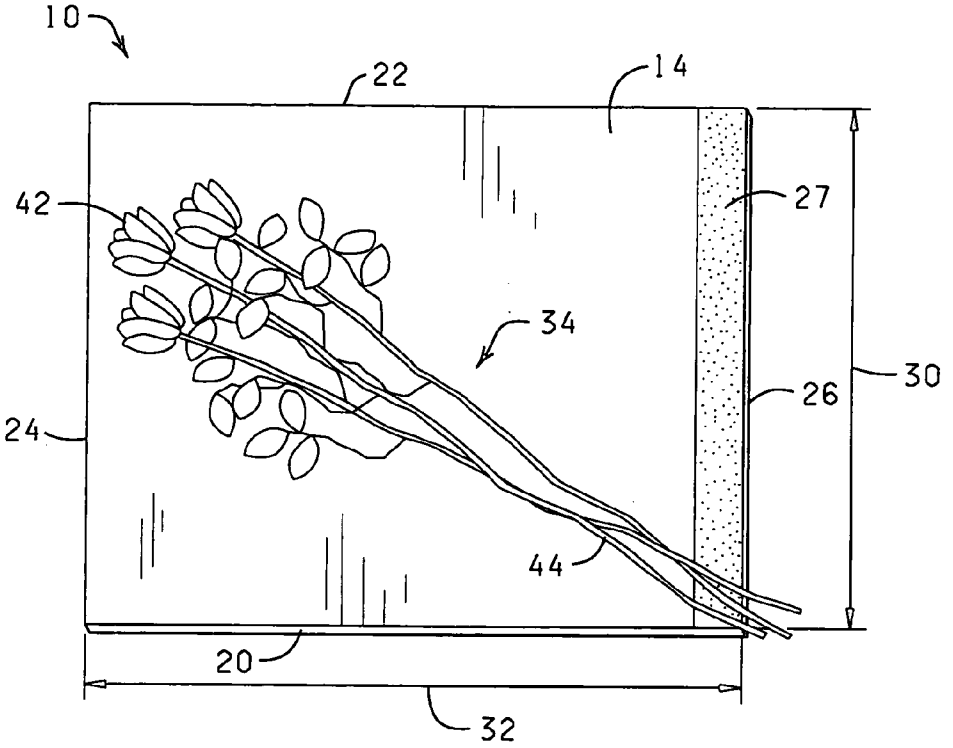


FIG. 3

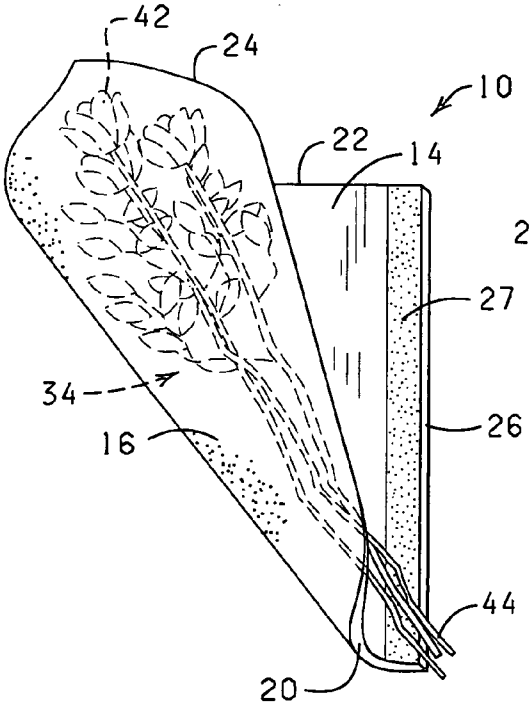


FIG. 4

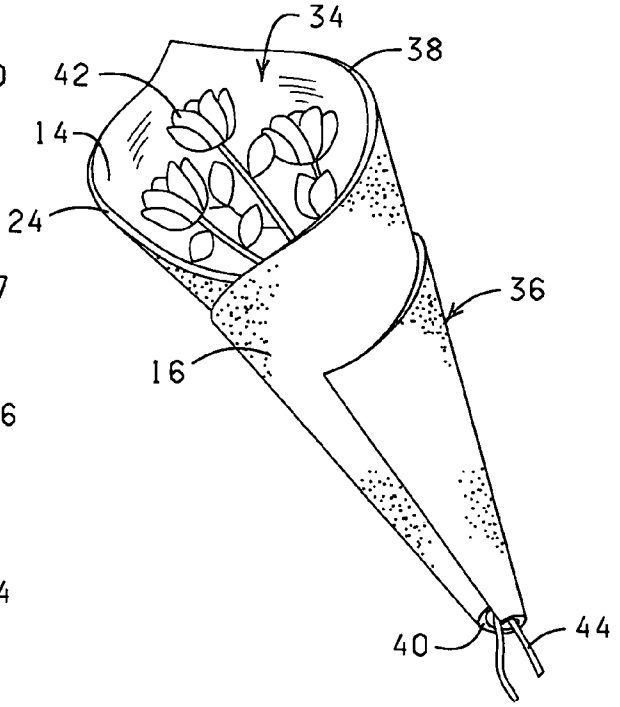


FIG. 5

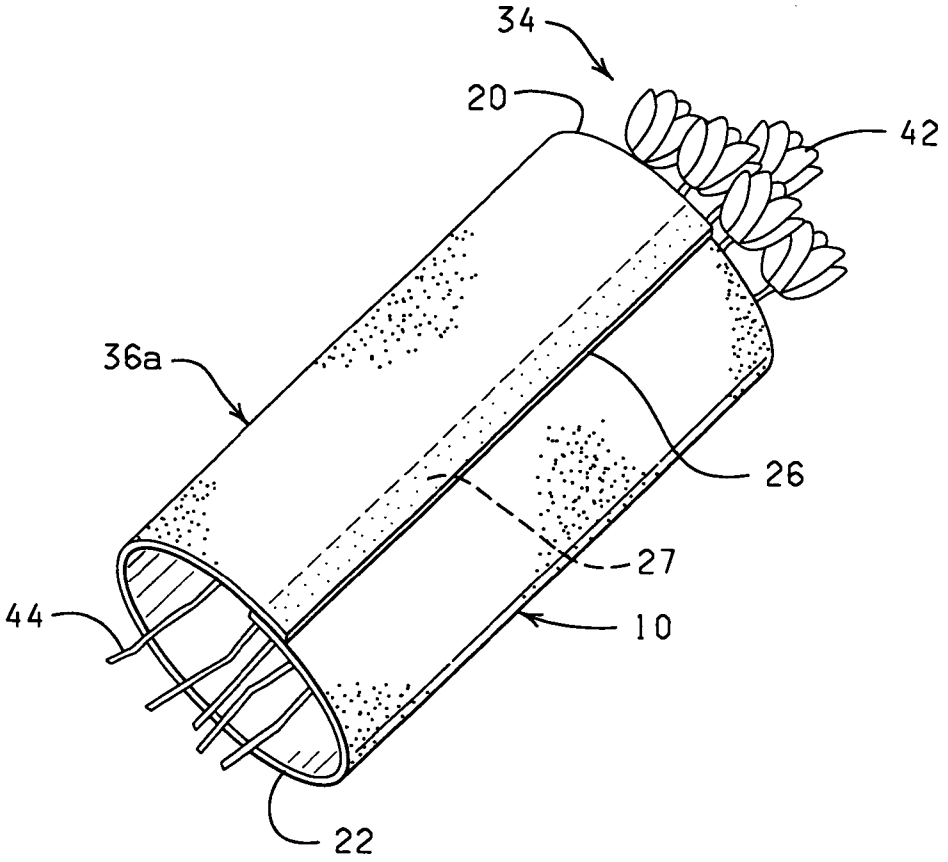


FIG. 6

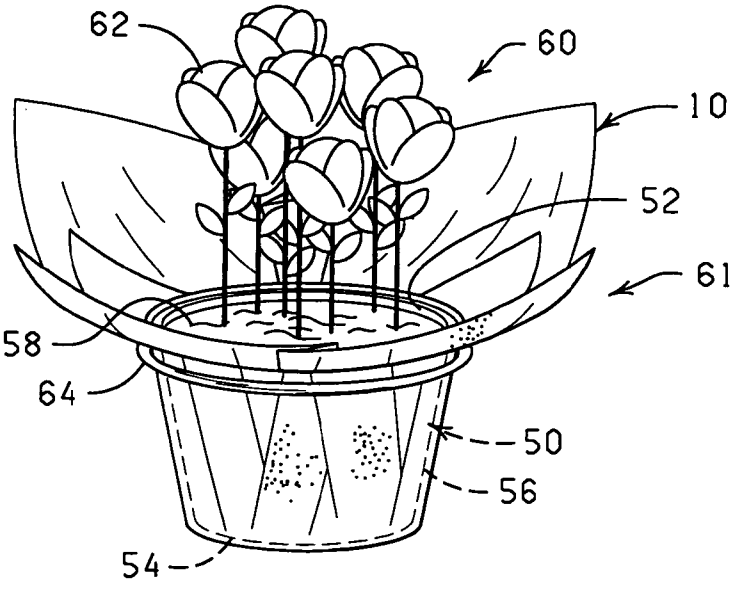


FIG. 7

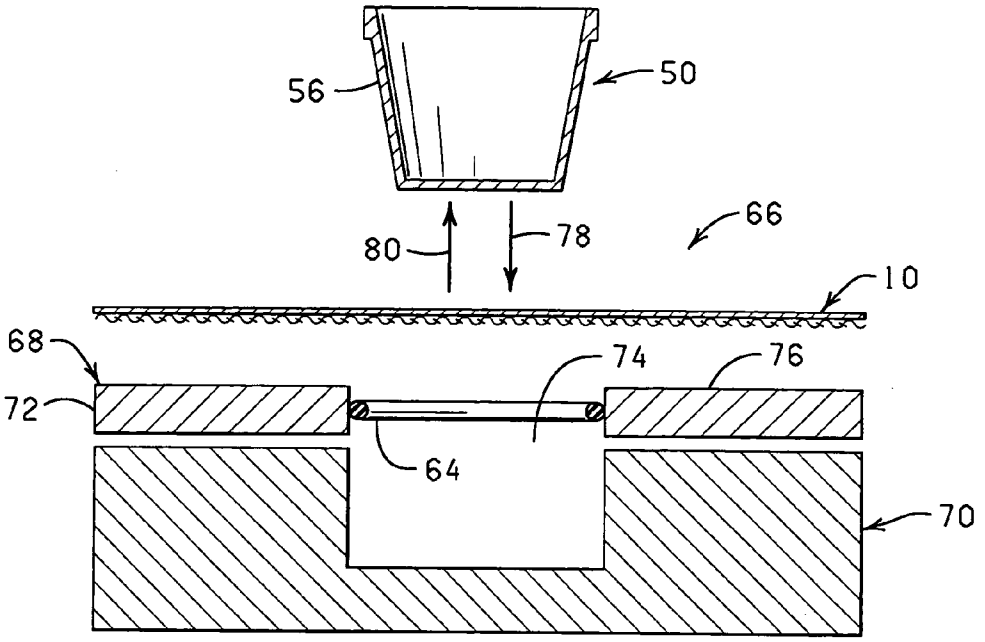


FIG. 8

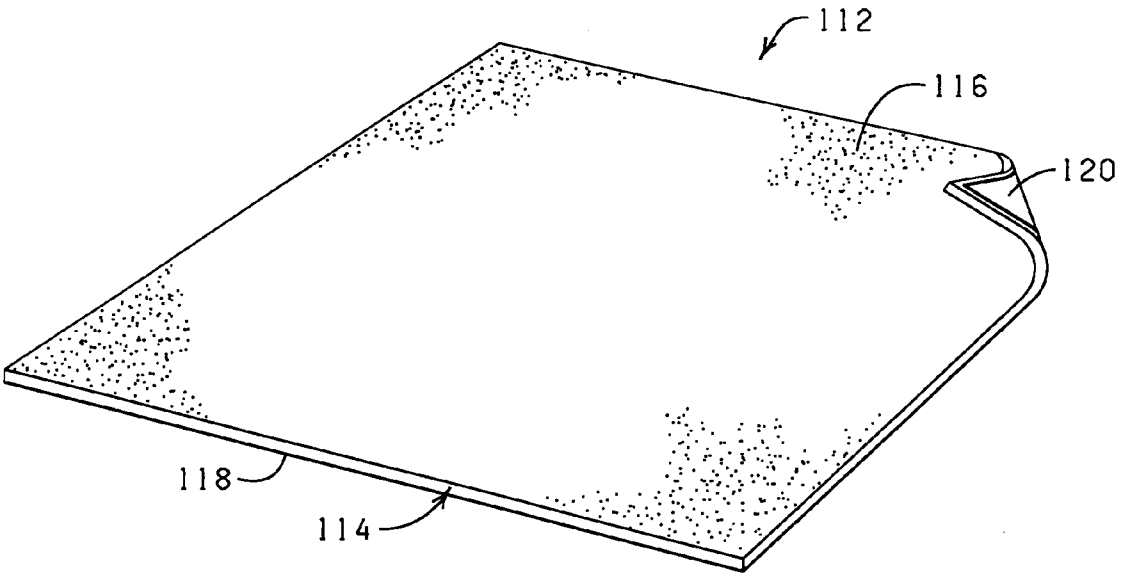


FIG. 8A

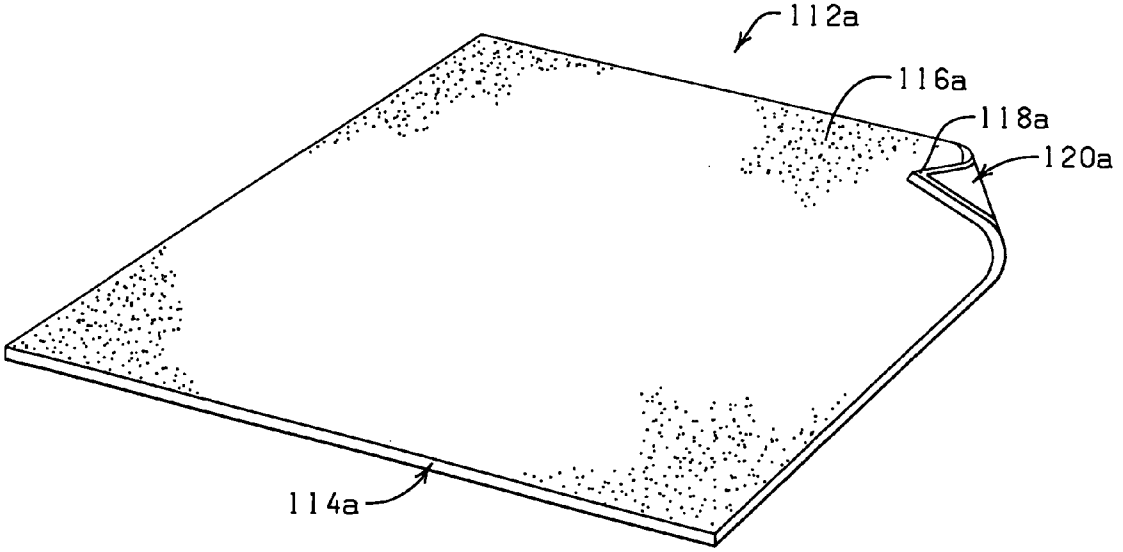


FIG. 9B

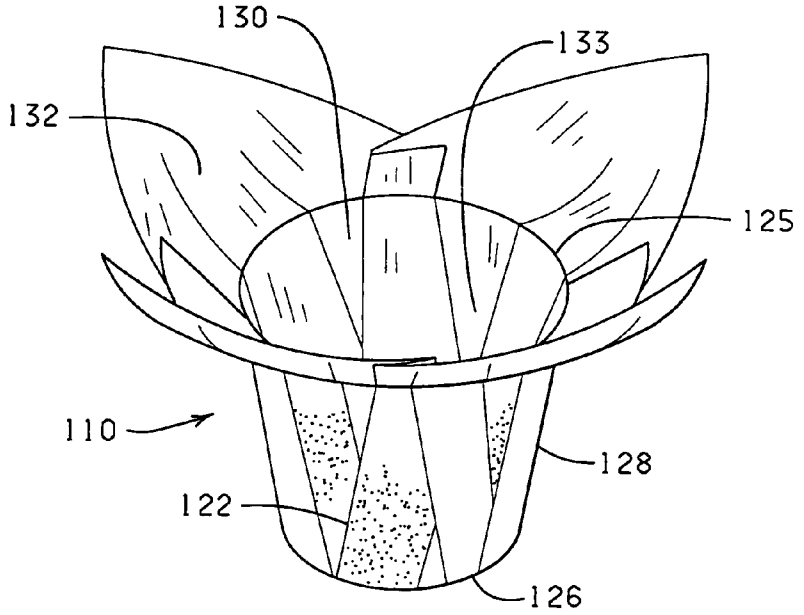


FIG. 10

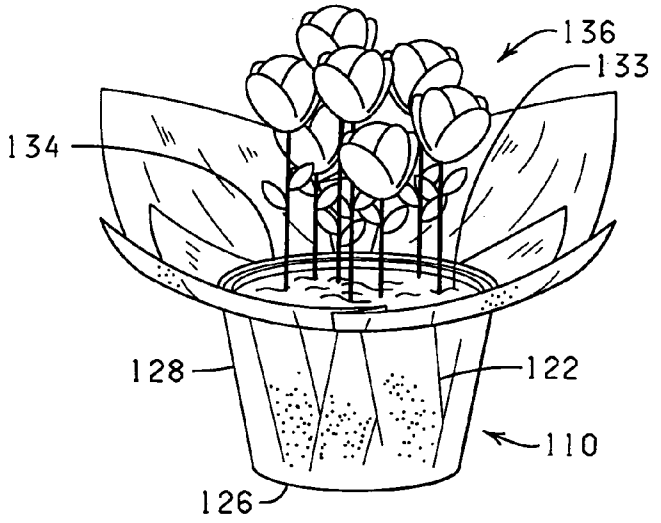


FIG. 11

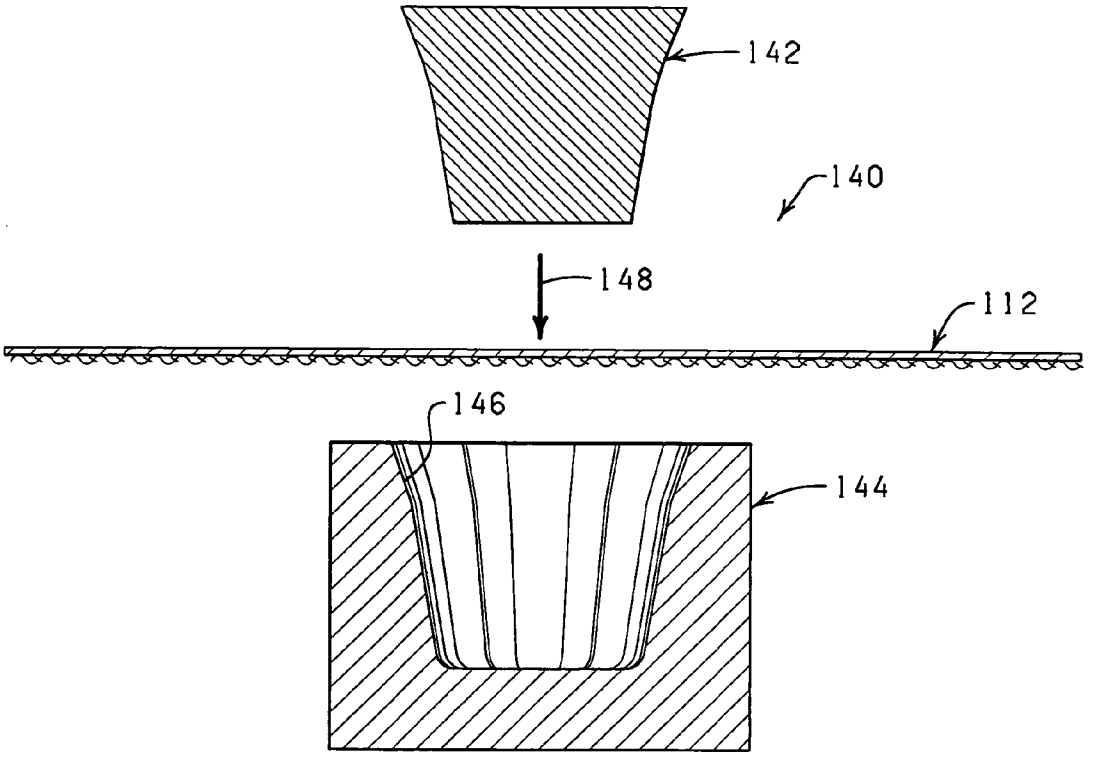


FIG. 12

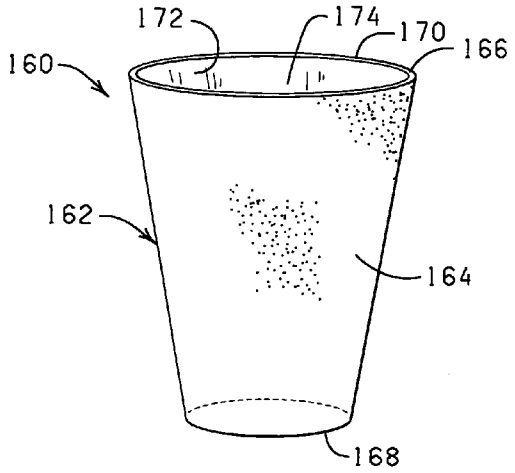


FIG. 13

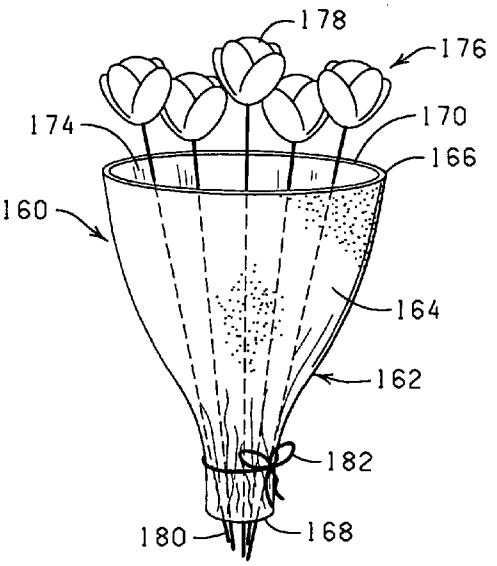


FIG. 14

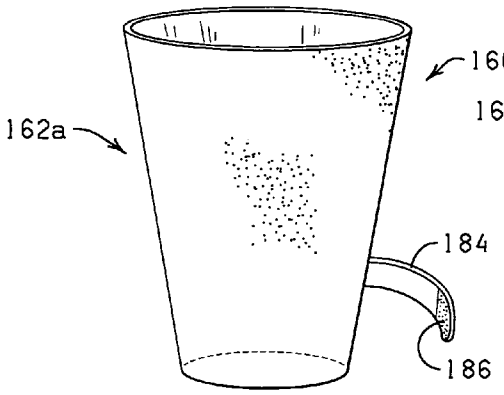


FIG. 15

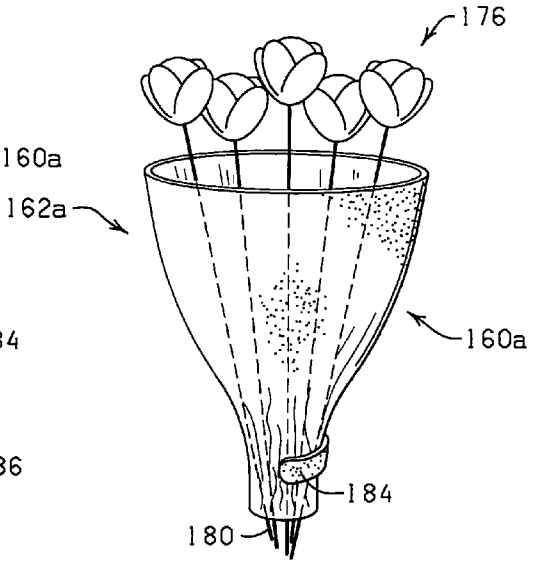


FIG. 16

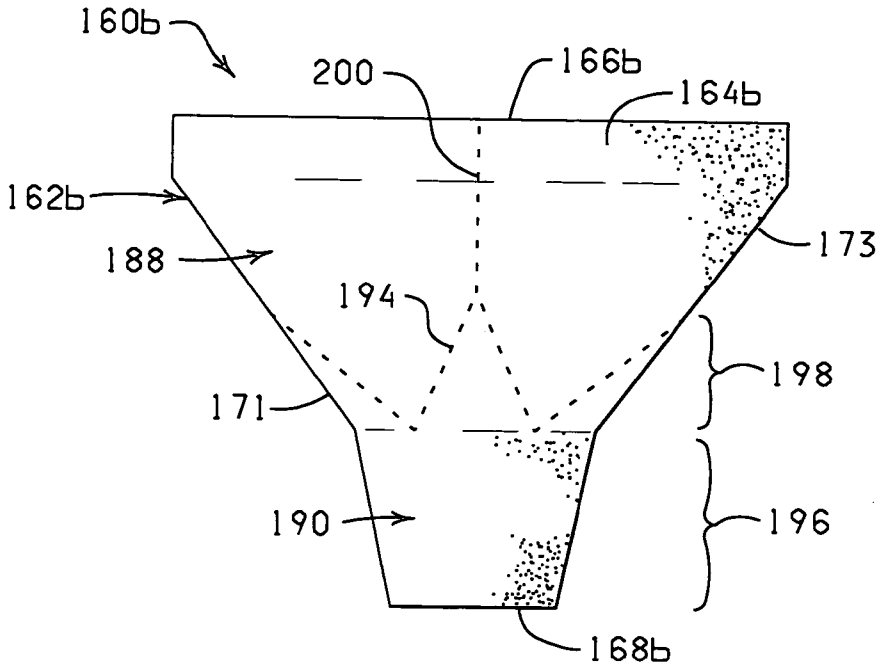
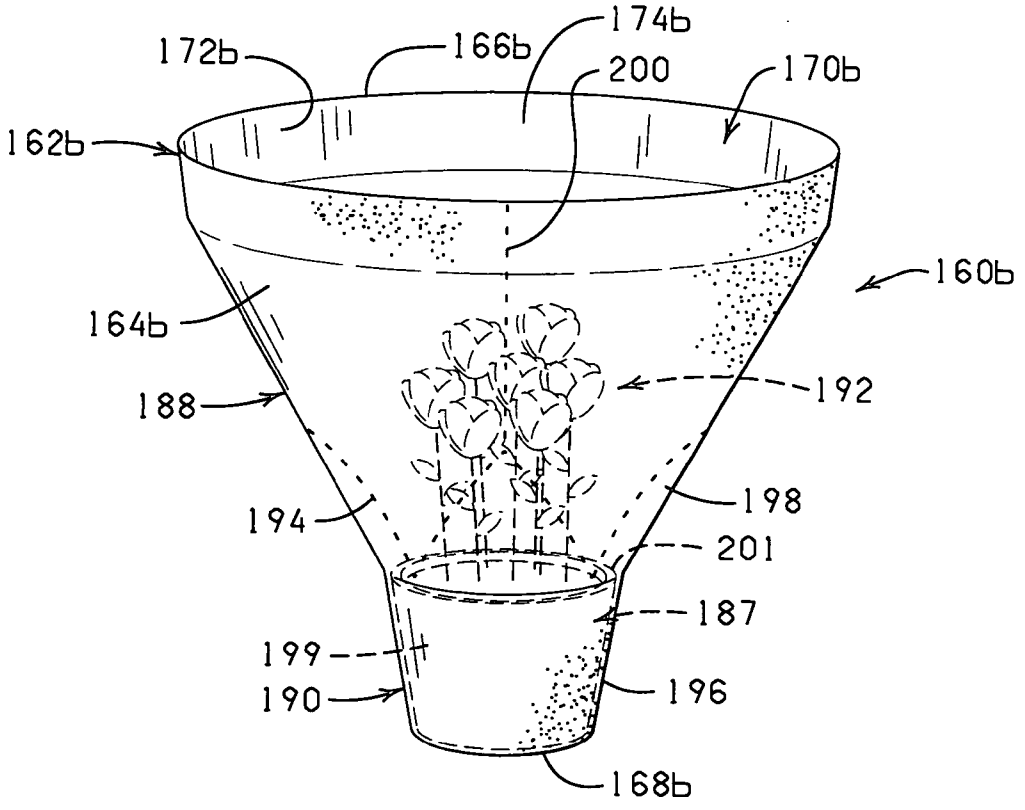

160b
200
166b
164b
162b
173
188
194
198
171
190
196
168b

Fig. 17


174b
172b
166b
200
170b
162b
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164b
192
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196
168b

Fig. 18

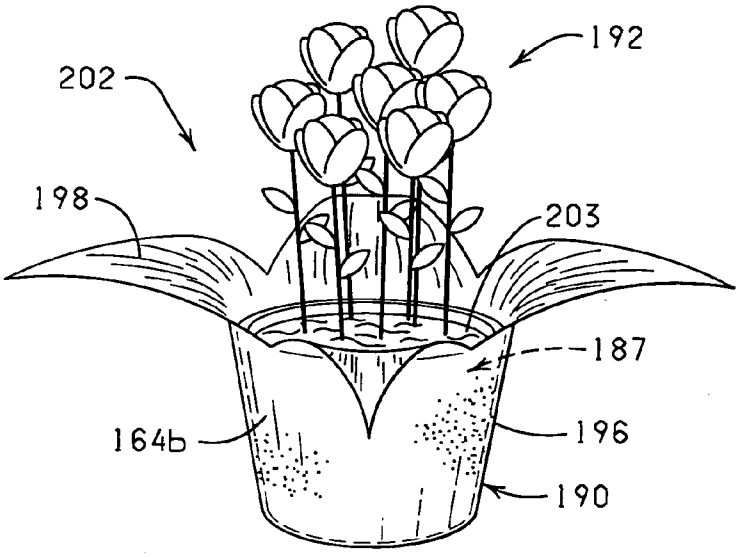

FIG. 19

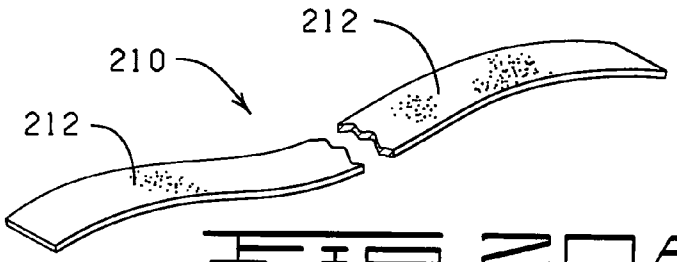

FIG. 20A

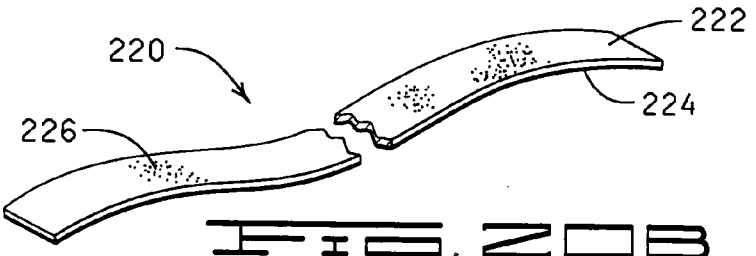

FIG. 20B

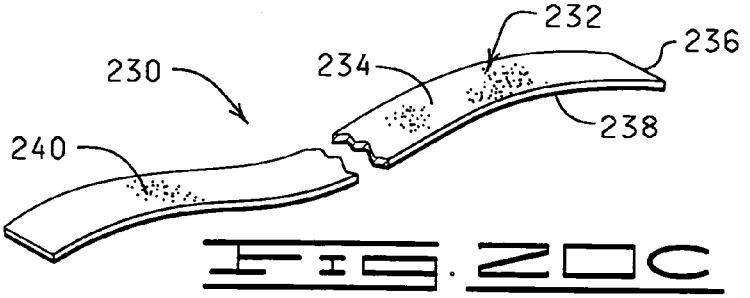

FIG. 20C

SLEEVES FORMED OF POLYMERIC MATERIALS HAVING A TEXTURE OR APPEARANCE SIMULATING THE TEXTURE OR APPEARANCE OF PAPER

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. Ser. No. 10/610,726, filed Jul. 1, 2003; which is a continuation of U.S. Ser. No. 10/269,568, filed Oct. 10, 2002, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,613,409, issued Sep. 2, 2003; which is a continuation of U.S. Ser. No. 10/114,745, filed Apr. 1, 2002, now abandoned; which is a continuation of U.S. Ser. No. 09/153,428, filed Sep. 14, 1998, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,365,251, issued Apr. 2, 2002; which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Ser. No. 09/098,898 filed Jun. 17, 1998, now abandoned; the contents of each of which are hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0002] Not applicable.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present invention relates to polymeric materials having a texture and appearance simulating the texture and appearance of paper, and more particularly but not by way of limitation, to preformed, shape-sustaining flower pot covers, flower pot and floral wrappings, and ribbon materials made from such polymeric materials. In one aspect, the present invention relates to methods for producing preformed, shape-sustaining flower pot covers and methods of wrapping floral groupings and flower pots with a sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance simulating the texture and appearance of paper to provide a decorative cover for such floral groupings and flower pots.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0004] **FIG. 1** is a perspective view of a sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper constructed in accordance with the present invention.

[0005] **FIG. 2** is a perspective view of the sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper of **FIG. 1** having a bonding material disposed along one edge thereof.

[0006] **FIG. 3** is a perspective view of the sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper of **FIG. 2** having a floral grouping disposed thereon.

[0007] **FIG. 4** is a perspective view of the floral grouping of **FIG. 3** being wrapped with the sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper of **FIG. 2** by one method of wrapping.

[0008] **FIG. 5** is a perspective view of a decorative cover for the floral grouping formed from the sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper of **FIG. 2** wherein the decorative cover formed from the sheet of polymeric material has a conical configuration.

[0009] **FIG. 6** is a perspective view of a decorative cover for the floral grouping formed from the sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper of **FIG. 2** wherein the decorative cover has a substantially cylindrical configuration.

[0010] **FIG. 7** is a perspective view of a decorative cover positioned about a flower pot wherein the decorative cover is formed from the sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper of **FIG. 1**.

[0011] **FIG. 8** is a cross-sectional view of a flower pot cover former and band applicator apparatus having the sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper of **FIG. 1** disposed above an opening of the flower pot cover former and band applicator and having a flower pot disposed above the sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper.

[0012] **FIG. 9A** is a perspective view of a sheet of expanded core polymeric film having a texture and appearance assimilating paper wherein an acrylic heat sealable lacquer is disposed on at least one surface thereof.

[0013] **FIG. 9B** is a perspective view of a laminated sheet of material wherein one surface is modified or textured to provide the sheet of laminated material with a texture and appearance assimilating paper.

[0014] **FIG. 10** is a perspective view of a preformed pot cover formed from a sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper.

[0015] **FIG. 11** is a perspective view of the preformed pot cover of **FIG. 10** having a flower pot disposed therein.

[0016] **FIG. 12** is a diagrammatic, cross-sectional view of a male and female mold having a sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper disposed therebetween for forming the preformed pot cover of **FIG. 10**.

[0017] **FIG. 13** is a perspective view of a floral sleeve formed from the sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper.

[0018] **FIG. 14** is a perspective view of the floral sleeve of **FIG. 13** disposed about a floral grouping.

[0019] **FIG. 15** is a perspective view of a floral sleeve having a cinching member wherein the floral sleeve is formed from a sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper.

[0020] **FIG. 16** is a perspective view of the floral sleeve of **FIG. 15** disposed about a floral grouping.

[0021] **FIG. 17** is a side view of a sleeve having a detachable portion wherein the sleeve is formed from a sheet of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper.

[0022] **FIG. 18** is a perspective view of the sleeve of **FIG. 17** having a flower pot disposed therein.

[0023] **FIG. 19** is a perspective view of a flower pot disposed in the sleeve of **FIG. 17** wherein an upper portion of the sleeve has been removed to provide a decorative cover having a skirt.

[0024] **FIG. 20A** is a perspective view of a polymeric ribbon material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper.

[0025] **FIG. 20B** is a perspective view of a polymeric ribbon material formed of an expanded core polymeric film having a texture and appearance assimilating paper.

[0026] **FIG. 20C** is a perspective view of a laminated polymeric ribbon wherein at least one surface of the laminated polymeric ribbon is modified or textured to provide the laminated polymeric ribbon with a texture and appearance assimilating paper.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Description of FIGS. 1-9

[0027] Referring now to **FIGS. 1 and 2**, designated generally by the reference numeral **10** is a sheet or web of polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper (hereinafter referred to as the sheet of polymeric material **10** or the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating paper). That is, at least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material **10** has been modified to provide a matte or textured finish assimilating the texture and appearance of paper. The term "texture and appearance assimilating paper" may be used interchangeably herein with the terms "matte or textured finish assimilating the texture and appearance of paper" and "texture and appearance simulating the texture and appearance of paper".

[0028] The modification of the sheet of polymeric material **10** to provide the sheet of polymeric material **10** with a matte or textured finish assimilating paper in texture and appearance can be accomplished in several ways. For example, a matte finish can be provided by printing a desired pattern on the sheet of polymeric material **10** and thereafter laminating a matte material, such as a translucent polymeric film, over the printed pattern. To further enhance the texture and appearance assimilating paper of the sheet of polymeric material **10**, the matte material may or may not have a plurality of spatially disposed holes extending therethrough. A matte or textured finish can also be produced by printing a sheet of polymeric material **10** with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material **10** with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by embossing the sheet of polymeric material **10** to provide an embossed pattern simulating the weave or texture of paper, or by embossing and printing the sheet of polymeric material to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry, or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. A matte or textured finish capable of providing the sheet of polymeric material **10** with a texture and appearance assimilating paper can also be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll or by laminating a second sheet of material to the sheet of polymeric material **10**. A matte or textured finish capable of providing the sheet of polymeric material **10** with a texture and appearance assimilating paper can also be achieved through the use of selected pigments, such as TiO_2.

[0029] The sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating paper has an upper surface **14**, a lower surface **16**, and an outer peripheral edge **18**. At least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material **10**, such as the lower surface **16**, is matted or textured as described above to provide the sheet of polymeric material **10** with a texture and appearance assimilating paper. The outer peripheral edge **18** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** comprises a first side **20**, a second side **22**, a third side **24**, and a fourth side **26**. A bonding material **27 (FIG. 2)** may be disposed on at least a portion of one or both surfaces **14** and **16** of the sheet of polymeric material **10**, such as the upper surface **14** thereof as shown in **FIG. 2** and as further illustrated in U.S. Pat. No. 5,181,364, the specification of which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0030] The sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating paper may be employed to provide a decorative cover for a floral grouping **(FIGS. 3 through 6)** or a decorative cover for a flower pot **(FIG. 7)**; to form a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot **(FIGS. 10 and 11)**; to provide a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping **(FIGS. 13 through 16)** or a flower pot **(FIGS. 17 through 19)**; or to provide a ribbon material **FIGS. 20A through 20C**). The use of the sheet of polymeric material **10** to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping or a flower pot wherein the decorative cover is provided with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper, or to form a sleeve for a floral grouping or a flower pot wherein the sleeve is provided with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper, or to form a preformed flower pot cover having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper, or as a ribbon material having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper will be described in more complete detail herein.

[0031] As noted above, the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be utilized to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping or a flower pot. The term "flower pot" as used herein refers to any type of container for holding a floral grouping, or a plant, or even another pot-type container. Examples of flower pots and/or pot-type containers include, but are not limited to, clay pots, wooden pots, plastic pots, pots made from natural and/or synthetic fibers, or any combination thereof. Such flower pots and/or pot-type containers are provided with a retaining space for receiving a floral grouping. The floral grouping may be disposed within the retaining space of the flower pot with a suitable growing medium described in further detail below, or other retaining medium, such as a floral foam. It will also be understood that in some cases the floral grouping, and any appropriate growing medium or other retaining medium, may be disposed in a sleeve formed from the sheet of polymeric material **10** if the sleeve is adapted to contain a medium.

[0032] "Floral grouping" as used herein means cut fresh flowers, artificial flowers, a single flower or other fresh and/or artificial plants or other floral materials and may include other secondary plants and/or ornamentation or artificial or natural materials which add to the aesthetics of the overall floral grouping. Further, the floral grouping may comprise a growing potted plant having a root portion as well. However, it will be appreciated that the floral grouping may consist of only a single bloom or only foliage, or a botanical item (not shown), or a propagule. The term "floral grouping" may be used interchangeably herein with the term

"floral arrangement". The term "floral grouping" may also be used interchangeably herein with the terms "botanical item" and/or "propagule."

[0033] The term "growing medium" when used herein means any liquid, solid or gaseous material used for plant growth or for the cultivation of propagules, including organic and inorganic materials such as soil, humus, perlite, vermiculite, sand, water, and including the nutrients, fertilizers or hormones or combinations thereof required by the plants or propagules for growth.

[0034] The term "botanical item" when used herein means a natural or artificial herbaceous or woody plant, taken singularly or in combination. The term "botanical item" also means any portion or portions of natural or artificial herbaceous or woody plants including stems, leaves, flowers, blossoms, buds, blooms, cones, or roots, taken singularly or in combination, or in groupings of such portions such as bouquets or floral groupings.

[0035] The term "propagule" when used herein means any structure capable of being propagated or acting as an agent of reproduction including seeds, shoots, stems, runners, tubers, plants, leaves, roots or spores.

[0036] In the embodiments shown in the drawings, the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating paper in texture and appearance is square. It will be appreciated, however, that the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating paper in texture and appearance can be of any shape, configuration or size as long as the sheet of polymeric material **10** is sufficiently sized and shaped to wrap and encompass a floral grouping or a flower pot. For example, the sheet of polymeric material **10** may have a rectangular, round, oval, octagonal or asymmetrical shape. Further, multiple sheets of the polymeric material **10** may be used in a single circumstance to provide a decorative cover or sleeve for a floral grouping or a flower pot. Moreover, when multiple sheets of the polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating paper in texture and appearance are used in combination, the sheets of polymeric material **10** need not be uniform in size or shape. Finally, it will be appreciated that the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper shown herein is a substantially flat sheet except for the texturing, matting, embossing, flocking, application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink, or other treatments and techniques employed to provide the sheet of polymeric material **10** with the desired texture or matting so that the sheet of polymeric material **10** has a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper.

[0037] Any thickness or stiffness of the sheet of polymeric material **10** may be utilized in accordance with the present invention as long as the sheet of polymeric material **10** can be modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper and the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating paper can be wrapped about at least a portion of a floral grouping or a flower pot to form a decorative cover for the floral grouping or the flower pot, or formed into a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot, or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping or a flower pot, or to provide a ribbon material. Generally, the sheet of polymeric material **10** will have a thickness of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil, and more desirably a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil. The terms "polymer film", "polymeric film" and "polymeric material" when used herein means a synthetic polymer such as a polypropylene or polyethylene, a naturally occurring polymer such as cellophane, an extruded polymeric material having an expanded core such as extruded polypropylene having an expanded core and combinations thereof. The extruded polymeric material having an expanded core may also be referred to herein as an expanded core polymeric material.

[0038] "Extruded polymeric material having an expanded core" or "expanded core polymeric film" as used herein means any extrudable polymeric material or polymeric film in which the core is expanded during extrusion, such as by incorporation of a blowing agent in the polymeric resin which is being extruded.

[0039] The sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance of paper may also be constructed, in whole or in part, from a cling material. "Cling material" when used herein means any material which is capable of connecting to the sheet of material and/or itself upon contacting engagement during the wrapping process and is wrappable about an item whereby portions of the cling material contactingly engage and connect to other portions of another material, or, alternatively, itself, for generally securing the material wrapped about at least a portion of a flower pot. This connecting engagement is preferably temporary in that the material may be easily removed, i.e., the cling material "clings" to the flower pot.

[0040] The cling material is constructed and treated if necessary, from polyethylene such as Cling Wrap made by Glad®, First Brands Corporation, Danbury, Conn. The thickness of the cling material will, in part, depend upon the size of sleeve and the size of the flower pot in the sleeve, i.e., generally, a larger flower pot may require a thicker and therefore stronger cling material. The cling material will range in thickness from about 0.1 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.5 mil to about 2.5 mil. However, any thickness of cling material may be utilized in accordance with the present invention which permits the cling material to be modified as hereinbefore described to provide the cling material with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper.

[0041] A decorative cover for a floral grouping (**FIGS. 3 through 6**), or a decorative cover for a flower pot (**FIG. 7**), or a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot (**FIGS. 10 and 11**), or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping (**FIGS. 13 through 16**) or a flower pot (**FIGS. 17 through 19**), or a ribbon material (**FIGS. 20A through 20C**) may also be constructed of a laminated material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper in texture and appearance (as shown in **FIG. 9B** and described in more detail hereinafter). The laminated material having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be produced by laminating two or more sheets of polymeric film (such as two or more sheets of polypropylene film or a sheet of polypropylene film and a sheet of expanded core polymeric film, such as expanded core polypropylene film), or by laminating a polymeric film (such as polypropylene film or an expanded core polymeric film) to metallized foil and the like wherein at least one

surface of the laminated material is textured or modified to assimilate the texture and appearance of paper. The only requirements in using a laminated material having a texture and appearance assimilating paper in texture and appearance to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping, or a decorative cover for a flower pot, or a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot, or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping or a flower pot, or as ribbon material in accordance with the present invention is that at least one surface of the laminated material be capable of being modified to provide the laminated material with at least one surface having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper and that the laminated material be sufficiently flexible or pliable to permit the laminated material to be formed into a decorative cover for a floral grouping, or a decorative cover for a flower pot, or a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot, or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping or a flower pot, or to be used as ribbon material. It should also be noted that two or more separate sheets of polymeric material can be used to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping, or a decorative cover for a flower pot, or a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot, or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping or a flower pot as long as one of the sheets of polymeric material is modified or textured to provide same with a texture and appearance assimilating paper.

[**0042**] The sheet of polymeric material **10** or a laminated material (**FIG. 9B**) having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper may vary in color. Further, the sheet of polymeric material **10** or a laminated material may be provided with other decorative patterns or designs in addition to the matting, texturing, flocking, application of lacquers or foamable inks, or embossing employed to impart a paper-like texture and appearance to the sheet of polymeric material **10** or the laminated material.

[**0043**] As illustrated in **FIG. 3**, the sheet of polymeric material **10** has a width **30** extending generally between the first side **20** and the second side **22**, respectively, sufficiently sized whereby the sheet of polymeric material **10** can be wrapped about and encompass a floral grouping or a flower pot. The sheet of polymeric material **10** has a length **32** extending generally between the third side **24** and the fourth side **26**, respectively, sufficiently sized whereby the sheet of polymeric material **10** extends over a substantial portion of the floral grouping when the sheet of polymeric material **10** has been wrapped about the floral grouping in accordance with the present invention, as described in detail herein. The sheet of polymeric material **10** may also be wrapped about a flower pot to substantially wrap and cover the flower pot in accordance with the present invention.

[**0044**] A plurality of sheets of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper may be connected together to form a roll as is shown in U.S. Pat. No. 5,459,976, issued to Weder et al. on Oct. 24, 1995, entitled "MATERIAL AND ADHESIVE STRIP DISPENSER", the specification of which is hereby expressly incorporated in its entirety herein by reference.

[**0045**] **FIGS. 3-5** illustrate the use of the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper for wrapping a floral grouping **34** to provide a decorative cover **36** having a texture and appearance assimilating paper (**FIG. 5**) for the floral grouping **34** wherein the decorative cover **36** has an open upper end **38** and a lower end **40**. The sheet of polymeric material **10** may optionally have the strip of bonding material **27** disposed upon the upper surface **14**, the lower surface **16** or both, such as the strip of bonding material **27** disposed along at least a portion of the upper surface **14** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** so that the strip of bonding material **27** is disposed substantially adjacent the fourth side **26** thereof substantially as shown in **FIGS. 3 and 4**. Further, the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be provided either as an individual sheet or from a pad or roll of material.

[**0046**] The bonding material **27**, if present, may have a backing or release strip (not shown). The backing or release strip may be left applied for a period of time to the bonding material **27** after it is disposed on a surface of the sheet of polymeric material **10** prior to its use as a wrapping material in order to protect the bonding qualities of the strip of bonding material **27**.

[**0047**] In operation, an operator may dispose the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper on a support surface (not shown) whereby the lower surface **16** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** (which has been modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material **10** with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper) contacts the support surface.

[**0048**] Referring more specifically to **FIGS. 3-5**, the floral grouping **34** is placed upon the upper surface **14** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** in a diagonal orientation. The floral grouping **34** has an upper bloom or foliage portion **42** and a lower stem portion **44**. The sheet of polymeric material **10** is then wrapped about the floral grouping **34** by the operator (**FIGS. 4 and 5**), the operator overlapping a portion of the sheet of polymeric material **10** over another portion of the sheet of polymeric material **10**. That is, for example, the operator places the first side **20** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** over the floral grouping **34**, as shown in **FIG. 4**. The operator continues to roll the floral grouping **34** and the sheet of polymeric material **10** in the direction toward the second side **22** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** until the upper surface **14** near the second side **22** firmly engages the lower surface **16** of the sheet of polymeric material **10**, wherein the floral grouping **34** is substantially encompassed by the sheet of polymeric material **10**, and wherein the bonding material **27** on the upper surface **14** contacts the lower surface **16** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** to provide the decorative cover **36** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper which substantially encompasses and surrounds a substantial portion of the floral grouping **34**. **FIG. 5** shows the floral grouping **34** wrapped in a conical fashion to provide the decorative cover **36** for the floral grouping **34** wherein the decorative cover **36** has a texture and appearance assimilating paper. When the floral grouping **34** is wrapped in a conical fashion, the bloom portion **42** of the floral grouping **34** is exposed near the open upper end of the decorative cover **36**, and the stem portion **44** of the floral grouping **34** is exposed near the lower end **40** of the decorative cover **36**.

[0049] In another embodiment, illustrated in **FIG. 6**, the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating paper in texture and appearance is utilized to wrap the floral grouping **34** in a cylindrical fashion. The floral grouping **34** is disposed upon the sheet of polymeric material **10** approximately parallel to the fourth side **26** of the sheet of polymeric material **10**. The sheet of polymeric material **10** is wrapped generally about the stem portion **44** of the floral grouping **34** to a position wherein the fourth side **26** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** generally overlaps the third side **24** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** in a cylindrical fashion. It should be noted that the sheet of polymeric material **10** may be wrapped a plurality of times about the stem portion **44** of the floral grouping **34** before the overlapping of the third side **24** and the fourth side **26** of the sheet of polymeric material **10**. As before, the portion of the sheet of polymeric material **10** near the fourth side **26** is disposed generally adjacent another portion of the sheet of polymeric material **10** and the two adjacent portions then are brought into contact where they may be bondingly engaged, thereby securing the sheet of polymeric material **10** generally about the floral grouping **34** so as to provide a decorative cover **36***a* having a texture and appearance assimilating paper for the floral grouping **34**.

[0050] In another version of the invention, the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper may be used to wrap a flower pot or pot-type container, as noted above. Shown in **FIG. 7** is a flower pot designated by the reference numeral **50** having an open upper end **52**, a bottom end **54**, an outer peripheral surface **56**, and an inner retaining space **58** within which may be disposed a growing medium. The flower pot **50** may contain a botanical item, such as a plant **60**, which has an upper portion **62** comprising blooms or foliage or both.

[0051] The sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper may be wrapped about the flower pot **50** by any one of numerous methods used to wrap sheets of material about flower pots to form decorative pot covers for flower pots, such as a decorative cover **61** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper disposed about the flower pot **50** illustrated in **FIG. 7**. The sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating paper may, for example, be formed by hand about the outer peripheral surface **56** of the flower pot **50** to produce the decorative cover **61** which has the appearance of being fabricated of paper. The decorative cover **61** can then be secured about the flower pot **50** by a bonding material or by an elastic band **64** such that the open upper end **52** of the flower pot **50** remains substantially uncovered by the decorative cover **61** substantially as shown in **FIG. 7**.

[0052] Referring now to **FIG. 8**, a flower pot cover former and band applicator device **66** for forming the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper into the decorative cover **61** for the flower pot **50** of **FIG. 7** is illustrated. The flower pot cover former and band applicator device **66** comprises a band applicator **68** and a flower pot cover former **70**. The flower pot cover former and band applicator device **66** has a support platform **72** with an opening **74** formed therein. A band, such as the elastic band **64**, is disposed circumferentially about the opening **74** in the support platform **72**.

[0053] The lower surface **16** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** (which has been modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material **10** with a textured or matted surface assimilating paper in appearance) is positioned on an upper surface **76** on the support platform **72** such that the sheet of polymeric material **10** is positioned over the opening **74** in the support platform **72**. The flower pot **50** is positioned above the sheet of polymeric material **10** and is moved in a direction indicated by an arrow **78** into the opening **74** of the flower pot cover former and band applicator device **66**. As the flower pot **50** is moved into the opening **74**, the sheet of polymeric material **10** is pressed about the outer peripheral surface **56** of the flower pot **50**, thereby forming the decorative cover **61** having a texture and appearance assimilating paper about the flower pot **50**. The decorative cover **61**, which has a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper, is then secured about the flower pot **50** by the elastic band **64**. The flower pot **50** having the decorative cover **61** secured thereto is then moved in a direction indicated by the arrow **80** out of the opening **74** in the support platform **72**.

[0054] The elastic band **64** can be applied manually or automatically, such as by the method shown in U.S. Pat. No. 5,105,599, issued to Weder et al. on Apr. 21, 1992, which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference. The band **64** can also be applied as a tie using a method such as is described in "Single Station Covering and Fastening System", U.S. Pat. No. 5,609,009, issued to Weder et al. on Mar. 11, 1997, the specification of which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference. The sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can also be applied automatically about the flower pot **50**, for example, by methods shown in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,733,521 and 5,291,721, both of which are hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0055] Instead of securing the decorative cover **61** about the flower pot **50** via the elastic band **64**, the decorative cover **61** formed from the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper may be secured to the flower pot **50** by the use of one or more bonding materials. For example, the upper surface **14** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** may have a bonding material such as the bonding material **27** disposed upon a portion thereof. When the sheet of polymeric material **10** is disposed about the flower pot **50**, at least a portion of the upper surface **14** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** contacts the outer peripheral surface **56** of the flower pot **50** and is thereby bonded and held about the flower pot **50** via the bonding material **27**.

[0056] The bonding material **27** may cover a portion of the upper surface **14** of the sheet of polymeric material **10**, or the bonding material **27** may entirely cover the upper surface **14** of the sheet of polymeric material **10**. The bonding material **27** may be disposed on the upper surface **14** of the sheet of polymeric material **10** in the form of a strip or in the form of spaced-apart spots. One method for disposing a bonding material **27** on the sheet of polymeric material **10** is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,111,637, entitled "Method For

Wrapping A Floral Grouping", issued to Weder, et al. on May 12, 1992, which is expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0057] The term "bonding material" when used herein can mean an adhesive, frequently a pressure sensitive adhesive, or a cohesive or any adhesive/cohesive combination having adhesive qualities (i.e., qualities of adhesion or adhesion/cohesion, respectively) sufficient to cause the attachment of a portion of the sheet of polymeric material **10** to itself, to the floral grouping **34**, or to the flower pot **50**. Since the bonding material **27** may comprise either an adhesive or an adhesive/cohesive combination, it will be appreciated that both adhesives and cohesives are known in the art, and both are commercially available. When the bonding material **27** is a cohesive, a similar cohesive material must be placed on the adjacent surface for bondingly contacting and bondingly engaging with the cohesive material.

[0058] The term "bonding material" also includes materials which are heat sealable and, in this instance, the adjacent portions of the material must be brought into contact and then heat must be applied to effect the seal. The term "bonding material" also includes materials which are sonically sealable and vibratory sealable. The term "bonding material" when used herein also means a heat sealing lacquer or hot melt material which may be applied to the material and, in this instance, heat, sound waves, or vibrations, also must be applied to effect the sealing.

[0059] The term "bonding material" when used herein also means any type of material or thing which can be used to effect the bonding or connecting of the two adjacent portions of the sheet of polymeric material **10** to effect the connection or bonding described herein. The term "bonding material" may also include ties, labels, bands, ribbons, strings, tapes (including single or double-sided adhesive tapes), staples or combinations thereof. Some of the bonding materials would secure the ends of the material while other bonding materials may bind the circumference of a wrapper, or a sleeve, or, alternatively and/or in addition, the bonding materials would secure overlapping folds in the material and/or sleeve. Another way to secure the sheet of polymeric material **10** about the floral grouping **34** or the flower pot **50** is to heat seal the ends of the material to another portion of the material. One way to do this is to contact the ends with an iron of sufficient heat to heat seal the material.

[0060] Alternatively, a cold seal adhesive may be utilized as the bonding material **27**. The cold seal adhesive adheres only to a similar substrate, acting similarly as a cohesive, and binds only to itself. The cold seal adhesive, since it bonds only to a similar substrate, does not cause a residue to build up on equipment, thereby both permitting much more rapid disposition and use of such equipment to form articles and reducing labor costs. Further, since no heat is required to effect the seal, the dwell time, that is, the time for the sheet of material to form and retain the shape of an article, such as a flower pot cover or flower pot, is reduced. A cold seal adhesive binds quickly and easily with minimal pressure, and such a seal is not readily releasable. This characteristic is different from, for example, a pressure sensitive adhesive.

[0061] The term "bonding material" when used herein also means any heat or chemically shrinkable material, and static electrical or other electrical material, chemical welding material, magnetic material, mechanical or barb-type fastening material or clamps, curl-type characteristics of the film or materials incorporated in material which can cause the material to take on certain shapes, cling films, slots, grooves, shrinkable materials and bands, curl materials, springs, and any type of welding method which may weld portions of the material to itself or to the pot, or to both the material itself and the pot.

Description of FIGS. **9-12**

[0062] Referring now to **FIGS. 10 and 11**, a decorative preformed flower pot cover **110** is illustrated constructed from a sheet of polymeric material having at least one surface thereof textured or modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper. The polymeric material having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper is a flexible material such as the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper **(FIG. 1)**, or a sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper **(FIG. 9A)** or a flexible laminated sheet of material **112***a* having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper **(FIG. 9B)**. In the embodiment shown in **FIG. 9A**, the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper used in the construction of the decorative preformed flower pot cover **110** comprises a sheet of expanded core polymeric material **114** having an upper surface **116**, a lower surface **118** and a thickness in the range of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, more desirably in the range of from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil. The sheet of expanded core polymeric material **114** is provided with a coating of an acrylic heat sealable lacquer **120** disposed on at least one of the upper and lower surfaces **116** and **118** thereof. It should be understood, however, that the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** is not limited to being the sheet of expanded core polymeric film **114** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper; rather, the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** can be any flexible polymeric material or flexible laminated material, such as the sheet of polymeric material **10** or the sheet of flexible laminated polymeric material **112***a*, which can be modified or textured so that at least one surface of such polymeric material or laminated material is provided with a finish or texture assimilating paper in appearance.

[0063] As previously stated, the modification of the polymeric material or laminated polymeric material, such as the sheet of polymeric material **10**, the sheet of flexible laminated polymeric material **112***a*, or the sheet of expanded core polymeric film **114** to provide the sheet of flexible material with the desired matte or textured finish, can be accomplished by printing a desired pattern on the sheet of polymeric material and thereafter laminating a matte material, such as a translucent polymeric film over the printed pattern. To further enhance the texture and appearance of the sheet of polymeric material so that the sheet of polymeric material assimilates the texture and appearance of paper, the matte material may or may not have a plurality of spatially disposed holes extending therethrough. A matte or textured finish can also be produced by printing a sheet of polymeric material with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material with a

dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by embossing the sheet of polymeric material to provide an embossed pattern assimilating the texture and appearance of paper, or by embossing and printing the sheet of polymeric material to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry, or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish capable of providing the sheet of flexible polymeric material with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll to produce the expanded core polymeric material, or by laminating a second sheet of material to the sheet of polymeric material, or by the use of selected pigments.

[0064] The sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** (**FIG. 9A**) having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper may vary in color. Further, the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** may be provided with other decorative patterns or designs in addition to the matting, texturing, flocking, application of lacquers or foamable inks, or embossing employed to impart a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper to the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112**.

[0065] When the sheet of polymeric material, such as the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112**, is formed into the decorative preformed flower pot cover **110**, a plurality of overlapping folds **122** are formed, and at least a portion of the overlapping folds **122** are connected to adjacently disposed portions of the decorative preformed flower pot cover **110** via the acrylic heat sealable lacquer **120**.

[0066] As shown in **FIGS. 10 and 11**, the decorative preformed pot cover **110** has an upper end **125**, a lower end **126**, and an outer peripheral surface **128**. An opening **130** intersects the upper end **125**, forming an inner peripheral surface **132** which defines and encompasses a retaining space **133** within which a flower pot **134** containing a floral grouping **136** may be disposed in a manner well known in the art.

[0067] In another embodiment, a sheet of flexible polymeric material **112***a* (**FIG. 9B**) is used in the construction of the decorative preformed flower pot cover **110**. The sheet of flexible polymeric material **112***a* is a laminated material which comprises a first sheet of material **114***a* having an upper surface **116***a* and a lower surface **118***a*, and a second sheet of material **120***a*. At least one surface of the first sheet of material **114***a* or the second sheet of material **120***a* is modified to provide the sheet of flexible laminated polymeric material **112***a* with the desired texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper. The sheet of flexible laminated polymeric material **112***a* having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be produced by laminating two or more sheets of polymeric film (such as two or more sheets of polypropylene film or a sheet of polypropylene film and a sheet of expanded core polymeric film, such as expanded core polypropylene film), or by laminating a polymeric film (such as polypropylene film or an expanded core polymeric film) with a sheet of metallized foil and the like wherein at least one surface of the sheet of flexible laminated polymeric material **112***a* is textured or modified to assimilate paper in appearance.

[0068] The first sheet of material **114***a* desirably has a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil, and the second sheet of material **120***a* desirably has a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil. The second sheet of material **120***a* can be laminated to the first sheet of material **114***a* with a colored adhesive so as to impart a desired color to the laminated sheet of flexible polymeric material **112***a*. While the thickness of the sheet of flexible laminated polymeric material **112***a* can vary widely and will generally depend on the thickness of the first sheet of material **114***a* and the thickness of the second sheet of material **120***a*, desirable results can be obtained where the sheet of flexible laminated polymeric material **112***a* has a thickness in the range of from about 1 mil to about 20 mil, and more desirably from about 1.2 mil to about 2.5 mil.

[0069] As previously stated, the decorative preformed flower pot cover **110** may be constructed of the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper (**FIG. 1**), or of the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** (**FIG. 9A**), or of the laminated sheet of flexible polymeric material **112***a* (**FIG. 9B**). The decorative preformed flower pot cover **110** so formed will have a plurality of overlapping folds **122** formed therein, at least a portion thereof being connected. If desired, the decorative preformed flower pot cover **110** can be formed of a plurality of sheets of the same and/or different types of material.

[0070] The method and apparatus employed to form the decorative preformed flower pot cover **110** having a texture and appearance of paper is substantially identical whether one uses one or more sheets of polymeric material **10** (**FIG. 1**), or one or more sheets of flexible polymeric material **112** (**FIG. 9A**), or one or more sheets of flexible laminated polymeric material **112***a* (**FIG. 9B**), or a combination of such sheets of material. Thus, only the formation of the decorative preformed flower pot cover **110** having a texture and appearance of paper using the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** of **FIG. 9A** will be described in detail hereinafter.

[0071] The decorative preformed flower pot cover **110** may be formed using a conventional mold system **140** comprising a male mold **142** and a female mold **144** having a mold cavity **146** for matingly receiving the male mold **142** (**FIG. 12**). The sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper is positioned between the male and female molds **142** and **144**, respectively. Movement of the male mold **142** in the direction indicated by an arrow **148** and into the mold cavity **146** forces the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** to be disposed about the portion of the male mold **142** disposed in the mold cavity **146** of the female mold **144** and thereby forms the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** into the preformed decorative flower pot cover **110** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper (**FIGS. 10 and 11**). Further, in accordance with the present invention, the decorative preformed flower pot cover **110** constructed from the materials described herein above may have a bonding material disposed upon a portion thereof.

[0072] Methods for forming such preformed decorative pot covers are well known in the art. Two methods of

forming such covers are described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,773,182 and 5,291,721, each of which is expressly incorporated herein by reference.

Description of FIGS. **13-19**

[**0073**] Shown in **FIG. 13** is a decorative cover designated therein by the general reference numeral **160** which comprises a flexible bag or sleeve **162** of unitary construction having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper in accordance with the present invention. The sleeve **162** may be used as a decorative cover **160** for a floral grouping or a flower pot. The sleeve **162** initially comprises a flexible flat collapsed piece of polymeric material which is openable in the form of a tube or sleeve. Such sleeves are well known in the floral industry. Further, in accordance with the present invention, the decorative cover **160** can be constructed of the sheet of flexible polymeric material **10** (**FIG. 1**), or the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** (**FIG. 9A**), or the sheet of laminated flexible polymeric material **112***a* (**FIG. 9B**) whereby at least a portion of one surface of the sleeve **162**, preferably an outer peripheral surface **164** of the sleeve **162**, has been modified to provide the sleeve **162** with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper, as previously described herein.

[**0074**] The sleeve **162** has an upper end **166**, a lower end **168** and the outer peripheral surface **164**. The sleeve **162** may be tapered outwardly from the lower end **168** toward a larger diameter at its upper end **166**. In its flattened state the sleeve **162** generally has an overall trapezoidal or modified trapezoidal shape, and when opened is substantially frusto-conical in configuration. It will be appreciated, however, that the sleeve **162** may comprise variations on the aforementioned shapes or may comprise significantly altered shapes such as square or rectangular, wherein the sleeve **162** when opened has a cylindrical form, as long as the sleeve **162** functions in accordance with the present invention in the manner described herein. The sleeve **162** (or any other sleeve disclosed herein) may have an angular or contoured shape.

[**0075**] The sleeve **162** has an opening **170** at the upper end **166** thereof and may be open at the lower end **168**, or closed with a bottom at the lower end **168**. The sleeve **162** also has an inner peripheral surface **172** which, when the sleeve **162** is opened, defines and encompasses an inner retaining space **174**. When the lower end **168** of the sleeve **162** is closed, a portion of the lower end **168** may be inwardly folded to form one or more gussets (not shown) for allowing the lower portion of the inner retaining space **174** to be expandable, for example, for receiving the circular bottom of a pot or growing medium.

[**0076**] The sleeve **162** is generally frusto-conically shaped, but the sleeve **162** may be, by way of example but not by way of limitation, cylindrical, frusto-conical, a combination of both frusto-conical and cylindrical, or any other shape, as long as the sleeve **162** functions as described herein as noted above. Further, the sleeve **162** may comprise any shape, whether geometric, non-geometric, asymmetrical and/or fanciful, as long as it functions in accordance with the present invention. The sleeve **162** may also be equipped with drain holes (if having a closed bottom) or side ventilation holes (not shown), or can be made from gas permeable or impermeable materials.

[**0077**] The material from which the sleeve **162** is constructed is the same as previously described above for the sheet of polymeric material **10** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper, or the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** or **112***a* having a texture and appearance assimilating paper. Any thickness of polymeric material may be utilized in accordance with the present invention as long as the sleeve **162** may be formed as described herein, is provided with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper, and as long as the formed sleeve **162** may contain at least a portion of a flower pot or a floral grouping, as described herein. Additionally, an insulating material such as bubble film, preferable as one of two or more layers, can be utilized in order to provide additional protection for the item, such as a floral grouping, contained therein.

[**0078**] In **FIG. 14** the sleeve **162** is illustrated as having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper provided on the outer peripheral surface **164** of the sleeve **162**. A floral grouping **176** is disposed within the inner retaining space **174** of the sleeve **162**. Generally, an upper or bloom portion **178** of the floral grouping **176** is exposed near the opening **170** of the sleeve **162** and a lower or stem portion **180** of the floral grouping **176** is exposed near the lower end **168** of the sleeve **162**. Either end of the sleeve **162** may be closed about the floral grouping **176**. Generally, a portion of the sleeve **162** is tightened about a portion of the stem portion **180** of the floral grouping **176** for holding the decorative cover **160** about the floral grouping **176**. For example, the sleeve **162** may be held by a tie **182** tied about the sleeve **162**, such as is shown in **FIG. 14**. Other methods for binding the sleeve **162** about the floral grouping **176** may be employed, such as the bonding materials described elsewhere herein. For example, as shown in **FIG. 15**, a decorative cover **160***a* is shown which comprises a sleeve **162***a* having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper and a cinching tab **184** having a bonding material **186** disposed upon a surface thereof. The cinching tab **184** can be used to gather portions of the sleeve **162***a* together about the stem portion **180** of the floral grouping **176** as shown in **FIG. 16** for holding the sleeve **162***a* tightly about the floral grouping **176**.

[**0079**] Similarly, it may generally be desired to use the sleeve **162** as a decorative cover for a flower pot, as will be described in further detail below. The flower pot will generally contain a botanical item or plant. The flower pot can be deposited into the open sleeve **162** in a manner well known in the art, such as manually wherein the sleeve **162** is opened by hand and the flower pot deposited therein.

[**0080**] As noted above, a bonding material may be disposed on a portion of the sleeve **162** or any sleeve described herein to assist in holding the sleeve **162** to the flower pot when the flower pot is disposed within the sleeve **162** or to assist in closing the upper end **166** of the sleeve **162** or adhering the sleeve **162** to the flower pot after the flower pot has been disposed therein, as will be discussed in further detail below.

[**0081**] It will be understood that the bonding material, if present, may be disposed as a strip or block on a surface of the sleeve **162**. The bonding material may also be disposed upon either the outer peripheral surface **164** or the inner peripheral surface **172** of the sleeve **162**, as well as upon the

flower pot. Further, the bonding material may be disposed as spots of bonding material, or in any other geometric, non-geometric, asymmetric, or fanciful form, and in any pattern, including covering either the entire inner peripheral surface **172** and/or outer peripheral surface **164** of the sleeve **162** and/or the flower pot. The bonding material may be covered by a cover or release strip which can be removed prior to the use of the sleeve **162** or flower pot. The bonding material can be applied by methods known to those of ordinary skill in their art. One method for disposing a bonding material, in this case an adhesive, is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,111,637, issued to Weder et al. on May 12, 1993, which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[**0082**] As noted above, a bonding material may be disposed on at least a portion of the inner peripheral surface **172** of the sleeve **162**, or, alternatively, the bonding material may be disposed on the outer peripheral surface of a flower pot contained within the sleeve **162** while the sleeve **162** may be free of the bonding material. In a further alternative, the bonding material may be disposed both on at least a portion of the flower pot as well as upon at least a portion of the inner peripheral surface **172** of the sleeve **162**. In addition, a portion of the bonding material may also be disposed on the outer peripheral surface **164** of the sleeve **162** as well. It will be understood that the bonding material may be disposed in a solid section of bonding material. The bonding material, when present, is disposed on the sleeve **162** and/or flower pot by any method known in the art.

[**0083**] Certain versions of sleeves described herein may be used in combination with a preformed pot cover. For example, a preformed pot cover may be applied to the pot, then the covered pot wrapped or disposed within a sleeve. Either the cover or the sleeve, or both, have a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper. Examples of sleeves which may be used in this invention are shown in the specification of U.S. Pat. No. 5,625,979, issued to Weder on May 6, 1997, which is expressly incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. Equipment and devices for forming sleeves are commercially available, and well known in the art.

[**0084**] Shown in **FIGS. 17 and 18** is another embodiment of a decorative cover **160***b* comprising a sleeve **162***b* having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper constructed from the sheet of polymeric material **10** or the sheet of flexible polymeric material **112** or **112***a* in accordance with the present invention. The sleeve **162***b* has a "detaching" element in predetermined areas for detaching a portion of the sleeve **162***b*. The sleeve **162***b* generally initially comprises a flexible flat collapsed piece of material which is openable in the form of a tube or sleeve. The sleeve **162***b* is constructed of the same material and in the same way as the sleeve **162** described previously herein and may be described exactly the same as the sleeve **162** described herein except for the additional elements described hereinafter.

[**0085**] The sleeve **162***b* has an upper end **166***b*, a lower end **168***b*, and an outer peripheral surface **164***b*. The sleeve **162***b* has an opening **170***b* at the upper end **166***b* thereof, and the sleeve **162***b* may be open at the lower end **168***b* or closed with a bottom at the lower end **168***b*. In a flattened state, the sleeve **162***b* has a first side **171** and a second side **173**. The sleeve **162***b* also has an inner peripheral surface **172***b* which, when the sleeve **162***b* is opened, defines and encompasses an inner retaining space **174***b* as shown in **FIG. 18**. When the lower end **168***b* of the sleeve **162***b* has a closed bottom, a portion of the lower end **168***b* may be inwardly folded to form one or more gussets (not shown) for permitting a circular bottom of an object such as a flower pot **187** to be disposed in the inner retaining space **174***b* of the lower end **168***b* of the sleeve **162***b*.

[**0086**] As shown in **FIGS. 17 and 18**, the sleeve **162***b* is demarcated into an upper portion **188** and a lower portion **190**. The lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* is generally sized to contain the flower pot **187**. The upper portion **188** of the sleeve **162***b* is sized to substantially surround and encompass a plant **192** contained in the flower pot **187** disposed within the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b*. The sleeve **162***b* is demarcated into the upper portion **188** and the lower portion **190** by a detaching element **194** for enabling the detachment of the upper portion **188** of the sleeve **162***b* from the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b*. In the present version, the detaching element **194** is a plurality of generally laterally-oriented or alternatingly diagonally-oriented perforations which extend circumferentially across the outer peripheral surface **164***b* of the sleeve **162***b* from the first side **171** to the second side **173**.

[**0087**] In the embodiment shown in **FIGS. 17 and 18**, the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* further comprises a base portion **196** and a skirt portion **198**. The base portion **196** of the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* comprises that part of the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* which, when the flower pot **187** is placed into the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b*, has an inner peripheral surface **172***b* which is substantially adjacent to and surrounds an outer peripheral surface **199** of the flower pot **187**. The skirt portion **198** of the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* comprises that part of the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* which extends beyond an open upper end **201** of the flower pot **187** and adjacent at least a portion of the plant **192** contained within the flower pot **187** and which is left to freely extend at an angle, inwardly or outwardly, from the base portion **196** when the upper portion **188** of the sleeve **162***b* is detached from the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* by actuation of the detaching element **194**.

[**0088**] In the intact sleeve **162***b*, the skirt portion **198** of the sleeve **162***b* comprises an upper peripheral edge congruent with the detaching element **194** which is connected to a lower peripheral edge, also congruent with the detaching element **194**, of the upper portion **188** of the sleeve **162***b*. In **FIGS. 17 and 18**, the upper peripheral edge of the skirt portion **198** of the sleeve **162***b* is congruent with a series of alternatingly diagonally-oriented lines of perforations which together form a zig-zag and comprise the detaching element **194**. The upper portion **188** of the sleeve **162***b* may also have an additional detaching element **200** indicated as a plurality of vertical perforations for facilitating removal of the upper portion **188** of the sleeve **162***b* and which are disposed more or less vertically therein extending between the detaching element **194** of the sleeve **162***b* and the upper end **166***b* of the sleeve **162***b*.

[**0089**] The upper portion **188** of the sleeve **162***b* is thereby separable from the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* by tearing the upper portion **188** along both the detaching element **200** and the detaching element **194**, thereby sepa-

rating the upper portion **188** from the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b*. The lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* remains disposed as the base portion **196** about the flower pot **187** and as the skirt portion **198** about the plant **192**, forming a decorative cover **202**, as shown in **FIG. 19**, which substantially surrounds and encompasses the flower pot **187** and the plant **192** contained therein. An outer peripheral surface **164***b* of the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b*, for example, the base and skirt portions **196** and **198**, may be modified to provide the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper, while the upper portion **188** of the sleeve **162***b* is left unmodified or is printed with a design; or both the upper portion **188** and the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* may be provided with a modified or textured surface so that both the upper portion **188** and the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* is provided with a texture or appearance assimilating paper. When the upper portion **188** of the sleeve **162***b* is detached, the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b* remains disposed about the flower pot **187** and thereby forms the decorative cover **202** about the flower pot **187** which has the appearance of paper.

[**0090**] "Detaching element" as used herein means any element, or combination of elements, or features, such as, but not by way of limitation, perforations, tear strips, zippers, and any other devices or elements of this nature known in the art, or any combination thereof. Therefore, while perforations are shown and described in detail herein, it will be understood that tear strips, zippers, or any other "detaching elements" known in the art, or any combination thereof, could be substituted therefor and/or used therewith.

[**0091**] In a general method of use of sleeve **162***b* as a decorative cover **202** for a flower pot, an operator provides the sleeve **162***b* and the flower pot **187** having a plant **192** disposed in a growing medium **203** contained within the flower pot **187**. The operator then disposes the flower pot **176***b* having the plant **192** and the growing medium **203** contained therein into the sleeve **162***b* by opening the sleeve **162***b* at the upper end **166***b* thereof and assuring both that the opening **170***b* therein is in an open condition, and that the inner peripheral surface **172***b* of the sleeve **162***b* is somewhat expanded outward as well, as shown in **FIG. 18**. The operator then manually or automatically disposes the flower pot **187** into the opening **170***b* in the sleeve **162***b*, the flower pot **187** being disposed generally through the upper portion **188** of the sleeve **162***b* into generally the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b*, the flower pot **187** remaining in the lower portion **190** of the sleeve **162***b*, permitting the sleeve **162***b* to substantially surround and tightly encompass the flower pot **187**. It will be understood that alternatively, the sleeve **162***b* maybe provided with an extension (not shown), and the sleeve **162***b* may be disposed on rods or wickets, and the flower pot **187** may then be disposed in the sleeve **162***b* either before or after the sleeve **162***b* has been removed from the wickets.

Embodiments of FIGS. **20A-20C**

[**0092**] Referring now to **FIG. 20A**, designated generally by the reference numeral **210** is a polymeric ribbon material having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper for forming decorative bows and for wrapping items. That is, at least one surface of a web of polymeric material (not shown) is modified to provide a matte or textured finish **212** assimilating the appearance of paper. The modification of the web of polymeric material (not shown) to provide the polymeric ribbon material **210** with a matte or textured finish **212** assimilating paper can be accomplished in several ways. For example, the polymeric ribbon material **210** having the matte or textured finish **212** can be produced by printing a web of polymeric material with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by embossing the sheet of polymeric material to provide an embossed pattern simulating the texture and appearance of paper, by flocking the sheet of polymeric material, by application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink to the sheet of polymeric material, or by embossing and printing the sheet of polymeric material to provide embossed and printed patterns, wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry, or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish **212** capable of providing the sheet of polymeric material with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll. Thereafter, the web of material having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be cut in a conventional manner to provide the polymeric ribbon material **210** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper.

[**0093**] Any polymeric material capable of being textured or otherwise modified to provide the polymeric material with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be employed in the formulation of the polymeric ribbon material **210**. For example, the polymeric material employed to produce the polymeric ribbon material **210** can be polypropylene film having a thickness of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil, and more desirably of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, or an expanded core polymeric film having a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil.

[**0094**] Referring now to **FIG. 20B**, designated generally by the reference numeral **220** is another embodiment of a polymeric ribbon material for forming decorative bows and for wrapping items. The polymeric ribbon material **220** is a laminated material comprising a first web or sheet of material **222** having a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil, and a second web or sheet of material **224** having a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 ml, and more desirably from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil. The laminated material having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be produced by laminating two or more sheets of polymeric film (such as two or more sheets of polypropylene film or a sheet of polypropylene film and a sheet of expanded core polymeric film, such as expanded core polypropylene film), or by laminating a polymeric film (such as polypropylene film or an expanded core polymeric film) with a sheet of metallized foil and the like wherein at least one surface of the laminated material is textured or modified to assimilate the texture and appearance of paper. The second web or sheet of material **224** is desirably laminated to the first web or sheet of material **222** with a colored adhesive so as to impart a desired color to the polymeric ribbon material **220**. If desired

the polymeric ribbon material **220** may be treated or otherwise processed to provide the polymeric ribbon material **220** with a matte or textured finish **226** assimilating paper in appearance so that the polymeric ribbon material **220** has a paper-like appearance similar to the polymeric ribbon material **210** hereinbefore described with reference to **FIG. 20A**. That is, the matte or textured finish **226** assimilating paper in texture and appearance can be printed on the first web or sheet of material **222**, and thereafter the second web or sheet of material **224** (which in this case is desirably a matte material of translucent polymeric film) is laminated to the first web or sheet of material **222** to provide the polymeric ribbon material **220** with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper. To further enhance the texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper of the polymeric ribbon material **220**, the second web or sheet of material **224** may or may not have a plurality of spatially disposed holes extending therethrough. The matte or textured finish **226** can be produced by printing at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material **222** and **224** with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material **222** and **224** with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by flocking at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material **222** and **224**, by application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink to at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material **222** and **224**, by embossing at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material **222** and **224** to provide an embossed pattern assimilating the appearance and texture of paper, or by embossing and printing at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material **222** and **224** to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, the matte or textured finish **226** capable a providing the polymeric ribbon material **220** with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be achieved by extruding the resin used to produce one of the first and second webs or sheets of material **222** and **224** onto a matted or textured chill roll.

[**0095**] Referring now to **FIG. 20C**, designated generally by the reference numeral **230** is another embodiment of a polymeric ribbon material for forming decorative bows and for wrapping items. The polymeric ribbon material **230** comprises a polymeric film **232** having an upper surface **234**, a lower surface **236**. An acrylic heat sealable lacquer **238** can applied to at least one of the upper and lower surfaces **234** and **236** of the polymeric film **232**, such as the lower surface **236** of the polymeric film **232**, and the upper surface **234** of the polymeric film **232** is desirably modified to provide the polymeric ribbon material **230** with a matte or textured finish **239** assimilating the texture and appearance of paper. The modification of the polymeric film **232** to provide the polymeric ribbon material **230** with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be accomplished in several ways. For example, the polymeric ribbon material **230** having the matte or textured finish **239** can be produced by printing the polymeric film **232** with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface **234** or **236** of the polymeric film **232** with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by flocking the polymeric film **232**, by application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink to the polymeric film **232**, by embossing the polymeric film **232** to provide an embossed pattern assimilating the texture and appearance of paper, or by embossing and printing the polymeric film **232** to provide embossed and printed patterns, wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry, or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, the matte or textured finish **240** capable of providing the polymeric film **232** with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll. Thereafter, the polymeric film **232** having a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be cut in a conventional manner to provide the polymeric ribbon material **230**.

[**0096**] Any polymeric film capable of being textured or otherwise modified to provide the polymeric film **232** with a texture and appearance assimilating the texture and appearance of paper can be employed in the formulation of the polymeric ribbon material **230**. For example, the polymeric film **232** employed to produce the polymeric ribbon material **230** can be polypropylene film having a thickness of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mill, and more desirably of from about 0.5 mill to about 10 mill, or an expanded core polymeric film having a thickness of from about 0.6 mil to about 10 mill.

[**0097**] Changes may be made in the construction and the operation of the various components, elements and assemblies described herein or in the steps or the sequence of steps of the methods described herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the following claims.

What is claimed:

1. A method of providing a decorative cover for a flower pot, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a flower pot;

providing a sleeve having an upper end, a lower end, an outer peripheral surface, an inner peripheral surface and an inner retaining space in which a flower pot may be disposed and wherein the inner retaining space is sized to substantially surround an outer peripheral surface of a flower pot when a flower pot is disposed in the sleeve, the sleeve formed of a polymeric material having at least a portion of one surface thereof modified to provide at least a portion of at least one of the inner and outer peripheral surfaces of the sleeve with the texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper; and

disposing the flower pot into the inner retaining space of the sleeve to provide a decorative cover for the flower pot.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the sleeve further comprises a lower portion generally sized to contain a flower pot, the lower portion comprising:

a base portion base portion having an outer peripheral surface and an inner peripheral surface; and

a skirt portion having an upper peripheral edge.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein at least a portion of the outer peripheral surface of the base portion of the lower portion of the sleeve is provided with an appearance or texture simulating the appearance or texture of paper.

4. The method of claim 2 wherein at least a portion of at least one surface of the skirt portion of the lower portion of the sleeve is provided with an appearance or texture simulating the appearance or texture of paper.

5. The method of claim 2 further wherein the sleeve further comprises an upper portion connected to at least one of the base and skirt portions of the lower portion and detachable therefrom via a detaching element.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein at least a portion of at least one surface of the upper portion of the sleeve is provided with an appearance or texture simulating the appearance or texture of paper.

7. The method of claim 5 wherein the upper portion is connected to the skirt portion of the lower portion of the sleeve.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein the upper portion is detachable from the skirt portion of the sleeve via a detaching element.

9. The method of claim 8 further comprising the step of detaching the upper portion of the sleeve from the skirt portion via the detaching element.

10. The method of claim 8 wherein the detaching element is linear, thereby providing the skirt portion with a linear upper peripheral edge when the upper portion is removed from the sleeve via the detaching element.

11. The method of claim 8 wherein the detaching element is non-linear, thereby providing the skirt portion with a non-linear upper peripheral edge when the upper portion is removed from the sleeve via the detaching element.

12. The method of claim 5 wherein the upper portion is provided with a linear upper edge.

13. The method of claim 5 wherein the upper portion is provided with a non-linear upper edge.

14. The method of claim 5 wherein the base portion and the skirt portion of the lower portion of the sleeve are constructed from the polymeric material and the upper portion of the sleeve is constructed from a second material different than the polymeric material.

15. The method of claim 2 wherein the lower portion is provided with a linear upper edge.

16. The method of claim 2 wherein the lower portion is provided with a non-linear upper edge.

17. The method of claim 2 wherein the skirt portion extends beyond an upper end of a flower pot when a flower pot is disposed in the sleeve.

18. The method of claim 1 wherein the polymeric film from which the sleeve is constructed is further provided with at least one of a printed pattern and an embossed pattern disposed on at least a portion of one surface thereof.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein the polymeric film from which the sleeve is constructed is further provided with a printed pattern disposed on at least a portion of one surface thereof and an embossed pattern disposed on at least a portion of one surface thereof.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein the printed pattern and the embossed pattern are in register with one another.

21. The method of claim 19 wherein the printed pattern and the embossed pattern are out of register with one another.

22. The method of claim 1 wherein the lower end of the sleeve is closed and is provided with a gusset formed therein.

23. The method of claim 1 wherein the sheet of polymeric film has a thickness in a range of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil.

24. The method of claim 1 wherein the lower end of the sleeve is open.

25. The method of claim 1 wherein the lower end of the sleeve is closed.

26. The method of claim 25 wherein the sleeve has a drain hole formed therein.

27. The method of claim 25 further comprising a gusset formed in the lower end of the sleeve.

28. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of securing the sleeve about the flower pot via a bonding material disposed on at least a portion of at least one of the sleeve and the flower pot.

29. The method of claim 1 wherein the sleeve has a flattened state.

30. The method of claim 1 wherein the polymeric material from which the sleeve is formed is further defined as a laminated polymeric material.

31. The method of claim 30 wherein the laminated polymeric material comprises:

a polymeric film having an upper surface and a lower surface;

a substantially water impervious polymeric film laminated to the polymeric film, the substantially water impervious polymeric film having an upper surface and a lower surface; and

wherein at least a portion of one of the upper and lower surfaces of one of the polymeric film and the substantially water impervious polymeric film is modified to provide the laminated polymeric material with a surface having a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper.

32. The method of claim 31 wherein the polymeric film and the substantially water impervious polymeric film are laminated with a colored adhesive.

33. The method of claim 30 wherein the base portion and the skirt portion of the lower portion of the sleeve are constructed from the laminated polymeric material and the upper portion of the sleeve is constructed from a second material different than the laminated polymeric material.

34. A method for providing a decorative cover for a floral grouping, the method comprising:

providing a floral grouping;

providing a sleeve having an upper end, a lower end, an outer peripheral surface, an inner peripheral surface and an inner retaining space in which a floral grouping may be disposed and wherein the inner retaining space is sized to substantially surround a floral grouping when the floral grouping is disposed in the sleeve, the sleeve formed of a polymeric material having at least a portion of at least one surface thereof modified to provide at least a portion of one of the inner and outer peripheral surfaces of the sleeve with the texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper; and

disposing the floral grouping into the inner retaining space of the sleeve to provide the decorative cover for the floral grouping.

35. The method of claim 34 further comprising the step of securing the sleeve about the floral grouping.

36. The method of claim 35 wherein the sleeve further comprises a bonding material disposed on a portion thereof for securing the sleeve about the floral grouping.

37. The method of claim 35 wherein the sleeve further comprises a cinching tab disposed on a portion of the sleeve for securing the sleeve about the floral grouping.

38. The method of claim 34 wherein the polymeric film from which the sleeve is constructed is further provided with at least one of a printed pattern and an embossed pattern disposed on at least a portion of one surface thereof.

39. The method of claim 38 wherein the polymeric film from which the sleeve is constructed is further provided with a printed pattern disposed on at least a portion of at least one surface thereof and an embossed pattern disposed on at least a portion of one surface thereof.

40. The method of claim 39 wherein the printed pattern and the embossed pattern are in register with one another.

41. The method of claim 39 wherein the printed pattern and the embossed pattern are out of register with one another.

42. The method of claim 34 wherein the sheet of polymeric film has a thickness in a range of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil.

43. The method of claim 34 wherein the lower end of the sleeve is open.

44. The method of claim 34 wherein the lower end of the sleeve is closed.

45. The method of claim 44 wherein the sleeve has a drain hole formed therein.

46. The method of claim 44 further comprising a gusset formed in the lower end of the sleeve.

47. The method of claim 34 wherein the sleeve has a flattened state.

48. The method of claim 34 wherein the polymeric material from which the sleeve is formed is further defined as a laminated polymeric material.

49. The method of claim 48 wherein the laminated polymeric material comprises:

a polymeric film having an upper surface and a lower surface;

a substantially water impervious polymeric film laminated to the polymeric film, the substantially water impervious polymeric film having an upper surface and a lower surface; and

wherein at least a portion of one of the upper and lower surfaces of one of the polymeric film and the substantially water impervious polymeric film is modified or textured to provide the laminated polymeric material with a surface having a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of paper.

50. The method of claim 49 wherein the polymeric film and the substantially water impervious polymeric film are laminated with a colored adhesive.

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