

Making Cornhusk Dolls

Cornhusks are interesting and fun to work with because they can be crunched or stretched into a variety of shapes. They can be rolled and tied or curled. They can be left natural or painted or dyed.

Native Americans used the husks to weave clothing and as food wraps for cooking. They act as nature's packaging, keeping the corn moist and sweet. Perhaps you have eaten a tamale, a Mexican food steamed in cornhusks.

If you can't obtain husks from the garden, you may buy them at a craft store or Mexican grocery store. If you purchase fresh corn in the husks, you can save the husks by letting them air dry completely, and then storing them in a non-airtight box in the garage, until you're ready to work with them.

To soften the cornhusks before working with them, soak the husks in warm water for a few minutes, and then lay them on a folded towel, ready for use.



Materials needed:

- **cornhusks (at least 5 per doll)**
- **raffia (5-10 12" lengths per doll)**
- **scissors**

(Note: the optional suggestions require more materials)

Suggestion for keeping in mind: make all knots of raffia string on the same side of the doll for a more finished look. All knots may be trimmed at the end or as you go, just make sure a tight double knot is made for each before trimming the ends.

Procedure

#1: Layer 4 corn husks on top of each other. (Wider husks work best) (Optional, to add "hair": place 20 strands of raffia between the middle of this layer with the extra length out the wide end of the husks. Braids may be added at the end as another option, see instructions at the end.)



#2: Tie at the top inch with a raffia string, tightly knotted.



#3: Take 2 husks on each side and flip inside out so the knot is now inside.



#4: To make a head, tie a raffia string about an inch below the rounded top formed by the knot hidden underneath. The raffia tie becomes the doll's neck.



#5: To make arms, fold one new corn husk in half length-wise and roll up, (Narrower corn husks work best and roll with the grain of the husk rather than against the grain). Tie each end with a strand of raffia.



#6: Place the arms between 2 of the corn husks inside the corn husk body. Slide the arms up as high as they will go up toward the neck tie.



#7: With a raffia string, tie a waist below the arms. Tie it tightly enough to firmly hold the arms in place.



Optional: Make a doll with pigtail braids with 3 raffia strings, tied at each end. Tie the braid onto the doll at the neck with the braid wrapped over the top of the head.

OR: Make a doll with pants rather than a skirt by cutting the skirt up the middle and tying each side with a raffia string at the ankle.



Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose