

Flora & Fauna

The Secrets of the Corn Dolly

Corn dollies have a rich and interesting history that not many people know about. These small figures woven from stalks of grain (not American corn as their name implies) can be traced back at least as far as the Roman conquest. Every harvest yielded the creation of these objects, which are still very popular today, though more for their decorative attributes than their symbolism.

It was believed in many pagan cultures throughout Europe and Scandinavia that the spirit of the grain lived amongst the crop. When it was time for the harvest, the spirit effectively became homeless. So to preserve the spirit and offer it a home during winter until the new crop could be planted, ancient farmers created the dollies or idols. Many traditions call for the dolly to be made from the last stalks of grain to be harvested; then the dolly was hung above the barn or in a place of honor in the home until spring. The spirit dwelled happily in its new home until it could return to the field.

Today, the corn dolly is generally seen as a symbol of abundance. Corn dollies are sold at craft fairs around the world, most extensively in Europe and Great Britain. Their forms are limited only by the imagination of the weaver. Some dollies resemble animals or people, and many are intricate weavings.

The shape of the dolly can usually be traced back to the region in which it originated. You can find horseshoe dollies in Suffolk, bell shapes in Cambridgeshire, lanterns in Norfolk, bowknots in Stafforshird, fans in Wales, or goats in Sweden. Skilled weavers can make just about any shape from a small braided wreath to a three-foot tall maiden carrying a small infant.

But it doesn't take a professional to make a corn dolly. Anyone can do it. All you need is a bit of wheat, nimble fingers, and a bit of patience.

Start off by choosing long wheat stalks that stand erect and straight (stalks should measure more than 18 inches from the base of the head to the first joint on the stalk). The stems should be slender and golden, not green.

Temper the stalks by soaking them for 20 to 40 minutes in cool or lukewarm water (don't use hot water, as it will strip the stalk of its natural shine). After soaking, wrap the stalks in a wet bath towel and let them set for about 15 minutes.

Now you're ready to begin weaving your dolly. Start by tying five stalks together by the heads. Then take one stalk, fold it over two stalks. Then take the next one and fold it over two stalks. Continue weaving in this pattern until you reach the ends of the stalks. Tie them to the heads and you should have a decorative circle to hang above your door.

With a bit more practice and some help from a few library books or an Internet search, you can create more complex and interesting dollies to decorate your home this harvest season.

GUARANTEE SYSTEM.

1518 Steele Ave SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49507
Phone: 616-451-0787
www.guaranteesystem.com

Cleaning Corner:

Taking Care of Porcelain

It's difficult to remove long-term discoloration that has settled into eroding surfaces of old porcelain fixtures. Once the surface is cracked and streaked with orange or blue stains, resurfacing might be the only solution. But that's a relatively expensive process – applying a new glaze over the old surface – and doesn't always take.

- Before you opt for resurfacing, try lightening porcelain stains by scrubbing with a mixture of lemon juice and salt.
- For deep stains, add baking soda to the mixture to make a wet paste that can remain on the stain overnight.
- If you're not interested in scrubbing, you can try soaking paper towels or an old cloth in bleach and laying it over the stain. Let the towel/cloth remain for at least 30 minutes, then remove and wash as usual.
- For a stained toilet bowl, sink, or bathtub, add a cup or two of bleach to the water and let it soak for a while. This also has the added benefit of removing any lingering odors.

October

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1800 | Spain cedes Louisiana to France in a secret treaty |
| 1890 | The Yosemite National Park and the Yellowstone National Park are established by the U.S. Congress |
| 1908 | Ford puts the Model T car on the market at a price of \$825 |
| 1923 | The Disney Company is founded |
| 1955 | The "Honeymooners" premieres |
| 1976 | TV audiences watched as Barbara Walters joined Harry Reasoner at the anchor desk of the ABC Evening News for the first time |
| 1982 | Sony launches the first consumer compact disc player |
| 1997 | First color photograph on the front page of the New York Times appeared |

Health Advice: Recognizing Thyroid Disease

Millions of American women could have thyroid disease and not know it. "Sometimes women have aches and pains and fatigue and depression, and they're just told they're getting older – get over it," says Richard Hellman, M.D., president of the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists. "The truth is, there could be an undiagnosed problem."

Pay Attention to Your Thyroid

The thyroid is a small, butterfly-shaped gland located just under the Adam's apple in the neck. It is one of your endocrine glands, which make hormones. The thyroid helps set your metabolism - how your body gets energy from the foods you eat. Your thyroid is a big part of a complex system that regulates every cell, tissue and organ in the body.

If you have a thyroid disease, your body uses energy more slowly or quickly than it should. A thyroid gland that is not active enough, called hypothyroidism, is far more common. It can make you gain weight, feel fatigued and have difficulty dealing with cold temperatures. If your thyroid is too active, it makes more thyroid hormones than your body needs. That condition is hyperthyroidism. Too much thyroid hormone can make you lose weight, speed up your heart rate and make you very sensitive to heat.

By age 50, 10 percent of women have signs that their thyroid isn't making enough hormones. By age 60, that number jumps to 17 percent. Untreated thyroid disease can cause serious problems, such as high cholesterol and heart disease. It also can affect how the body breaks down or responds to medicine. "A medicine that should last eight hours might last 24 hours in someone who has untreated thyroid disease," Dr. Hellma says. "it's easy to get overdoses of sedatives, pain medications, and other medicines."

Watch for These Signs

Diagnosing thyroid disease involves a blood test, called a TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone) test. Ask your doctor about having this test if you have a family member with thyroid disease or if you have excessive:

- Fatigue
- Forgetfulness
- Muscle cramps
- Cold intolerance
- Hair loss or changes in skin and nails
- Feelings of depression

Although routine screening for thyroid disease is controversial, some experts recommend that you talk with your doctor about it if you're age 35 or older. Thyroid conditions may not be preventable, but most can be diagnosed and effectively treated with medications or, less commonly, with surgery.

Kid Corner: The Importance of Play

Play is essential to children's development. It directly contributes to their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles. Play also offers an ideal opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children.

Sometimes, however, getting through the day with an active toddler can put your patience, creativity, and endurance to the test. To help you both enjoy play time, here are some simple activities that make it easier to just have fun!

Unique Ideas

1. **Celebrate a new holiday.** Announce that it's Polka-Dot Day or Purple Day.
2. **Throw a doll's birthday party.** Wrap up a few "gifts," decorate with balloons and streamers.
3. **Open a petting zoo.** Place stuffed animals around the room, pet each one, and talk about what they eat.
4. **Camp out in your living room.** Climb into a tent and sleeping bags. Turn on a flashlight, and tell stories.

Easy Art Project

1. **Finger-paint with pudding.** Place a dollop on a laminated place mat or a cookie sheet and have your child create sweet abstract art. (You can dye vanilla pudding with food coloring.)
2. **Make jewelry.** String painted Cheerios or hollow pasta shapes onto yarn and voila, a necklace or a bracelet.
3. **Make a collage.** Give him paper and a glue stick. Go nuts with decorations, such as torn pieces of tissue or construction paper, cotton balls, feathers, images from magazines, and photos.
4. **Knead some goop.** Mix a box of cornstarch with water to a consistency your child likes, then add food coloring.

Rainy Day Ideas

1. **Pop in a yoga tape.** Have her follow your poses.
2. **Bake cookies with care.** Give her a lesson in altruism by baking cookies for an elderly neighbor or to send to the troops in Iraq. Let her sneak a couple.
3. **Create an obstacle course.** Jump on pillows, crawl under chairs, and burrow through a blanket-covered tunnel.

Games to Play with a Ball

1. **Knock it across the room with a kitchen utensil.** Grab a spoon or a strainer with a handle.
2. **Roll with it.** Facing your child with legs spread apart, roll a ball to each other, alternating between using your left hand and right hand.
3. **Bounce it into a hula hoop.** Hold the hoop and have her try to toss the ball so it lands in the center.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup sugar
 - 2/3 cup white corn syrup
 - 1/3 cup butter
 - 1 tsp vanilla
 - 2 1/2 cup powdered sugar
 - 1/4 tsp salt
 - 1/3 cup powdered milk
 - Red and yellow food coloring
1. Combine sugar, butter, and corn syrup in pan and bring to a boil stirring constantly. Turn heat to medium and boil 5 minutes. Stir occasionally. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla.
 2. In a separate dish, combine powdered sugar, salt, and powdered milk. Add all as once to the mixture in the pan. Let mixture stand until slightly warm to touch (about twenty minutes).

3. Divide dough into 3 equal pieces. Place each piece in a small bowl.
4. Add several drops of yellow food coloring to one piece of dough. Using plastic gloves to protect hands, knead food coloring into dough until smooth and color is even. Repeat using red and yellow coloring (to make orange) with second piece. Leave the last piece white.
5. Roll each piece into a thin rope (but not too thin, or the dough will break). Push three ropes together to form a long rectangle. Using a sharp knife, cut ropes into triangles. Using fingers, shape corn as desired.
6. Store at room temperature in an airtight container, separating layers with wax paper to prevent sticking.

Tasty Candy Corn History

Candy corn was invented by the Goelitz Confectionery Company in 1898. The company began commercial production of the treat in Cincinnati, OH and is today the oldest manufacturer of the Halloween icon. The tri-color design of the candy was considered revolutionary at the time, plus the shape was also a big selling point for the mostly agrarian population of the early 1900s. So popular was candy corn, that competing candy companies tried to introduce other vegetable shapes, including turnips. However, none could rival the popularity of the original candy corn.

Decorating with Area Rugs

Area rugs come in all shapes, sizes and colors. They can be used on any surface and in any room or hallway in your home. Renters, college students in dorm rooms, or anybody who wishes to keep away from the bother and cost of carpet fitting will find area rugs a smart, handy option. They're great for thrifty decorators, plus they can complete a chic look in your home!

Determine the Role of Your Area Rug

- **Do you want it to be the focal point?** In this case, you'll want an area rug with bold, bright, and contrasting colors. You might even consider making a dramatic statement with a round rug, or a rectangular rug placed on an angle.
- **Do you want it to define a furniture grouping?** If so, make sure that it will be large enough so that all pieces within the focal area partially or completely touch the rug. In this way the area rug defines the conversation area by creating a tiny island.
- **Do you want to use it to enhance the room's color scheme?** Then select a rug that captures the room's dominant or accent colors. Conversely, you might also select a rug with contrasting or livelier colors if, for example, you have a room with a very subdued color scheme.

Select Your Style

- **Casual Floral:** These rugs will fit country or more traditional settings.
- **Color:** A boldly patterned rug can add spice to your space. With patterns such as primitive shapes and lines, the disharmony of color will add zest.
- **Sophisticated Modern:** Warm up a modernistic room with a shag or a sheepskin rug.
- **Persian rugs:** Striking colors, captivating designs, and high knot count give these rugs a well-earned status as the best on earth.

If possible, choose the rug first before decorating the rest of the room. Harmonizing a rug with fabrics and wallpaper can be more difficult, but not impossible. Take several color or fabric samples with you when shopping to replace a rug in an already decorated room.

Owing to the unbelievable diversity of styles, sizes, shapes, materials and manufacturing processes involved, shopping for rugs can be a challenge. An interior designer can be very useful if you're having trouble.

How to Care for a Hardwood Floor

Wood is a natural, beautiful and timeless design and decorating element. Caring, consistent and correct maintenance will ensure it remains that way. Here are the Do's and Don'ts of proper hardwood floor care:

- **Do** use a walk-off mat or area rug at each entryway to collect dirt and grit that might be tracked in. These tiny particles act like sandpaper and will scratch your floor.
- **Don't** use rubber-backed or non-ventilate mats or rugs as they can cause damage.
- **Do** use cleaners that won't leave a film or residue.
- **Don't** use wax on floors with a urethane finish.
- **Don't** use ammonia cleaners or oil soaps on a wood floor, as they will dull the finish and performance of your floor. These products will also affect the ability to recoat your floor later.
- **Do** use a good quality broom and sweep your floor regularly to pick up grains of dirt and dust. You can use a vacuum cleaner (without a beater bar) to pick up hard-to-reach dirt in between planks and crevices.
- **Do** use a hardwood floor cleaner to remove occasional scuffs or heel marks. Just spray some cleaner on a cloth and lightly rub the stained area. Sticky spots can be cleaned with a damp towel or sponge.
- **Don't** use a wet mop or excessive water to clean your floor. Wood naturally expands when wet, so large amounts of water will cause the wood to swell, crack, or splinter.
- **Do** clean up spills on your hardwood floors as soon as they happen.



PRSRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
GRAND RAPIDS, MI
PERMIT #1254

1518 Steele Ave SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49507

This issue of Neighborhood News brought to you by:



Phone: 616-451-0787
Fax: 616-451-8303
www.guaranteesystem.com

Inside this issue you'll find:

- The Secrets of Corn Dollies
- Cleaning Corner: Taking Care of Porcelain
- Health Advice: Recognizing Thyroid Disease
- Kid Corner: The Importance of Play
- Recipe: Homemade Candy Corn
- Decorating with Area Rugs
- How to Care for Hardwood Floors
- October Money-Saving Special



Money Saving Coupon

**Protect your carpets
with Dupont Teflon**
**This month only, \$12 per room
a savings of 25%**

If you can't use this coupon, give it to a friend!

**As always, you have my Personal Satisfaction
Guarantee. If it's not cleaned to your standards,
we'll clean it again for FREE.**

This coupon expires October 31, 2009
Guarantee System