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CORN HUSK

USING CORN HUSK FOR A DESIGN EXPRESSION



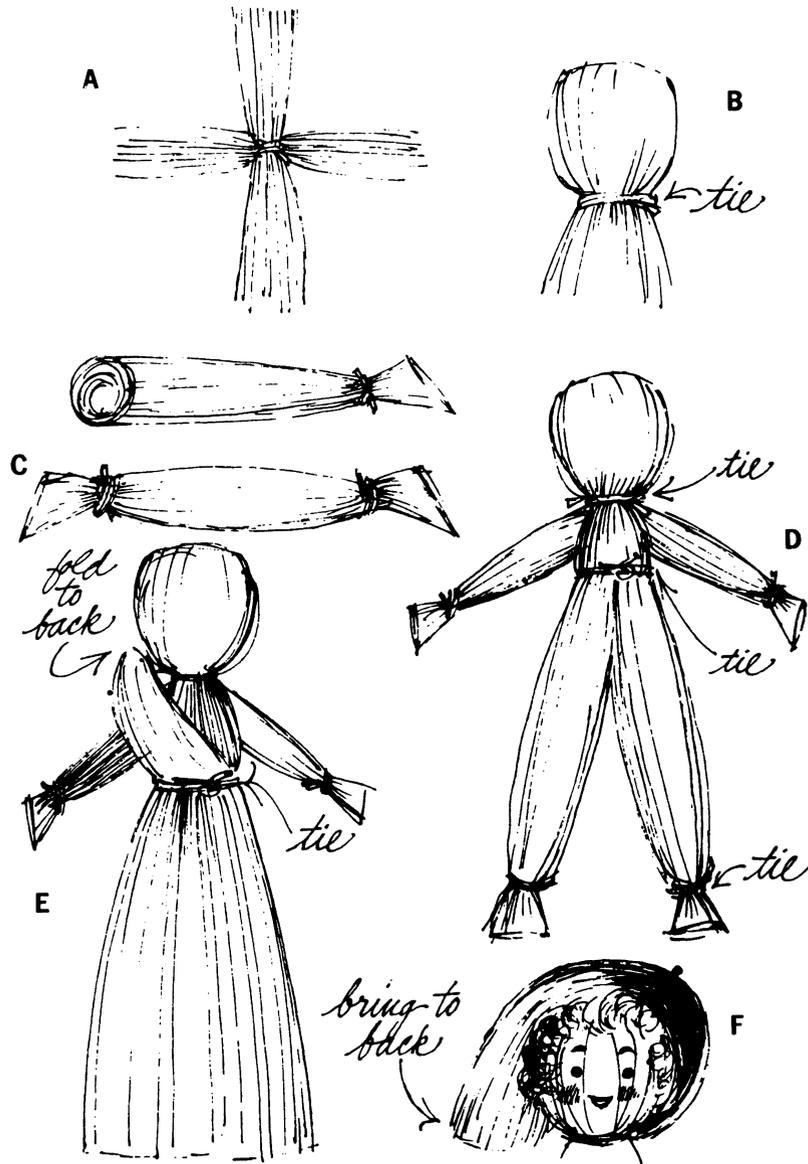
Dolls

Corn Husk Dolls were the earliest American toys. When the Mayflower children arrived, the dolls were already here, for it is believed that the Indians not only taught the Pilgrims to grow corn but to make the dolls also.

You can use the husks of sweet corn grown in your own garden or bought from a produce counter; or use husks from field corn. Before beginning look at the entire corn husk. Note that inside leaves have smooth satiny texture, and outer shucks are coarse and heavy. Also, there are right and wrong sides, and varying colors, strength, and pliability.

Now, as in the 1600's, the only essential tools are a pair of scissors and the previously dried husks. In these modern times, however, you may wish to use thread, wire, and dyes also. Our ancestors used berries and barks to make dyes for the better dressed dolls. All husks were bleached with wood ashes. Today's household bleach (one part to eight parts water) will eliminate any bacteria or mold.

Soak the dried husk in warm water a few minutes, and always work with damp husk. From the strong outer leaves tear strips 1/4 inch or less wide to use for ties. Always tie with a double knot.



Tear more husk strips of the same size, but make these into a bundle that is tied in the middle. Make a second one the same way. Lay one across the other to form an X. (See Diagram A).

Slip these over your thumb, pulling the ends down--slide your thumb out and tie securely to make the head and body formation. The head can be stuffed with extra husks if necessary. Next, select a smooth grained husk, lay it over the head form, smooth it, and twist at the top bringing it to the back and tying at the neck. (See B).

For arms roll a husk, tying at the ends to make hands. (See C). Wedge this piece crosswise between the husk under the head. Tie again beneath them to form a waist. For a male doll divide the remaining husk and tie near ends to make legs. (See D).

A woman doll needs enough husk, small ends tied at the waist, to make her stand when bottoms are cut straight across. Cover these with two broad husks, placing them on front and back with points over shoulders; bring to the opposite side and tie at the waist. (See E). A bustle or apron may be added by tying on a smaller squared-off piece. Bend the arms to shape and tie loosely until dried.

Hair is made of the cork silks either braided or tied under the bonnet. Make the bonnet by draping a husk around the head, tying securely at the neck with an extra tie. (See F).

Make the faces with a pencil or colored crayon, keeping them simple--just nose, mouth, and eyes. You may want to add a baby, basket, or parasol for variety.

Remember...this is a design expression...after you work out the first rose, try to put your own ideas to work.

CORNHUSK ROSE

Cornhusks should be permitted to dry completely after being removed from the ear; this may take several weeks. Field or feed corn has the better husks, and there is a variety that has husks naturally colored a beautiful pink to dark red. If you prefer, cornhusks may be dyed any color you choose by using fabric dyes.

STEP 1. When you are ready to make the rose, put two cups of hot water and two tablespoons of glycerine into a vessel; then lay the cornhusks in this solution for about 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from the solution and wrap in a towel. When most of the moisture has been absorbed by the towel, cut petal shapes out of the husks. The shape should be very much like the shape of a piece of pie, and all the petals will be approximately the same length from the tip of the pie shape to the back; about three inches. The width of the petals across the back of the pie shape, however, should vary from 1-1/2" to 2-1/2", the wider ones being used towards the outside of the rose. Cut the petals so that the grain of the cornhusk runs up and down (from the tip of the pie shape to the back). After they are cut, keep them in a damp towel till needed.

STEP 2. Make the center of the rose. (See Figure A, on back.) Select a large husk and cut it so you have about a 4" square. Fold this in half so it makes a triangle, then curl the two top points down to the bottom middle point (Figures B & C) and, holding the points together, pucker the whole bottom area together to make a little hollowed out bud shape (Figure D). Wind with thread (Figure E) at the bottom to hold it and then lay it aside.

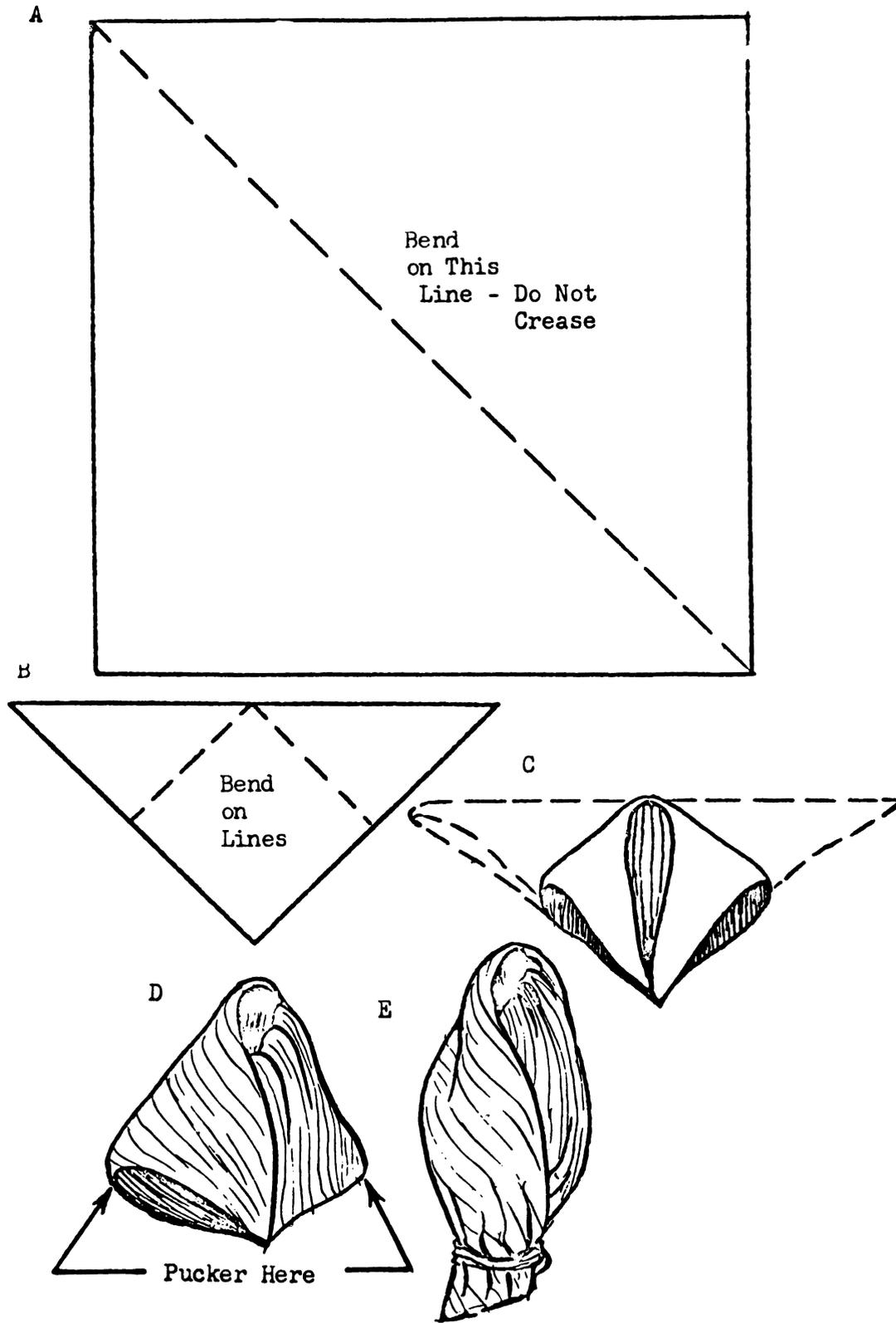
STEP 3. The next step is to curl the corners of the petals, and if you happen to own an electric curling iron, this can be accomplished very simply. Sort out the petals; take the smaller ones first. Roll the corner around the iron and hold long enough to get a natural looking curl.

If you don't have a curling iron, use your electric iron set on the "rayon" setting. Press each petal, and before it is completely dry, curl each corner on the wide edge over a 1/4" diameter knitting needle. Slide the needle out, pin the curl with a bobby pin or pincurl clip, and let it dry.

STEP 4. Proceed by either method till you have 12 or 18 petals curled. Starting with the smaller petals first, wrap them one by one around the bud center. To hold them, wind thread around the base of the flower as you place the petals around the center. When the rose is as large as you wish, break off the thread and wrap the base with Floral tape. Wrap the tape at least three times around, keeping it close to the base of the rose.

STEP 5. To make the stem, wrap a piece of #28 wire twice around the taped area, pulling it very tight. Twist the wire together (three twists to hold it), then trim off all cornhusk ends below the taped area. Add another #28 wire in the same way and pull down all four ends, tape down the length of them for a stem.

Points to Check: When assembling the cornhusk rose, be sure to keep the thread at the same level as you add the petals. Gather the petals slightly around the bottom for an open rose, and lay them flat around the bottom for a less open flower. Also, the petals are placed a little higher as the rose gets larger.



MAKING A CORNHUSK ROSE CENTER

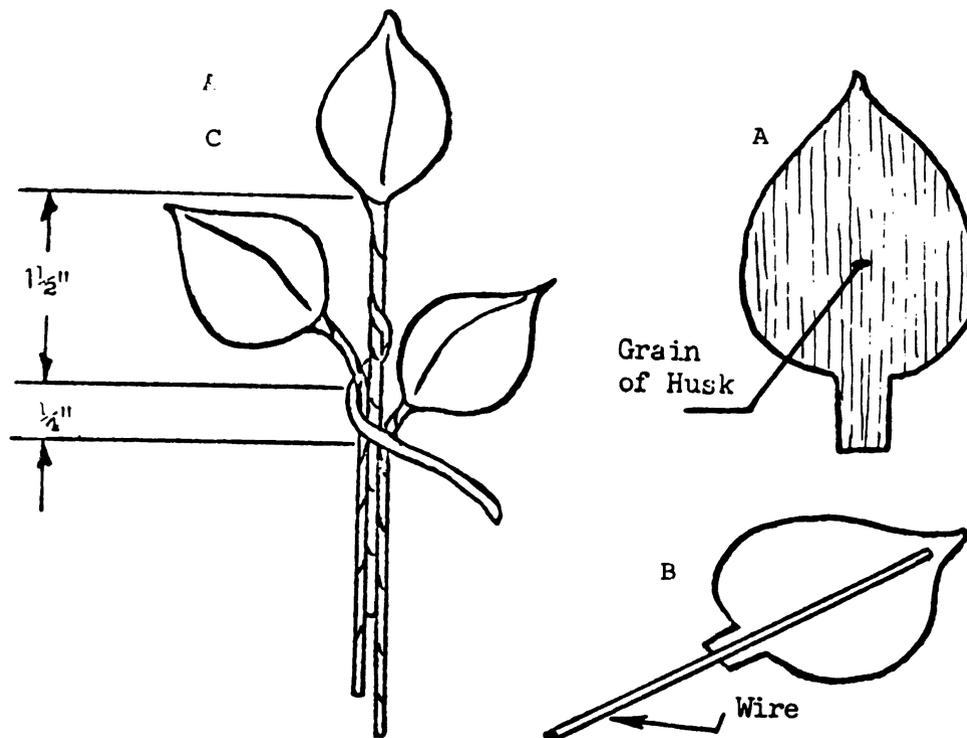
CORNHUSK LEAVES

For the cornhusk rose; color, texture and patterns may be better carried out by making the leaves from cornhusks.

STEP 1. Using the pattern in Figure A, cut six leaf shapes out of cornhusks for each leaf you wish to make. The grain should run up and down.

STEP 2. Place one cornhusk leaf shape on the table or flat surface and cement a piece of #30 covered wire down through the center, extending several inches below the leaf (Figure B). Then cement another leaf shape exactly on top of it to cover the wire. Make sure the edges match, or trim them when the cement is dry. Make three of these wired cornhusk leaves.

STEP 3. When dry, assemble the cornhusk leaves by placing one leaf at the top and another leaf about 1-1/2" below it. Tape the two stems together and tape the third leaf stem about 1/4" below the second. (See Figure C). Continue wrapping to the end of the wire stem.



MAKING LEAVES

SHUCK DOOR MAT

(This is a difficult project, it takes skill)

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Scissors, needle (tufting, sack, sail, or large darning), tapeline or footrule, pan, and newspapers.

SUPPLIES NEEDED: Strong cord or twine which can be threaded in the needle used, long clean, mature, dry heavy shucks and water.

HOW TO PREPARE SHUCKS: Remove the shucks from ear without shredding them. Tear them in one inch wide strips and lay them with "stem ends" together. Dip a large batch in the pan of water and lay them on a newspaper.

HOW TO BRAID THE SHUCKS:

1. Select 6 shuck strips and tie the stem ends together with a wet piece of shuck, Figure 1. Bring the "right" two shuck strips to left as in a three strand braid. Add 2 new shuck strips with stem end extending out about 1 inch. Figure 2.

2. Bring the "left" two strips over toward the right and add two more shuck strips with stem ends extending out at least 1 inch. Figure 3.

3. Continue to braid the shucks adding 2 new strips each time the strand is brought in place. Figure 4. The stem ends stand up 1 inch above the braid making a nap of pyle. The bottom of the braid is a smooth 3 strand braid more than 1 inch wide.



Figure 1



Figure 2

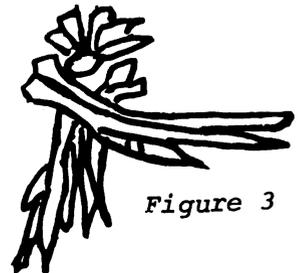


Figure 3

HOW TO SEW THE BRAIDS TOGETHER:

1. Two or three yards of braid should be made before starting to sew the braids together. The shuck braid should be kept damp by dipping it in the water from time to time.



Figure 4

2. Cut a pattern the size of door mat desired. Popular sizes are 14" x 18", 16" x 20", 18" x 22", or 20" x 27". A round mat, 18" to 24" in diameter, is also very popular.

3. Since the rug must be started in the center it is necessary to make the center braid the correct length so that when the correct width of rug is reached the length will be correct. To get the correct length for the center braid measure the width and length of the pattern. Subtract the width from the length. The difference in these two measurements should be the correct length for the center braid. Using the size 14" x 18" the difference is 4 inches, so begin with a center braid 4" long, Figure 5.

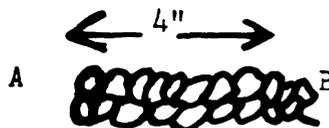


Figure 5

4. Fold the braid at "B" and begin to sew. "A" is the "beginning end" of the braid. Sew on the bottom side of the rug. If a very heavy strong cord is used, use it single, if a small cord is used, double it once or twice. It is important to use strong cord. Tie a loop in the long end of the twine to slip the needle through to make the first stitch. Or tie the ends into a knot if thread is doubled-- slip the needle through the doubled twine to make the first stitch. The knot in the end of the thread is not likely to remain fixed in the shucks as it does in the cloth.

5. Each stitch is made by running the needle under one of the three strands of the braid, first on center braid, then on braid being sewed to center braid or to the rug as the sewing progresses. Figure 6 shows the first step. The needle is inserted under one strand at "B" and put through the loop at "C" in the end of the thread. Pull the thread tightly and push the twine between the braids as best as you can. If correctly sewed the thread does not show. As the braids are sewn together, Figure 7 shows the thread run loosely under the strands on opposite sides. When this thread is pulled tightly into place the thread is not seen and the braid is securely sewed into place.

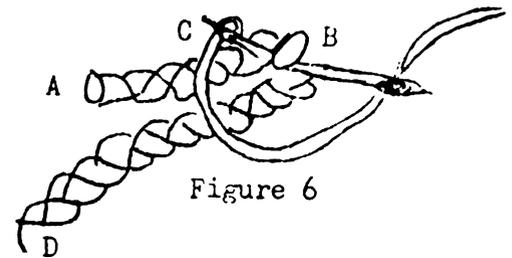


Figure 6

6. Since the rug is oval in shape the braid must be curved around the ends so that each braid is flat on the floor.

7. To fasten a new thread sew as far as possible with the old thread, remove the needle and leave the loose end. Start the new thread by fastening the end by running the needle through the loop as in the beginning, but "backstitch" over the old thread for about two inches.

8. To finish the rug, continue braiding ahead of the sewing of the braids together. Braiding and sewing should be done together, as the braids are more pliable just after the braiding is done than if the braid is allowed to dry and then dampened again. As the rug is completed stop adding the 2 strips each time a strand is brought into place and finish the braid four or five inches. Fasten securely in place on one side of the rug. (Figure 8)



Figure 7

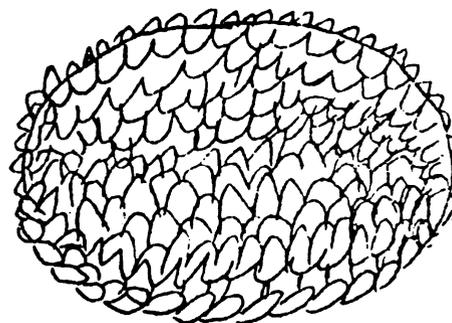


Figure 8

CORNHUSK WREATH

The Christmas Wreath is a hallmark of the holidays, and are a favorite wall embellishment. Cornhusks wreaths were made years ago by the American Colonists. For this design expression you will need cornhusks, a plastic foam wreath base, florist picks, small decorations, and ribbon for a bow. You may wish to keep your wreath very simple and use cornhusks without added trim or decorations. You can substitute a wire frame or coat hanger for the base. Cornhusks dolls and a checked gingham bow might be your choice for decorations, or use pine needles, foliage and red berries for extra trim.

Soak the cornhusks in water until they become pliable, then cut them into 2 x 5" strips. Fold them into loops and attach them to the plastic foam wreath base with Florist picks or small wires bent in the shape of hairpins. To provide accent, you might add small springs of greens, red berries and small Christmas figures that make up the nativity scene. Place at the bottom of the wreath. At the top place a bright red bow nestled in a cluster of greens.



Cornhusk Wreath

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