

The Legend

Twenty-three centuries ago, China consisted of many independent kingdoms, most of which were in conflict with one another—this era in Chinese history is known as the Warring States Period. During this time, the kingdom of Ch'in began a slow rise to power, conquering its neighboring kingdoms.

Qu Yuan (ca. 340 BCE - 278 BCE) was a government minister in the kingdom of Ch'u, Ch'in's largest and most powerful rival. He urged that Ch'u form an alliance with the kingdoms of Yan and Qi against Ch'in. His advice went unheeded, and the machinations of his political opponents resulted in his being banished from court.

From exile at his country estate, Qu Yuan collected legends and folktales and composed impassioned poems on patriotic themes, creating a body of work that makes him one of the most prominent figures in Chinese literature. In 278 BCE, upon hearing of Ch'in armies capturing his country's capital city of Ying, he wrote his most famous work, "A Lament for Ying." He then drowned himself in the Mi Luo River in protest of the governmental corruption that had led to military disaster.

As legend has it, the villagers raced out in their boats to save the beloved poet, throwing their food into the water to lure fishes away from his body (and probably also to appease Qu Yuan's troubled spirit; according to Chinese superstition, the ghost of a suicide is a potent and terrible thing).

Qu Yuan's sacrifice is commemorated to this day in the Dragon Boat Festival, at which people eat special leaf-wrapped rice cakes and teams of paddlers race dragon-shaped boats.

Fifty years after the death of Qu Yuan, his beloved country of Ch'u was finally conquered by Ch'in. Yan and Qi were soon annexed as well, and the entire region became the country of China.

Background

Bunches of angular, leaf-wrapped rice cakes tied with string festoon food-vendor stalls during the Dragon Boat Festival. These *joong* (also known as *zong* or *zongzi*) are tasty, but not particularly attractive. Sometime during the centuries since Qu Yuan's death, people started making *joong*-shaped ornaments, also known as *joong*, of brightly-colored string wrapped around a hollow core. To help ward away evil spirits, these ornamental *joong* are often filled with sweet-smelling spices.

When I was about 10 years old, I learned to make *joong* ornaments at an event at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. Mrs. Au taught us; I don't know whether she had the original insight that ombre crochet thread or yarn would self-stripe, making it very easy to create these ornaments. At any rate, all the instructions I've been able to find call for creating stripes by changing threads.

Materials

Strip of paper, 1 x 11"
4.5 yards of multicolored crochet thread
Tape (optional, but helpful)
Darning needle
Spices or potpourri
Embellishments: tassels, beaded pins

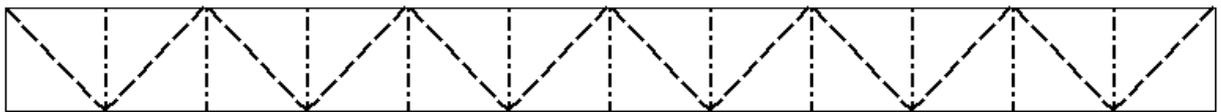


Overview

- Pleat a strip of paper
- Fold the paper into a hollow form and fill with spices
- Wrap with crochet thread
- Add hanging cord, tassels, beaded pins, and other embellishments

Step-by-Step Instructions

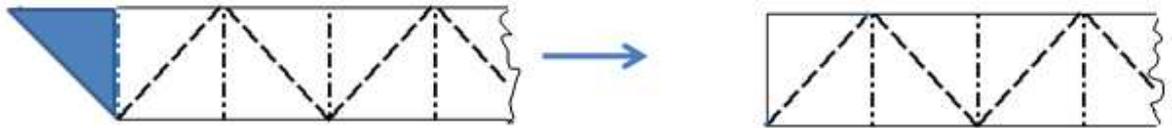
1. Form guidelines for creating the *joong* base by pleating a piece of paper accordion-style along alternating diagonal and vertical lines. An origami folding diagram, in which dashed lines represent valley folds and dot-dash lines represent mountain folds, would look like this:



- a. Fold one corner of the paper up so that the short side edge lines up with the top edge, forming a triangle shape. (In the diagram, the front of the paper strip is white, and the reverse side is blue.)



- b. Fold the paper back along the side of the triangle that is perpendicular to the long edges of the strip.

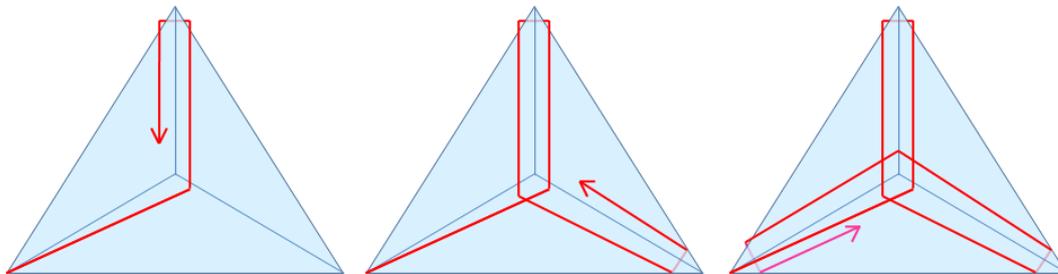
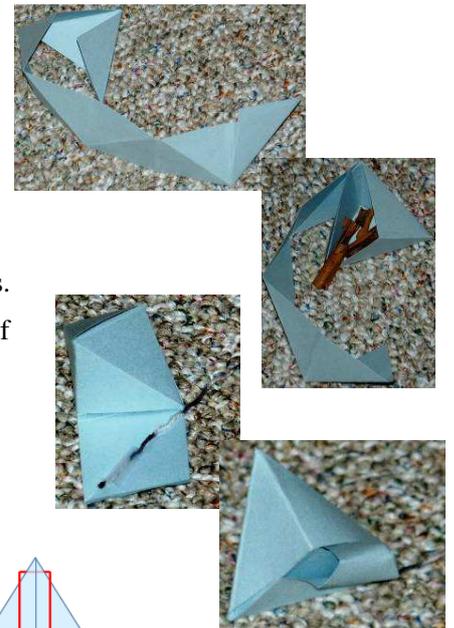


- c. Fold the paper down so that the fold made in step b aligns with the bottom edge of the paper strip



- d. Continue folding in this manner until you come to the end of the strip. Don't worry if the last segment of the strip isn't square.

2. Refold the vertical “mountain” folds into valleys. This will produce a strip that wants to curl in on itself. It will practically form a hollow hexahedron (six-sided three-dimensional shape) by itself.
3. Form the strip into a six-sided shape. If you like, you can use tape to hold your shape together.
 - a. Put spices into the hollow interior of the shape (optional).
 - b. Wrap the excess paper around the shape, following the fold lines.
 - c. Just before you reach the end of the strip, place or tape the end of your thread along a fold in the shape.
 - d. Tuck in the end of the strip. Use tape to secure it, if you like.
4. Wrap your thread around the form, going from corner point to the apex, then down and around the next corner point, then back around the apex.



5. When you run out of thread or places to put the thread, or you decide you like the way your ornament looks, cut the thread and tuck the loose end under the wrapped portion. Use a needle, bent paperclip, or other pointed object to help you do this.
6. Add a hanging cord, using your darning needle to pierce the joong.
 - a. You may want to add a tassel to the hanging cord. (The Chinese are very fond of tassels; a *joong* ornament usually has a large, embellished tassel at the bottom and smaller tassels on all three corners.) Make your tassel from leftover crochet thread, fine perle cotton, or embroidery floss.
 - b. Pearl-headed pins, or small crystal beads on sequin pins can also be used to embellish the corners.

You can use leftover self-striping sock yarn with narrow stripes (2-3 rows wide on a 60-stitch sock) to make a *joong*, but you'll need to start with a wider strip of paper; 1.75" works well.