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How to Make Paper



We've all heard it before: [reduce, reuse, recycle](#). But when it comes to paper, recycling doesn't have to mean tossing those scraps into a bin and dragging it to the nearest recycling center. Instead, you can create your own functional (and artistic) paper from old newspapers, unwanted files and letters. Here's how to do it.

[\[edit\]](#) Steps

1.



Frame seen from the bottom.



Homemade frame seen from the top

Make a frame for preparing the paper. Stretch a fiberglass screen - for example, a window screen - over a wooden frame (an old picture frames work well for this, or you can build your own) and staple it or nail it to the [frame](#). The screen should be pulled as tightly as possible. Make sure to construct the frame large enough to hold the size of paper you wish to make.

2. **Find paper to be recycled.** Newspaper may be the easiest source to start with, but you can also use old print-outs, notes, phone books - just about any unwaxed paper product. Keep in mind, however, that the color of the papers you use and the amount of dark ink on them will affect the "grayness" of your creation.
3. **Remove plastic, staples and other contaminants.** Especially if you're using junk mail, your paper scraps are likely to contain plastic from envelope windows. Try to remove such impurities as thoroughly as possible.
4. **Soak the paper in water.** You may be able to get away with skipping this step, particularly if you use a blender to pulverize the paper, but you'll probably have better luck if you presoak the paper for a day or two.
- 5.



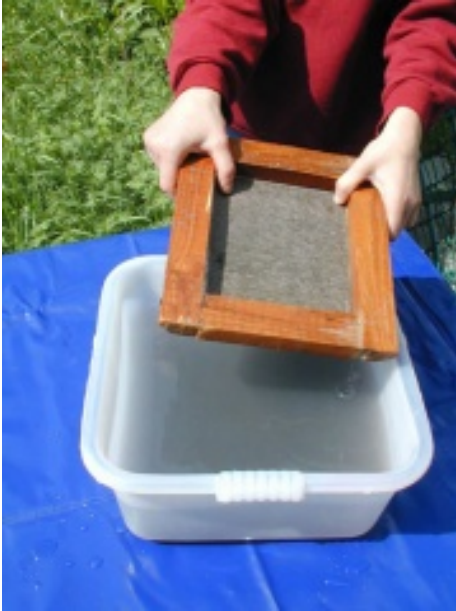
Pulp ready for the basin.

Blend the paper. Rip the paper into tiny bits, and place it all into a blender until it's about half full. Fill the blender with warm water. Run the blender on "slow" at first, then increase the speed until the pulp looks smooth and well-blended - approximately 30 to 40 seconds - just until there are no flakes of paper remaining. Alternately, you can grind up the paper in small batches using a mortar and pestle.

6. **Fill your basin about halfway with water.** The basin should be a little wider and longer than your frame and approximately the same shape.
7. **Add paper paste (pulp) to water in basin and stir to make a homogeneous mixture.** How much you add will depend on personal preference and the size of the paper you're making. The amount of pulp you add to the water will determine the thickness of the paper, and while you want a dense

suspension of pulp to fully cover your screen in the next steps, you don't need to make the whole tub into sludge. Experiment a bit.

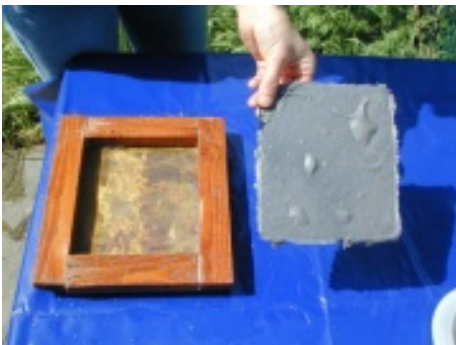
8. **Remove any large clumps of paper.** Try to pick out any clumps; the smoother and finer your mixture, the more uniform your end product will be.
9. **Make your paper ink-ready (optional).** If the paper is going to be used for stationery, stir 2 teaspoons of liquid starch into the pulp mix. The starch helps prevent ink from soaking into the paper fibers.
10. **Immerse the frame in the mixture.** Place your wooden frame into the pulp, screen-side down, then level it while it is submerged. Lightly move it side-to-side until the pulp on top of the screen lies fairly uniformly flat.
- 11.



New paper just pulled from the basin.

Remove frame from basin and resolve any thickness problems. Slowly lift the frame up until it is above the water. Drip-drain it over the basin. Wait until most of the water has drained from the pulp, and you'll see the beginnings of a new piece of paper. If the paper is very thick, remove some of the pulp from the top. If it is too thin, add some more pulp and stir the mixture again.

12. **Give it the pull.** After the mold stops dripping (or nearly so), gently place a piece of fabric (felt or flannel, preferably) or a piece of Formica (smooth-side down) in the frame on top of the "paper". Very gently press down to squeeze out excess water. Use a sponge to press out as much water as possible from the other side of the screen, and periodically wring out the sponge.
- 13.





Remove the paper from the frame. Gently lift the fabric or Formica out of the frame. The wet sheet of paper should remain on the fabric. If it sticks to the screen, you may have pulled too fast or not pressed out enough water. You can gently press out any bubbles and loose edges at this point.

14. **Set the paper out to dry.** Take the pieces of fabric and Formica with the paper on them and arrange them to dry on a flat surface. Alternatively, you can speed up the drying process by using a hair dryer on the low setting.
15. **Repeat the above steps to make additional sheets.** Continue adding pulp and water to the basin as needed.
16. **Peel the paper off the fabric or Formica.** Wait until the sheets of paper are thoroughly dried; then gently peel.

[\[edit\]](#) Tips

- For a more artistic flair, you can also incorporate plant materials into your paper, such as shreds of flower petals, leaves, or green grass. The resulting beautiful effects will motivate you to make more - no two pieces are ever the same.
- You can add dryer lint to your slurry, but do not make your paper entirely from lint, as it will not have enough body on its own.
- Have a craft-oriented friend help you, especially if you find yourself to be craft-challenged.
- If you have trouble pulling the paper out of the frame, you may gently turn the frame upside down and try to pull it off the fabric or Formica.
- When drying the paper, you may wish to try hanging the sheets (with fabric or Formica still attached) on a clothesline or standing them up vertically. It's best to let the sheets dry a little first; otherwise they may be too fragile.
- You can press a drying sheet of paper by placing another piece of fabric or Formica on top of it and gently pressing. This will make the resulting paper smoother and thinner. Leave the second piece there as it dries.
- If you don't add starch, the paper will be highly absorbent, and your ink will likely bleed quite easily. If this occurs, briefly soak the dried paper in a mix of water and gelatin and re-dry.
- The resulting paper will most likely be opaque on one side and bright on the other. Depending on your intended use, either side may be suitable, but the bright side will probably be better for writing.
- Nearly any fine screen or sieve with holes about 1 mm can be substituted for the window screen.
- You can use coffee cans, embroidery frames, or other objects to build frames. Try experimenting to get different sizes and shapes of paper.
- You can make getting the paper off the screen faster and easier by making a deckle. It should be identical to the frame the screen is attached to. Just before step 10, place the deckle on top of the screen and dip it into the pulp deckle-side-up. After you lift it out of the pulp, lift the deckle, place your fabric over the paper, turn it over, and remove the screen. Since the paper may still be sodden, you'll need to be careful not to poke any holes or stretch it.
- You can make your paper a little more dense by using an iron. While it's still very damp, place it between two pieces of cloth. Iron on low, no steam, pressing down and always moving. Check it frequently, since it can brown while still damp! Note the heat may cause things like flower petals to lose their pigment or turn brown.

- If you want to make colored construction paper, use paper with the least amount of dark ink, use a lot of "pulp" and use liquid food coloring.
- When you get good at making paper, try making plantable bookmarks. They're a great gift for anyone who loves to garden, or read about gardening. Mix in seeds with the pulp. Choose hardy plants that are fairly easy to sprout, and choose fairly small seeds. Then, make paper as outlined above. Air dry the finished paper quickly so the seeds don't sprout. Cut it into bookmark shapes. You can trace around cookie cutters to get decorative shapes, if you wish. When you're done reading, plant the whole bookmark and keep it moist until the seeds sprout. If the seeds are for flowers, you could mix in dried flowers or petals with the paper for decoration.

[\[edit\]](#) Warnings

- This **is** going to get messy.
- At your first run, it might not turn out as neatly as you'd like. But it takes time, so stick with it.
- When squeezing out excess water with your piece of fabric or Formica, be very gentle, and be careful not to break or deform your screen.
- Particularly if you dry the paper on fabric, the paper may take on the color and texture of the material, so be careful what you use. Smooth Formica may be the best option if you want smooth writing paper.

[\[edit\]](#) Things You'll Need

●



Assembled materials.

Paper to recycle

- Sponge
- Window screening for frame
- Wooden frame
- Plastic basin or tub large enough to totally submerge wooden frame
- Blender or food processor (or mortar and pestle)
- White felt or flannel fabric or Formica
- Staple gun, tacks or nails (for frame)
- Liquid starch (optional)
- Hair dryer (optional)

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