



Papermaking for Fun or Profit

Learn how to make paper from recycled and farm-grown ingredients, and turn them into a myriad of personalized, artisan paper products or gifts.

By Barbara Berst Adams

Photos courtesy Lane Parks

Papermaking has a long history dating back to Ancient Egyptians, who pounded certain parts of the papyrus plant into a stable writing surface. Many plants, from rice to trees, can be used to make paper.

Today, both recycled material and your own garden can supply materials for artisan paper that you can use for pleasure or even profit. Here's a recipe for homemade paper>>Lane Parks and his wife, Susan Ferrel, oversee a nonprofit, rural gathering place in Washington State called the Madrona Center, catering to other eco-farmers, gardeners, fine artists and others.

Among various other crafts, they handmake paper and use it for various projects—including fine art books with covers and/or pages made with their handmade paper.

The hand-bound, homemade paper journals have contributed significantly to Parks' personal income; the blank books sold very well to local bookstores and other gift and art outlets. Now they sell their artisan paper journals to help fund the Madrona Center.

Value-added Homemade Paper Ideas

For income, handcrafted paper is like any art or craft. If you can “plug in” to a niche market, as Lane and Susan did, you might create a regular stream of income.

You might also consider handmade paper as inspiration for an indirect income source, such as: Papermaking classes on your farm, with an emphasis on some of your own crops.

Items on display for the sale at your farm stand or retail area or at a local B&B.

Specialized labels for value-added food crops.

A personal touch added to gift baskets filled with other products you make and sell from your farm.

Recreational Homemade Paper Ideas

Even if you're not aiming for income, countless projects for pleasure are waiting. These include: Stamped calling cards
Folded favor boxes and bags
Envelopes
Bookmarks
Stationery sets
Greeting cards
Place cards
Notecards
Invitations
Guest books
Scrapbooks
Framed art, with or without your own art or calligraphy

Some paper artisans even embed viable garden seeds within their handcrafted paper invitations. Recipients eventually can plant the invitations directly into the ground!

Items like these can be used as gifts, customer thank-you's or little bonuses added to your farm's CSA shares.

Making Homemade Paper

Upon visiting Lane's workshop, one quickly discovers that homegrown crops and native plants can be used to make a signature paper. He uses various wild and cultivated plants to color and texture his paper.



Handmade paper starts with the base fiber that makes up the bulk of the paper, then smaller amounts of other decorative materials are added.

These unique, added textures, flecks, colors and sometimes even scents may come from your own garden, farm or woodlands to make your paper unique.

Petals of bachelor's button, dried lavender and even spinach leaves are only three examples of the many possibilities.

The bulk of paper crafted at home is usually comprised of either recycled paper or purchased papermaking fiber, such as cotton or hemp.

As experience mounts, you may recycle cotton scraps into handmade paper or even grow the bulk fiber for paper. Such papers are a cottage industry in rural areas of Southeast Asia.

Beginners can start with less-technical methods. Papermaking is similar to cooking as far as being an exact science.

There are variables to some rules, so you improvise and experiment until a "feel" develops. Like putting together a new cake recipe, you eventually get faster at the process.

Lane and Susan's custom, handmade paper-journal business has just been expanded to sell both locally and to the world.

"We'll be selling them primarily online," Lane says, "and at select local stores."

To visit the Madrona Center's papermaking, folk arts school and other projects, visit the Madrona website or go directly to their handmade paper books.

About the Author: Barbara Berst Adams is author of *Micro Eco-Farming: Prospering from Backyard to Small Acreage in Partnership with the Earth*, www.microecofarming.com and *The New Agritourism: Hosting Community and Tourists on Your Farm*. www.newagritourism.com