

How to Enjoy a Chinese Moon Festival

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The Moon Festival, also known as the Mid-Autumn Festival, the Harvest Moon festival, or the Zhongqiu Festival, is celebrated on the 15th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar—or around September or October. It's a day to celebrate family and tradition, so get together with your relatives, do some moon gazing, and enjoy a moon cake—or a few! 中秋快乐 (Happy Mid-Autumn Festival)!

Things You'll Need

■ Lanterns

- ☐ 3 36 × 1/8 × 1/8 in (91.44 × 0.32 × 0.32 cm) square balsa wood dowels
- ☐ 1 20 in × 20 in (51 cm × 51 cm) sheet of tissue paper
- ☐ Wire
- ☐ Tealight candle
- ☐ Electrical or masking tape
- ☐ Double-sided tape
- ☐ Crafting glue
- ☐ Scissors

Ingredients

■ Dough for Mooncakes and Picture Pastries

- ☐ 3/4 cup (100 g) of flour
- ☐ 1/2 tsp (60 mL) of alkaline water
- ☐ 1/4 cup (60 g) of golden syrup
- ☐ 2 tbsp (28 g) of vegetable oil

■ Mooncake Filling

- ☐ 1 3/4 cups (420 g) of lotus seed paste or red bean paste
- ☐ 1 tsp (5 mL) of rose-flavored cooking wine
- ☐ 6 egg yolks

■ Egg Glaze

- ☐ 1 egg yolk
- ☐ 2 tbsp (30 g) of egg white

Method 1 of 3: Cooking for Moon Festival



1 Buy or **bake mooncakes**, a traditional Moon Festival treat. No Moon Festival is complete without mooncakes, which are small, rich pastries that you can buy from a Chinese bakery or make on your own, if you have time. They're meant to be shared and gifted to family and friends, so have plenty!^[1]

Make Your Own Mooncakes

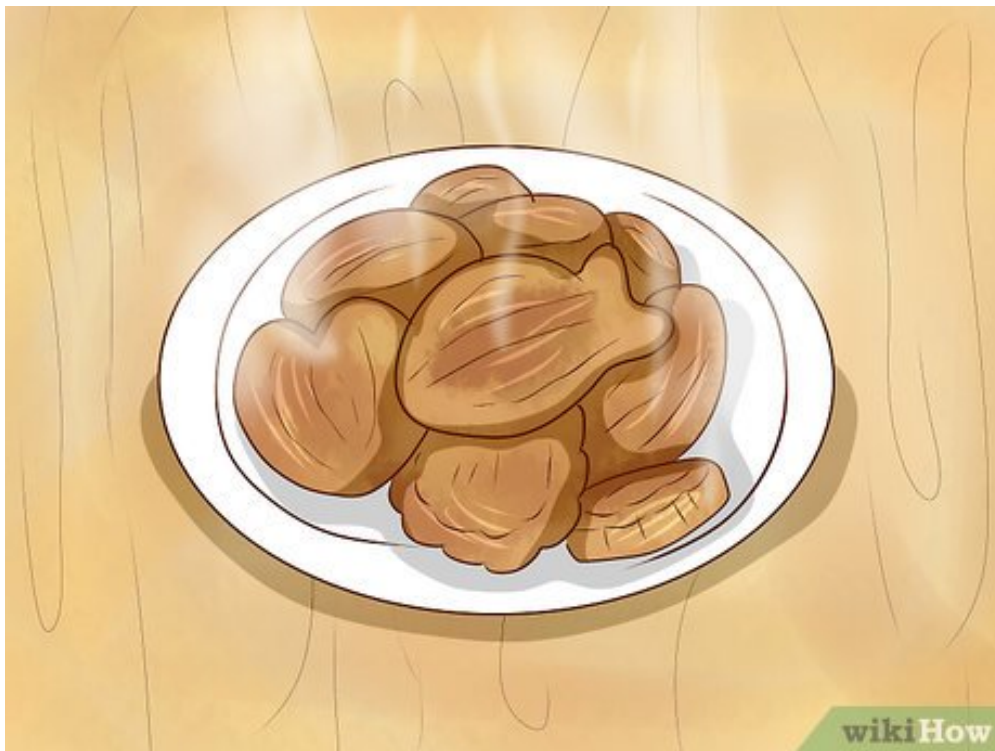
Dough: Mix alkaline water, golden syrup, vegetable oil, and flour. Let it sit for 3 hours. Separate the dough into 12 flat discs.

Egg filling: Separate 6 egg yolks and steam them, then cut them in half.

Creating the mooncakes: Make 12 balls of lotus or red bean paste and create a depression in each. Place half an egg yolk inside and cover it with the paste. Place the ball on a disc of dough and pull up the sides to cover it.

Baking: Spray a mooncake mold with nonstick spray and place your mooncakes inside. Bake them at 350 °F (177 °C) for 5 minutes, then remove and brush them with egg wash. Return them to the oven and bake for 5-6 more minutes until they're golden brown.^[2]

Serving: Store them in an airtight container for 1-2 days, then enjoy!



2 Make picture pastries for an additional sweet treat. Picture pastries, also known as mooncake biscuits or “kung chai peng” in Cantonese, aren’t as well known as mooncakes but can still be a tasty dessert for the Moon Festival. They’re cookies made from the same dough that you used to form the outside of the mooncakes, and will need 1-2 days before they’re ready to eat. To make them:[3]

- Make mooncake dough by combining flour and baking soda in a bowl, then making a small well in the center and stirring in golden syrup, oil, and baking soda solution. Knead the mix into a dough, then let it sit for 3 hours.
- Use cookie molds or cutters to make 10-20 cookies, then place them on a greased baking sheet. Bake them at 400 °F (204 °C) for 6 minutes.
- Remove the cookies, brush them with a beaten egg mixture, then bake them for another six minutes. Let them cool, then store them in an airtight container for 1-2 days so the golden syrup can soften the pastry.



3 Plan a dinner of tasty and traditional dishes. A Moon Festival dinner offers big portions of delicious, symbolic dishes for the whole family to enjoy. Think about how many people you'll be inviting over and start to plan your meal accordingly. Many families also choose to eat out for Moon Festival to avoid the burden of making a meal—it's up to you! like roast pork, a whole chicken, fish, vegetables, and rice.^[4]

Dinner Options for the Moon Festival

- Roast pork
- A whole chicken
- Fish
- Vegetables
- Rice



4 Set up an honor table to present your mooncakes, fruits, and tea. An honor table is a small end table or even a bench that you'll place near your dinner table. Use it to display your ritual offerings, including candles and incense, which you'll burn to honor ancestors. You'll also place your mooncakes, picture pastries tea service, and fruits on the honor table.^[5]

Fruits for Your Honor Table

Apples
Pomelos
Asian pears
Grapes
Peaches
Melons

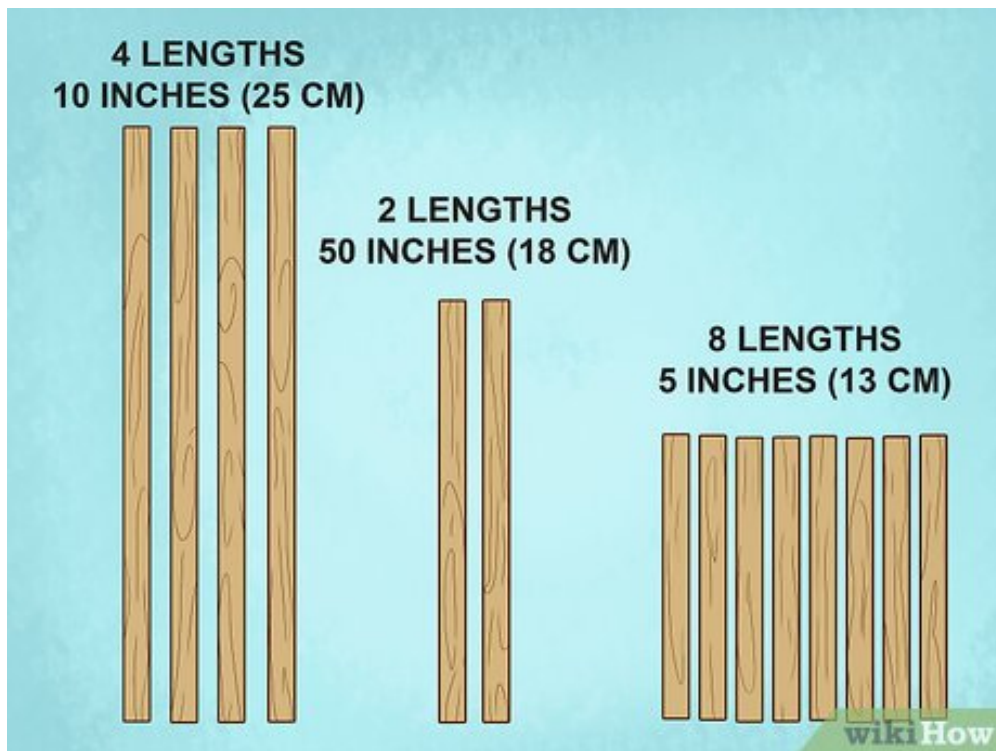
Did you know: the round shape of these fruits are meant to evoke the moon and symbolize family unity.

Method 2 of 3: Making Moon Festival Lanterns



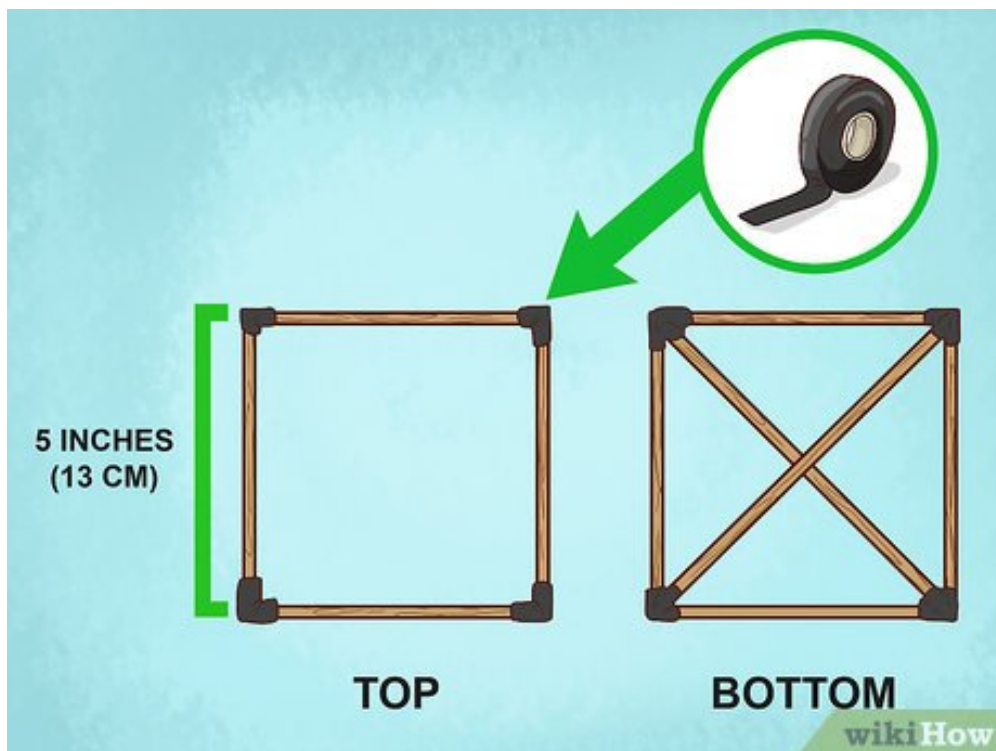
1 Make lanterns to decorate and light up your home. Moon Festival decorations don't need to be over the top, but the one thing you can't do without are lanterns. Moon Festival lanterns are bright, festive, and often shaped like animals or interesting geometric designs, but you can [make your own](#) simple rectangular lanterns. Creating lanterns as a family in the days beforehand is a great way to foster the spirit of togetherness that this holiday is all about.^[6]

- [Making lanterns](#) is an especially great activity for kids, who can design their own and carry it around on the night of the celebration!



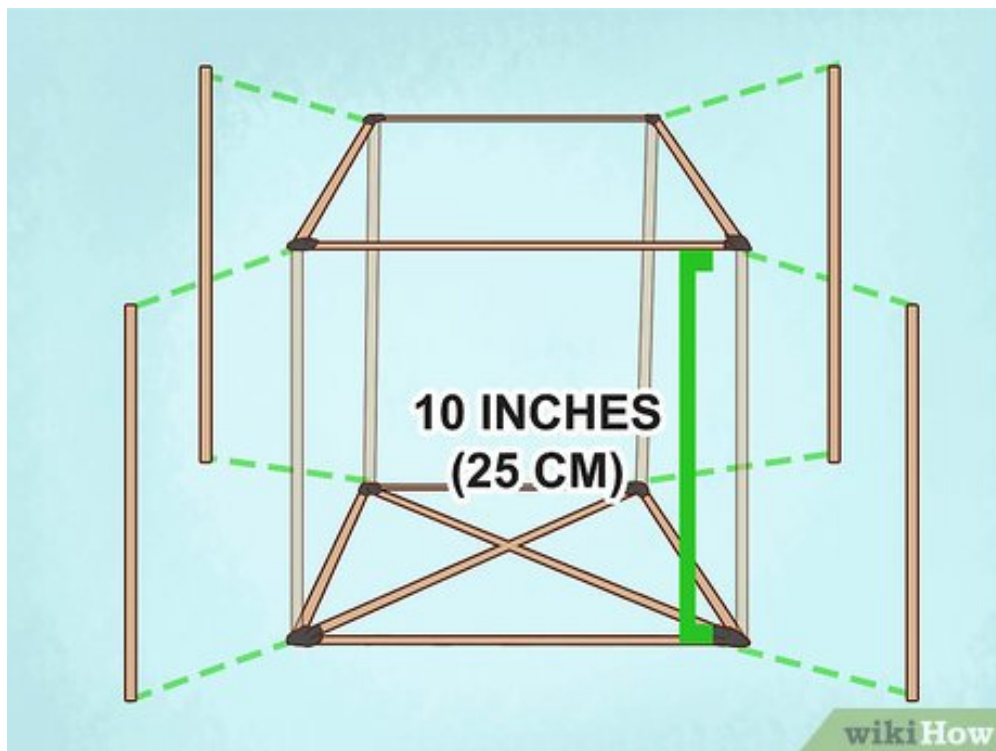
2 Cut balsa wood towels into smaller lengths. Start with 3 square balsa wood dowels that are 36 by $\frac{1}{8}$ by $\frac{1}{8}$ inches ($91.44 \times 0.32 \times 0.32$ cm). Use scissors to cut them into smaller pieces as follows:^[7]

- 4 lengths of 10 in (25 cm)
- 8 lengths of 5 in (13 cm)
- 2 lengths of 7 in (18 cm).

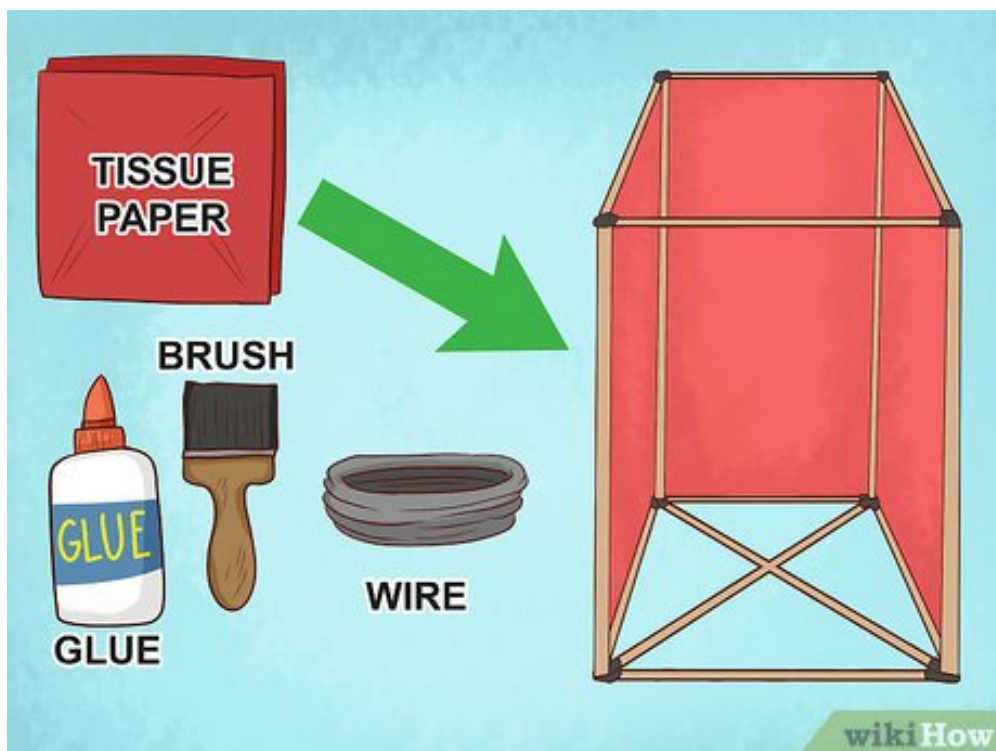


3 Tape the pieces into squares to form the base and top. Use electrical tape to attach the 5 in (13 cm) pieces together, creating 2 squares. These will be the top and bottom of the lantern. To make the base more stable, tape your two 7 in (18 cm) strips of wood in a cross in one of the squares.^[8]

- Use double-sided tape to attach a tealight (either a candle or electric) at the intersection of the cross.



- 4 Attach the long wood pieces to make the sides.** Tape the 10 in (25 cm) pieces vertically from each corner of the base to create the outer shell of the lantern. Then, tape on the top square.



- 5 Decorate the outside with tissue paper.** Spread out a 20 in × 20 in (51 cm × 51 cm) sheet of tissue paper and use a brush to coat it in a thin layer of glue. Wrap it around the lantern frame, then create a wire handle so you can carry it or hang it around your house.

- If you want to decorate your lantern with Chinese characters or drawings, do so before you paint the glue on the tissue paper.



6 **Hang your lanterns around your house for a festive, traditional look.** Repeat this process to make at least 5-6 lanterns. Place them around your house and outside to light up the night with a soft glow.

- You can also let kids carry them around, but be careful if you used candles. You may want to use electric tealights to make a few kid-friendly lanterns, and use candles in the ones that you plan to hang up out of their reach.

Method 3 of 3: Celebrating with Family

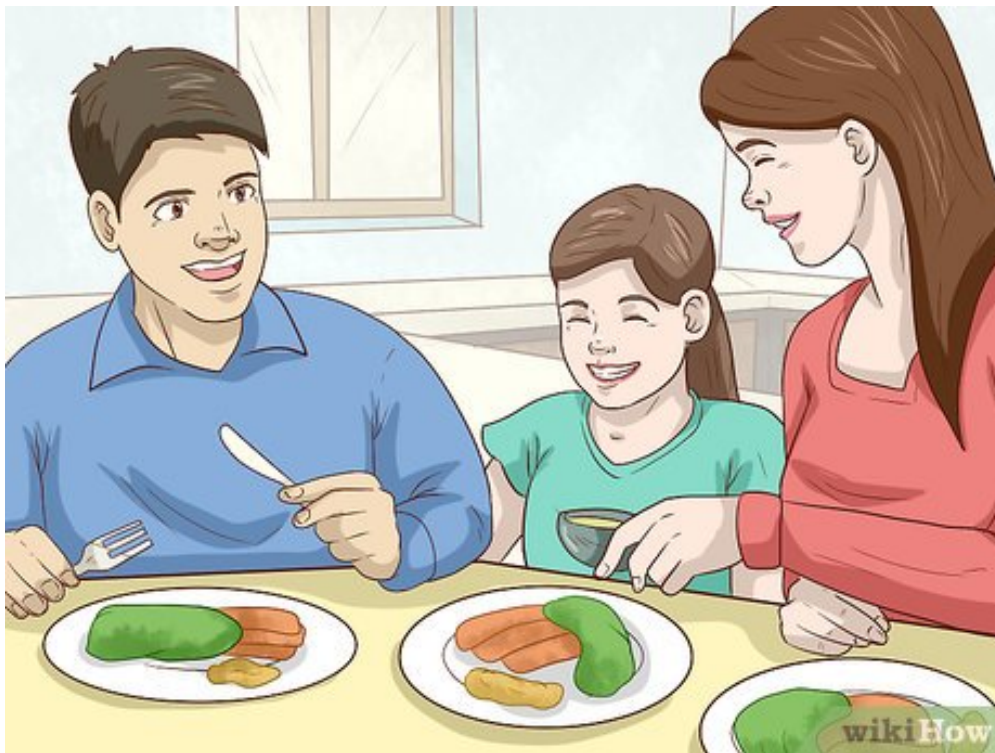


1 Learn about the history and traditions of the Moon Festival. The Moon Festival is often seen as the second most important holiday on the Chinese calendar, second only to New Year. It's a harvest festival that originates from moon worship, and is meant to celebrate the changing seasons and new-to-old cycles of life.^[11]

History of the Chinese Moon Festival

The Moon Festival has been **celebrated since the Shang Dynasty**, 3,000 years ago.

The festival **originates from a folk story** about an archer, Hou Yi, who receives an elixir of immortality in return for saving the world. His wife, Chang'e, drinks the elixir and floats up to the moon, where she turns into a jade rabbit. The story says that she still lives on the moon, longing for her husband, and reunites with him once a month, when the full moon shines brightly from the strength of their love.



2 Get together with your family for a meal and a casual celebration. The Moon Festival is a time for family and togetherness, similar to an American Thanksgiving, and the best way to celebrate is by sharing a meal and catching up with family. This meal is traditionally made and eaten at home, but some families today choose to eat out to save on time and effort. Many people also choose to eat outside under the stars, taking advantage of the warm fall weather and using the opportunity to appreciate the moon.[12]

- If you're hosting, make sure to get in touch with your relatives a few weeks beforehand to invite them and confirm that they're coming. Specify a time and whether you'd like them to bring any dishes.
- If you eat outside, you can set up a blanket on the grass and have a picnic-style dinner. Set up a bench or small, portable table as your honor table.
- If you're away from your family during the Moon Festival, or if some of your loved ones are away, make sure to call or message to wish each other a happy Moon Festival.



3 **Serve tea and head outside to moon gaze together.** After dinner, serve your family tea and enjoy your dessert of mooncakes, picture pastries, and fruit. If you ate inside, take your tea and pastries outdoors and sit down together to look at the moon and enjoy each other's company.[13]

- Many families use this time together to reminisce about times past and talk about family members who have passed away or can't be at the celebration.
- Hang your lanterns outside, too. They'll give off a soft, pleasant glow while you talk.



4 **Honor ancestors by burning incense.** Family is at the center of the Moon Festival celebration, and ancestors take a place of special honor. To show your respect to ancestors and family members who have passed away, burn incense and bow 3 times in front of your honor table.[14]



5 Share family stories with children to help them appreciate tradition. Families typically allow children to stay up late on the night of the Moon Festival. Include them in family conversations or read to them from books of Chinese poetry. You can also let them march around with their colorful lanterns.^[15]

- Make sure they're old enough to carry the lanterns without hurting themselves or spilling the candle. You can also replace the tealight inside with an electric light that looks like a candle, often right down to its sputtering glow.



6 Check for any Moon Festival celebrations in your area. Chinese communities often hold special events to commemorate the Moon Festival, including fire dragon dances, lion dances, lantern exhibitions and carnivals. You can see if any events are being held near you, or even travel to larger celebrations in China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Singapore, and other countries where the holiday is observed.

- If you decide to make a trip, be sure to book your tickets and accommodations well in advance. Large cities known for their celebrations, including Beijing and Hong Kong, will often fill up quickly in the days beforehand.
- In many countries, the day after the Moon Festival is considered a holiday, with work and school closed. Keep this in mind if you're traveling—you'll be able to stay up later than usual, but some businesses may take the day off.
- If you live near a large city with a Chinatown neighborhood, there's a good chance you'll be able to catch some Moon Festival celebrations there. Ask around or do some research online to see.



Tips

- The Moon Festival is observed in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam.
- Different ethnicities within Chinese culture have unique ways of celebrating the festival. Mongolians, for example, will “chase the moon” on horseback until it sets, while Tibetans will try to “seek the moon” in reflections in their homes. Explore different traditions and consider incorporating them into your own celebration to appreciate other cultures.

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