

Making Paper Lanterns: Farolitos and Luminaria

In New Mexico and other Southwestern states, it's common to see farolitos, or small paper lanterns, to welcome the Christmas season. This practice is believed to have been inspired by the use of Chinese lanterns during celebrations, but because these decorative lanterns were typically made with delicate material, Spanish people on the Santa Fe Trail eventually found that paper bags would last longer.

Displaying farolitos during Christmastime also has its roots in the tradition of luminaria, little bonfires that guided people to Mass on the last night of Las Posadas, a nine-day celebration leading to Christmas Eve.

In this activity, welcome the holiday season by making your own simple paper lanterns! Check out the more advanced version of this activity [here](#).

What You Need

- Paper or brown bag
- Black permanent marker
- Sand
- Tea light candle and match or electric candle
- Pencil
- Scissors (optional)
- Hole punch (optional)

What You Do

1. Set out a paper bag and a permanent marker.
2. Have your child draw a design on one, or both sides, of the paper bag with a permanent marker. When the bag is lighted, the marker lines will be clearly seen.
3. Once the bag has been decorated, fill it with a couple inches of sand. Set the candle in the middle of the sand so that it doesn't fall over. If you use a real candle, light it and remind your child to be careful around matches. Be careful not to let the flame burn the paper.
4. Make as many as you wish, and place the bags on a table or sidewalk to light a path!

If your child wants to cut out designs, have her draw designs with pencil. Instruct her to cut out the shapes she drew with scissors by pinching one side of the bag to avoid cutting the other side. Assist as needed. You can use a hole punch to pierce the bag as well. Explain that large cutouts might make the bag less sturdy.



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