



How to Make a Spirit Doll

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This little booklet is a gift, and you are welcome to share it freely with anyone who might enjoy making their own Spirit Doll.

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How I Started ...

In the summer of 2012, when I was planning a sacred art practice for my first Gaian Soul Retreat, I stumbled upon the idea of making Spirit Dolls. I'm not sure how the idea came to me, as I'd never made one before. Through trial and error, I came up with the process I'll share with you here. I expect this to be only a guideline for you, as I know what can happen when creative energy runs wild! I'm sure you'll improve on my technique, and come up with ideas of your own. The women at the retreat sure did! I was astounded at the beauty of the dolls they created, and how each one was unique to its creator.



Spirit Doll by Jane Pugliano

Step 1:

Set Your Intention, Choose a Theme, Gather Your Supplies

Consider setting an intention for this doll. Self-love? Healing? Prosperity? To deepen your intuition? To mark the current season?

Think of a quality that you want to bring into your life.

This doll will hold that energy for you. As you make her, you will be meditating on your intention and listening for guidance.

You could also choose a theme for the doll that resonates with your intention. For example, you might want to honor the Crone, the Wise Old Woman, for the sea-

Think of a quality
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This doll will hold
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for you.

That might be the best way of all.



Then choose a color scheme that matches your theme or intention — blue, purple and green for mermaids; black, silver and white for a Wise Woman (perhaps with a splash of red and purple!)

Or — you can just let her develop organically, and choose fabrics and embellishments in an intuitive way, without making any conscious choices ahead of time. That might be the best way of all.

Then gather your supplies.

From outside:

Gather a nice pile of sticks for the body, from 8" to 18" long. I gathered mostly cedar and alder sticks, because that's what is easily available around my house. You can also gather seedpods, leaves, moss, herbs, stones, shells, feathers and anything that seems magical and might make its way into your doll.

If you don't live in an area where sticks and other natural materials are readily available, make a material-gathering pilgrimage to a city or regional park. Make this adventure part of your creative process.

From your altar or jewelry box:

Odd pieces of old jewelry, charms from a charm bracelet, crystals, essential oils, anything you might want to incorporate into the doll.

From your own stash of craft supplies, a craft store or a garage sale:

Fabric, ribbon, yarn, twine, sisal, thread, beads, gemstones, buttons, silk or dried flowers, corn husks, etc.

You will also need cotton balls or cotton batting for the body; and Pearl-Ex powders and clear shoe polish (or metallic paints) for the face. If you decide to sculpt your own face out of Sculpey or Fimo, you'll need those supplies, plus sculpting tools.

Tools:

Scissors, needle & thread, glue gun, snipper for cutting sticks. Wet Ones are helpful after working with the Pearl-Ex and shoe polish.

Face:

I like to use the terra cotta faces I purchase from San Antonio artist Lyn Belisle in her Etsy shop, *EarthShards*. If she doesn't have any in her shop when you look, be sure to email her and ask about them. Tell her I sent you.



As you can tell, Step 1 might take some time!



Step 2: Decorate the Face

As I mentioned, I like to use the terra cotta faces I purchase from San Antonio artist Lyn Belisle in her Etsy shop, *EarthShards*.

To “paint” the terra cotta face, use a mixture of clear (or neutral) shoe polish and Pearl-Ex powders (I learned this trick from Lyn). Put a thumb-sized bit of clear shoe polish on a piece of heavy paper or foil, then mix in one of the Pearl-Ex colored powders with your fingers. Smear this onto the face. You can either cover the entire piece of clay, or allow some of the terra cotta color to show through.



Karen Karlovich, one of the women who made a doll at our Gaian Soul Retreat, went home and came up with another technique. She used metallic paints. On one, she painted it black first, then blotted it. Then she brushed copper paint over it and rubbed it, for a really lovely distressed look.



Some of the women at the retreat preferred to leave the face “plain,” with no decoration at all. Of course, it’s up to you (and your doll!).

You can also sculpt your own face out of Sculpey or Fimo. If you’re making a face out of these, you can rub the Pearl-Ex onto the face before baking it. Be sure to leave holes in the face, so you can tie it onto the doll’s body. (I prefer the terra cotta faces because they are made from the earth, unlike the polymer Sculpey material.) You could also make a head or face out of cloth.

I find “Wet Ones” to be really handy in cleaning the paint, powder, or shoe polish off your fingers.

[Click here for information about sculpting in polymer clay.](#)

[Click here for information about Pearl-Ex Powders.](#)

Step 3: Make the Body

Bundle together a group of sticks, about 12" – 18" long, depending on how big you want your doll to be. Tie them together with twine or sturdy string.

Then make another, smaller and shorter bundle for the arms, and tie those together. Then tie the "arms" onto the "body." Now you have a shape that looks like a cross.



Alternatively, if you want the arms to point downwards, you can make two small bundles (one for each arm), tie them together at one end, then attach them to the main body with a glue gun. You can also use the twigs and branches you've gathered to suggest poses for the arms and legs. At the retreat, some of the women came up with graceful, joyous dancers!

During the wrapping process, you can tuck secret things inside the body of the doll: a crystal charged with your intention, or a little piece of paper with a prayer or affirmation written on it.



Rip some fabric into strips for the “undergarment.”

Wrap cotton balls or batting around the body. (You might want to put a few drops of essential oil on the cotton.) You can also use Spanish moss, or flat herbs like English sage.

Then wrap the “undergarment” strips around the cotton and herbs, forming a plump body. Don’t forget to add extra for breasts! Start from the middle and move down. Then wrap the arms, and then the head. Leave some of the sticks coming out of the



“head” for a headdress. Knot the strips of cloth together as necessary. You can also wrap yarn or twine around the cloths, and knot those. You could also use a needle and thread as necessary.

During the wrapping process, you can tuck secret things inside the body of the doll: a crystal charged with your intention, for example, or a little piece of paper with a prayer or affirmation written on it.





Step 4: Dress the Doll

Choose different pieces of fabric and different colorful yarns to wrap an outer garment around the doll.

There is no one right way to do this. I like to rip the fabric into strips. Tuck feathers, leaves and other items into it as you wind the strips around the doll. Add more cotton if needed between layers. Try different textures, like cheesecloth, lace, silk, leather, whatever you have on hand.

You can make a “cape” by letting some fabric flow from the shoulders and arms, or give her a shawl. You can make a skirt!

Just like you did with the undergarments, you can tie bits of cloth or yarn together, or sew the clothing together with needle and thread. You can also use a glue gun.

Play around and see what happens. (I’ve been told the doll will tell you how she wants to be dressed!



Step 5: Face and Crown

Now that you're well on your way to having your doll finely dressed, it's time to attach the doll's face to her "head," to add hair, and create a crown or headdress of some kind.

The terra cotta faces that Lyn Belisle makes have holes in them, so you can easily tie the face to the sticks above the arms. Use strong waxed thread to tie it on. You might want to add some cotton balls to pad the space between the face and twigs. You can also use a glue gun if you need to.

You can create hair out of yarn, especially the kind that pulls apart and gets fuzzy. Be sure to put a little hair on the top edge and sides of the face. One of the women at the retreat brought mohair from her Angora goats. It makes fabulous hair! (I found a source for it on Etsy here.)



Create a headdress or crown of some kind.

You could add corn husks or wheat heads for an autumn theme. You could fill the "branches" of her headdress with bird beads. You could add gemstones, beads, anything that comes to mind. You could tie ribbons from the sticks, too, or drape a gauzy cloth like cheesecloth through the branches, letting it hang down.

If your face has extra holes in it, you can dangle a few beads from it. Use black waxed thread and put several beads on it, then tie it through the holes. Let the tail end of the black thread be part of the design.





Spirit Doll by Rue Croneheart

She'll let you know when she's done.

Step 6: Embellishment and Decoration

Now it's time to embellish and decorate her with all kinds of lovely things.

You can add things to her arms, add a flower to her hair, give her jewelry and things to hold. Think: feathers, beads, charms, crystals, gemstones, shells, tiny rocks, scrolls of paper, tiny mirrors, silk or dried leaves and flowers. With a glue gun, you can attach just about anything!

You can see on my tarot High Priestess doll at right that I added a High Priestess tarot card; a mirror, a key, a scroll, a crescent moon, and seashells — all symbols from that card.

My friend Rue Croneheart made the Samhain altar doll at left. She wears a medallion with a symbol sacred to Hecate, and carries a bundle of charms: a bead, a crystal, and a tiny Venus of Willendorf. And what a gorgeous headdress!

If you like, you can make a “hook” out of copper wire on your doll's back so you can hang her on a wall.

She'll let you know when she's done.



Spirit Doll by Joanna Powell Colbert

Step 7: Name Her, Charge Her, Bless Her

When you feel like your doll is done (and at some point, you just have to declare her “done” or you’ll keep fussing with her forever), create sacred space. Offer her up to the Divine, and charge her with the energy of your intention.



Spirit Doll by Marilyn Shannon

Then name her. Perhaps you already know her name: “She Who . . .”

If not, close your eyes and pretend you are introducing her into a circle of women. Say: “This is She Who . . .” and let the rest of the sentence (her name) unfold.

Then bless her. Keep her on your altar or hang her on your wall, in a special place where she will remind you of your sacred intention.

(In the photo at right, we see Karen Karlovich at the Gaian Soul Retreat, presenting her new friend *She Who Owns Her Power*. At left we see Marilyn Shannon’s doll, *Miss Ruby Red: She Who is Fearless to Be Herself and Let Love Grow*.)

Blessed be.



Spirit Doll by Karen Karlovich

Perhaps you already know
her name: “She Who . . .”

Keep her on your altar, or
in a special place where
she will remind you of your
sacred intention.

About Joanna Powell Colbert

Joanna is an artist, author, teacher, and retreat leader who inspires and helps lovers of Mama Gaia to lead wholehearted, creative, and soulful lives.

She teaches e-courses and workshops around the country on earth-centered spirituality, and tarot as a tool for inner guidance and self-exploration. Her contemplative courses, *Gaian Soul Seasonal Practices*, run all year round. She also hosts Gaian Soul Retreats twice a year, where these Spirit Dolls were first born.

Joanna's tarot deck and book, the *Gaian Tarot*, was published by Llewellyn Worldwide in September 2011. She also released a deluxe, Limited Edition of 1000 decks in March 2010. As of January 2013, nearly 80% of those had already found happy homes. She hosts the engaging membership site, Gaian Tarot Circle, which she created for people who want to participate in a study circle centered on the Gaian Tarot.

Joanna also offers Magical Tarot Dreams Sessions (part coaching, part tarot reading), designed to help you manifest your dreams and purpose.

She sells her colored-pencil paintings and mixed media pieces as originals and limited edition prints. Amber Lotus Publishing Co. calls me one of "the most accomplished and well-loved artists in the Goddess-spirit community."

She lives in the woods outside Bellingham, Washington with her husband and two cats. Oh, and her baby granddaughter Gracie is the most beautiful child in the whole, entire world!



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This little booklet is a gift, and you are welcome to share it freely with anyone who might enjoy making their own Spirit Doll.