

Making Ripples

Gratitude Journals

by Amanda Bancroft

Giving thanks is usually done out loud, before the traditional Thanksgiving meal. Words are spoken, acknowledged briefly, and slip into the unconscious past to be stored between the memories of delicious smells and the bursting belly feeling that comes later. Do we even remember what we were most grateful for on Thanksgiving last year?

If it's always the same thing ("family" or "good friends" perhaps?) that counts as a very important blessing indeed, but counting blessings needn't stop at one. In hard times, it actually helps to have a record of wonder in life, of positive people and events, of the simple moments that bring a brief smile or the footsteps of fortune that happened to tread upon our lives last Friday. And especially in hard times, those things are difficult to remember.

Gratitude journals can keep track of what the overstuffed pantries of our minds cannot. They can be private places of shelter in a storm, or family projects that celebrate our successes. Often, they take the shape of an actual journal, either bought at a store (locally owned businesses do carry journals) or handmade on a rainy day. People make them out of practically anything, and some go as far as making the paper out of recycled paper scraps – but it is very labor-intensive.

You could use folded pieces of recycled paper stapled together, or scraps of fabric sewn like a book. Some families just use paper tablecloths and crayons, adding gratitude moments at dinner until the whole sheet is full and can be photographed or stored. Once you have the basic form, it's easy to add stickers, color, ribbons, treasures found in nature, souvenirs from a trip, photographs or anything else that fits. Movie or performance tickets can remind you of your favorites from the last several decades, once you save them up inside a gratitude journal with a note about what you enjoyed most.

Gratitude journals can be completely personalized to reflect who you are or what you wish to remember. They could be romantic, recording the best moments of a marriage. Or they could be a meditative practice for someone wanting to be more mindful and positive. Origami stars created from colorful paper are one three-dimensional option for counting blessings: if you'd like, learn how to fold them from a book or online tutorial, then keep them in a jar or string them into a gratitude garland.

Are you tangible-challenged? That's ok! "Journals" do not need to be tangible objects, so if you're not crafty, there are other options. Start an online (private or public) blog, or perhaps a simple text document saved to your computer. If pressed for time, try taking a daily stroll and

counting blessings as they come to mind. It's sure to brighten a dreary day or make a great day even better!

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