

## Rice Paper

There is a lot of mileage in a rice plant. Parts of the plant i.e. rice straw and rice flour can be processed into rice paper. This versatile commodity found favor in the beginning of the 20th century in Europe and is grown in the thick forests of Taiwan. Not to be confused with rice that grows in paddy fields, the pith is removed from the rice paper plant and is rolled and cut into very fine sheets. These are then dyed the required color, often used for the manufacture of artificial flowers. White sheets are used by watercolor artists, being the perfect texture for the medium. It is not possible to write on this paper, as the texture is too thin. The rice plant is also used simply as a decorative plant.

Rice straw can be made into paper, which is thin but durable and is used in the processing of cigarette paper, partition walls in construction and lampshades. Even finer textured paper can be made from it with the addition of hemp. Rice flour, used in the cuisine of Southeast Asia, is usually made from white rice and goes into the manufacture of edible rice paper. The rice is processed into a powder and added to tapioca powder. The quality of the rice determines the flavor of the rice paper. These sheets are often used to wrap food in or as an ingredient in recipes. They can be bought in specialist Asian food outlets.

Paper made from the mulberry tree is sometimes referred to as rice paper. This is because of the similar properties and this sort of paper is often the product used for packets of rice. The raw material is taken from the bark of the tree, which is stripped, cleaned and cooked in water and sodium carbonate. The traditional manufacture is done by hand from different types of mulberry tree i.e. gampi, kozo or mitsumata. The result is an extremely strong, naturally white paper that is used for calligraphy, screens, origami and clothes.

Many different purposes are ingeniously found for rice paper. Some people like to make party hats from this paper, rather like papier mache, and others buy sleeves made from the paper that are designed to contain vinyl records. In addition to keeping the records clean and free from damage, something in the paper keeps down the static on the record. It doesn't get more versatile than this.