

## POI *(Note: in Maori, plurals do not take an 's')*

Traditional poi were a very long poi that flowed with the rhythm of the waiata (song) and enhanced the grace and beauty of the performer. While poi are essentially used by women, in the past men may have used it as a form of martial art and training for warfare.

Poi were, of course, made of natural materials. The long poi would be the same length as the distance between the fingertips and the shoulder, while short poi is usually the same as the distance between fingertips to elbow.

The feathery heads of raupo reeds (bulrush) were used as the soft filling. Sometimes leaves of both raupo and kuta plants were used to wrap around the filling, while taniko weaving decorated the wrapping of others. Muka (fibre from NZ flax, harakeke) ties secured the wrapping around the filling.

Long poi handles were also made of muka. Sometimes dog hair or feathers were attached at the join.

Here are some modern day options for children to make their own:

1. Short poi using recycled materials: Take a bread bag and a plastic supermarket bag. Roll the supermarket bag up around a small weight (bottle top?) and stuff it into the bottom of a bread bag. Tie off. Cut the rest of the bread bag into three strips lengthwise. Plait these to form a handle.
2. Long poi: Use old nylon stockings or long woollen socks stuffed with soft foam or a scrunched up shopping bag. Push foam/bag into the end of a stocking/sock and knot it to make a ball. Tie a knot in the other end to make a handle.
3. Make wool handles by plaiting three or four strands of wool together (refer above for lengths). Make a wool pompom and attach to knotted end of handle.
4. As for three above, but for the ball, take a strip of batting (used in quilting) about 20cm long and 5cm wide, and tie the wool for the handles around the batting. Scrunch the batting up and into a plastic bag. Tie off the plastic, so that the handle can be plaited – this tie ensures the poi stays together. Decorate to disguise the join.
5. Cut medium rubbish bag plastic in half to make two poi. Stuff foam or screwed up paper rounded to fit into one of the plastic pieces. Tie plaited handle into the foam first. Tighten plastic firmly, making a nice rounded ball and tie with string close to the ball end of the handle. Make a second tie around the plastic and handle. Turn the edge of the plastic down onto the ball and make a third tie around it – this tie ensures the poi stays together.

Some suggested actions to perform in time to the waiata 'Purerehua' (Butterfly).

1. Tap the right foot and swing the poi in front of you.
2. Tap the right foot and make two circles with one poi, then catch the poi with the other hand.
3. Tap the right foot, make two flat circles with one poi, moving slowly from left to right. Finish with one more half circle which taps your side with the poi. Repeat in the other direction.
4. Make figure 8 circles starting in front of your face, then over the back of your shoulder.

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