

# Celebrating Onam with Pookalam

## The Vibrant Floral Art of Kerala

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Onam is among the important national festivals of India, where in people wear traditional wear, adorn houses with Pookalam (floral designs), and prepare Onasadya (elaborate meal of about 13 dishes). It is an annual harvest festival celebrated predominantly by Malayalees, marking the home coming of the legendary King Mahabali. The festivities are enriched with various cultural events, such as Vallamkali (snake boat race), Kaikottikali (clap dance), Kathakali dance, and Pulikali procession (artists dressed and painted like tigers and hunters).

Pookalam, also known as Athapookalam, is a traditional floral art form from the Indian state of Kerala. It is a vibrant and decorative

### Significance of Pookalam

Pookalam is not just a decorative element; it symbolizes happiness, prosperity, and the spirit of togetherness. It reflects the harmonious blend of nature and culture, as different flowers, each with its own unique color and fragrance,

### How Pookalam is Made

Creating a Pookalam requires skill, creativity, and patience. It usually begins with a basic outline, and then different flower petals are used to fill in the pattern. While the most pookalams have a set pattern with ten rings of contrasting colors, others feature fancier designs like drawings of Mahabali, film-stars, and even company logos. Flowers such as marigolds, daisies, chrysanthemums, and jasmine are commonly used due to their availability and vibrant colors. Fresh and

arrangement of flowers that is a central part of the Onam festival celebrations. The festival spans ten days, and each day is known for different cultural events, with Pookalam playing a significant role.

The word "Pookalam" is derived from two Malayalam words: "Poo," meaning flower, and "Kalam," meaning a pattern or shape. It involves creating intricate and colorful designs on the ground using various types of flowers, which are arranged in patterns or circular shapes. Traditionally, the Pookalam starts small on the first day of Onam (Atham) and grows in size and complexity as the festival progresses, culminating on the tenth day (Thiruvonam).

are used to create intricate patterns. The tradition of making Pookalams dates back centuries and is rooted in Kerala's agrarian lifestyle, where flowers were readily available during the harvest season.

colorful petals are preferred to ensure the design stays attractive throughout the day.

Ritual of making the floral rangolis continues for all ten days of Onam. Designing starts from the day of Atham and is made ready by Thiruvonam day. Basic design is prepared on the first day. Size of a Pookalam is increased by adding more to it on every passing day hence a massive Pookalam gets ready for the main day of the occasion.

Generally, the rangoli means drawing patterns at the entrance is made up of colours but keeping in view the ecofriendly nature, the loose flowers can also be used to make rangoli. In place of artificial colours, flowers of different colours are used; to create green colour either turf grass clippings or foliage clippings are used.

Various patterns are used for making rangolis, in design that may be traditional and geometrical, floral, sceneries depicting nature or rural life, thematic designss etc., As per the designer's choice and creativity, a wide range of flowers and petals can be used for rangoli making.

#### Colour Symbolism:

Colours used in Rangoli designs hold meaning. Red symbolizes strength, yellow signifies happiness, white represents purity, and green denotes fertility

The process involves:

1. **Selecting a Design:** Traditional designs are often circular and symmetrical, inspired by motifs from nature or Hindu iconography. Modern Pookalam, however, may include geometric patterns or even themes from popular culture.
2. **Laying Out the Pattern:** The pattern is first sketched on the ground using chalk or a similar material.
3. **Layering with Flowers:** The gathered blossoms, consisting of various types of flowers in different shades, are carefully

Various flowers are used on each day as a specific flower is dedicated to each day of Onam. Commonly used flowers include Thumba (Lucas Aspera), Kakka Poovu, Thechipoovu, Mukkutti (little tree plant), Chemparathy (Hibiscus), Aripoo or Konginipoo (Lantana camera), Hanuman Kireedom (Red pagoda plan) and Chethi (Ixora). Among, all of these flowers, Thumba flowers are given more importance in Pookalam as they are small in size and glitter in the the soft rays of the sun. 'Thumba Poo' is also considered to be the favourite flower of Lord Shiva and King Mahabali was a devout worshipper of Shiva.

pinched into small pieces to create intricate patterns on the floor, resembling a floral carpet. These colorful designs, often placed at entrances or temple premises, bring a touch of nature's beauty to the surroundings.

4. **Enhancing the Design:** Additional decorations such as small oil lamps (diyas) or even colored powders may be used to enhance the design.

It is a work of religious art, typically the team initiative of girls and women, who accomplish it with a delicate touch and a personal artistic sense of tone and blending. The pookkalam is similar to Rangoli which is made of powders of various colours and is popular in North India.



A Circular Pookalam Featuring Geometric Patterns and Vibrant Colors



An Octagonal Pookalam Design with Concentric Floral Patterns



**Spiral Elegance: A Circular Pookalam Featuring a Central Swirl Motif**



**Hexagonal Harmony: A Pookalam Central Six-Pointed Flower Pattern**

### **Pookalam Competitions**

Pookalam competitions are a popular aspect of Onam festivities, with schools, colleges, and social organizations hosting events where participants compete to create the most

elaborate and beautiful floral designs. These competitions encourage creativity and help preserve this traditional art form.

### **Conclusion**

Pookalam is more than just a floral arrangement; it is a celebration of life, culture, and nature. It reflects the artistic spirit and

cultural depth of Kerala, making it an enduring part of the Onam festival and a cherished tradition.