

Small Kites

Small kites have a fascination all their own. They can be complicated and highly decorated but they can also be simple, quick to make and quick to remake if you decide to try a new version. They fly slowly indoors and look good on the wall or on a shelf. But how do you get started?

The important thing is that small kites need light materials if they are to fly well. Tissue paper is a good starting point. For a simple kite take a flat piece, iron it if it is badly crumpled, and cut a rectangle 60mm by 80mm (see diagram). Press a line 5mm from a short edge by running a used-up ball point pen gently along it, and fold the strip over to make a stiff leading edge. Do not glue the strip down. Now mark a centre line of the kite and fold it gently to give a slight dihedral. That is the kite finished. To make the tail cut and join a strip of tissue paper 3mm wide and 900mm long. Scrumple the tail up to soften it and then straighten it out again. Glue one end to each rear corner of the kite to make a loop.

For flying line use thin sewing thread (the cheaper the better). Bridles are fiddly, so fix the thread directly to the kite 24mm from the leading edge. Use a weak glue so you can peel the line off later if you decide to move it. I use a very small drop of Copydex.

You can fly the kite indoors by walking holding the line in your hand, but it is easier if you use a stick. Find a stick about 0.8m long (a broken spar from your scrap box?) and fix the line to one end. Use a flying line a little shorter than the stick. The stick keeps the kite away from the turbulence caused by your body and hand if you walk, or you can sit in a chair and fly the kite by waving the stick slowly in a figure-eight over your head.

If you use a piece of masking tape to fix the line to the stick it is easy to change kites - of course you could use a proper clip or a clothes peg.

When this kite is working try variations. The kite will fly without a tail, but needs a dihedral angle of about 45degrees each side. Make another one, better, and decorate it. Try more interesting variations on the shape and different sizes.

For a more ambitious kite make a sparless box. Mark out a piece of tissue paper as shown in the second diagram. Press the dotted lines with your used-up ball point pen. Cut on the solid lines (I use a metal rule and a sharp craft knife). Fold over the long edge to make a stiff leading edge. Fold each of the other fold lines to 90degrees and you have a box shape. Glue the overlap. Now use a needle to thread the flying line (sewing thread) through the centre of one edge of the front box and out through the opposite edge. Glue both points so the thread is straight when the box is square. [If you decide later to try moving the tow point, cut the line off leaving the diagonal in place and then glue the line on in the new position].

To make smaller kites which fly well you need a lighter material. 'Tissuetex' is a very light paper, less than half the weight of normal tissue; it will make kites half the size of these or smaller. The kites will also fly more slowly which is more convenient indoors. Try specialist paper shops, or contact Pete Waddington of Airworks who sells it (tel 01274 676976).

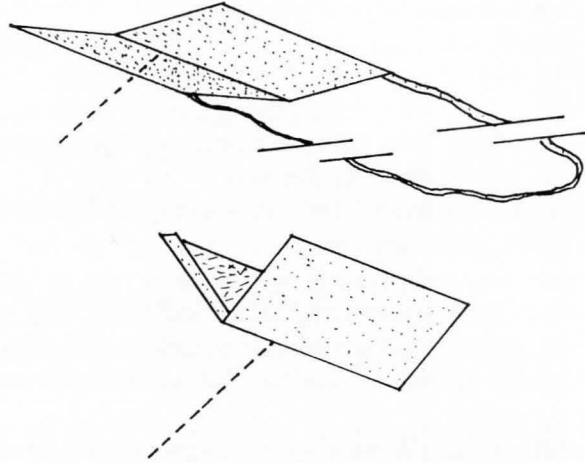
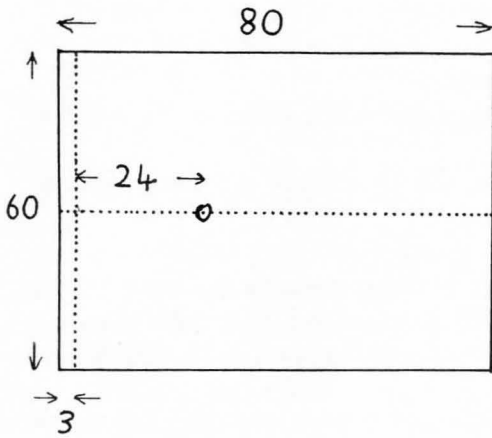
For a stiffer material which glints nicely in the lights try thin aluminised polyester sheet. This is a thinner version of giftwrap and is sold as 'space blanket' or handed out free after the London Marathon and similar events. It is also available, coloured, from The Highwaymen. Giftwrap itself works for slightly larger kites, but being heavier it flies faster.

Next time - Small kites with spars. Good flying

Nicolas Wadsworth

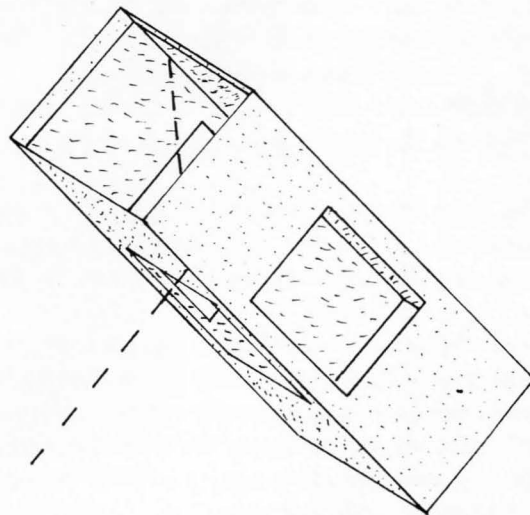
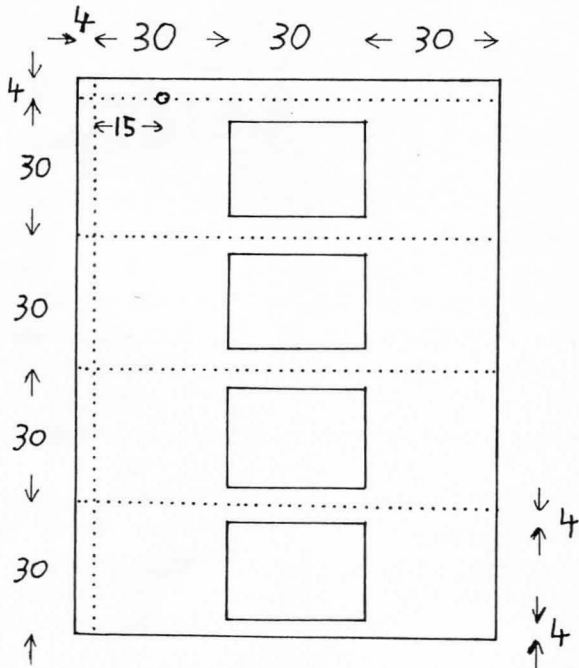
Small Kites

Simple Kite



Dimensions in millimetres

Sparless Box Kite



Small Kites by Nicolas Wadsworth