

# FUROSHIKI

*A magical cloth can be used in a multitude of ways.*

A *'furoshiki'* is an oversized square piece of material, dyed in any number of colors, hues and patterns, used for carrying and storing things, for wrapping gifts, spreading on the floor, or even decorating a room. Non-Japanese are amazed by the multitude of usages of this 'magical' cloth. For most visitors it's another hitherto unknown aspect of Japanese ways and culture.



## Origin of 'Furoshiki'

Dating back to the mid-Edo Period (1603-1868), *'furoshiki'* literally translated means 'bath spread'. First used in public bath houses, then a social center for the common people, *'furoshiki'* served as a wrap to hold the bather's clothes. Gradually, it came to be used as a convenient means for carrying a change of clothes and toiletries. The convenience of *'furoshiki'* to carry things spread quickly as commerce grew and people and goods moved around more for business and pleasure. Before becoming associated with public bath, *'furoshiki'* was known as *'hirazutsumi'*, meaning a flat, folded bundle. Eventually, the *'furoshiki's'* manifold usages extended to serve as a means for merchants to easily transport their wares or in other cases to protect and decorate a gift.



## How to use 'Furoshiki'

The intricate manner and beauty of Japanese traditional gift wrapping often amazes non-Japanese folks. Now, in some cities outside of Japan, *'furoshiki'* wrapping is finding a new exposure and demonstrations on 'how to' are becoming popular events while gathering enthusiastic on-lookers. It won't be long before *'furoshiki'* usage and wrapping becomes recognized around the world as a vibrant expression of Japanese ways and culture.

## 'Furoshiki' usage etiquette

In Japan, it is considered impolite to offer a gift directly by hand. To avoid a social gaffe, the *'furoshiki'* serves a useful purpose in an attractive manner. However, etiquette is a serious thing in Japan, and currently there's a debate on whether a gift wrapped in a *'furoshiki'* might not be interpreted that the receiving party is then expected to reciprocate the favour with a return gift wrapped in the original *'furoshiki'*.

*'Furoshiki'* were used for weddings from the mid-Edo Period until the mid-Showa Period (1926-1989), parents of the bride would prepare *'furoshiki'* with patterns such as cranes and other birds, fans, pine trees and waves, all symbols believed to usher in happiness and fortune. Today, most guests attend the wedding ceremony with the gift carried in a *'furoshiki'* but taken back home to avoid any possible misunderstanding. Still, there are those who



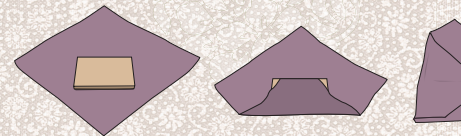
suggest the *'furoshiki'* should be considered as gift wrapping and therefore included with the gift. Nothing is simple in Japan!

## Transition of 'Furoshiki' Culture

*'Furoshiki'* gained increasing popularity during the Edo Period and users devised multiple ways to wrap things passing on the tradition until it became an indispensable tool in the life of the Japanese. The custom of using *'furoshiki'*, however, faded in the mid-70s, (mid-Showa Period). Mostly due to the proliferation of plastic shopping bags and other disposable materials, *'furoshiki'* users declined precipitously in Japan's post-war period. Happily however, there has come about a renewed interest in the reusable *'furoshiki'* for the sake of environmental protection. Due to today's concerns about the deteriorating eco-system in Japan (and the world), environmentally conscious shoppers carry their own bags and refuse those given at supermarkets or other stores. Although only just a very recent trend, the revival of the *'furoshiki'* is being promoted as a means of protecting the environment, this coupled with a new respect

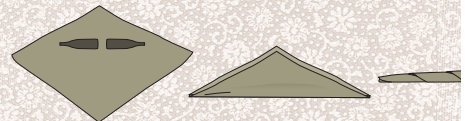
### 'HIRA-ZUTSUMI'

1. Place object to wrap up at the centre of a *'furoshiki'*
2. Gather two adjacent corners of the cloth and tie them in a reef knot.
3. Repeat with the other two corners.
4. Pass the knot through the gap formed under the first knot.
5. Pull together and presto! A handy-dandy handle.



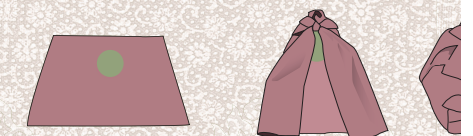
### 'NIHON-ZUTSUMI' (TWO BOTTLE WRAP)

1. Place two bottles on the diagonal line formed between two opposite corners of the *'furoshiki'*. Be sure the bottles do not touch each other.
2. Cover them with the corner of the cloth nearest you.
3. Roll them so that they are covered with the cloth.
4. Stand them up.
5. Tie the left and right ends together.



### 'SUIKA-ZUTSUMI' (WATERMELON WRAP)

1. Place object to wrap up at the centre of a *'furoshiki'*
2. Take two adjacent corners of the cloth and tie in a reef knot.
3. Repeat with the other two corners.
4. Pass the knot through the gap formed under the first knot.
5. Pull, and magically a useful handle is created.

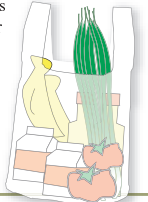




and re-evaluation of the values of Japanese traditional customs. A number of new and innovative uses of 'furoshiki' have been proposed on top of ancient, conventional techniques. The 'furoshiki' is becoming more and more versatile, being used not merely as a gift wrapper, but perhaps as a table covering or other ingenious interior decorations.

### Environmental Facts!

According to the result of Eco Event conducted by Japan's Environment Ministry in October 2005, one plastic bag, weighing 8 to ten grams requires from 16 to 18 ml of crude oil to produce. Furthermore, it emits 30 g carbon dioxide during the process of manufacture and a further 31g of carbon dioxide during incineration. Imagine, by NOT using one plastic bag about 61 grams of polluting carbon dioxide is prevented from further degrading our breathing air! As well, the Ministry determined that 30 billion plastic bags are annually used in Japan requiring 0.6 million km liters for its manufacture resulting in a mountainous 0.6 million tons of garbage sent to overburdened landfills. Foregoing the use of plastic bags for daily shopping is vital to our planet's environmental health. Instead, by using a traditional 'furoshiki', (a square of cloth) definitely lowers carbon dioxide emissions thus becoming a positive contribution to the prevention of global warming.



### Texture of 'Furoshiki'

'Furoshiki' are often decorated with traditional designs or by 'shibori' (silk crepe), or 'chirimen' (tie-dyed fabric). Modern 'furoshiki' can be made of a variety of materials, including silk, cotton, rayon, or nylon and of course are reusable. A 'furoshiki' is nothing more than a sheet of cloth, but it can adequately wrap anything regardless of shape, for example as gift wrapping because of its design and pleasing appearance.



SPECIAL "FUROSHIKI"

### Today's reappraisal

Compared with sacs and bags used in Western cultures, 'furoshiki' offers attractiveness and flexible usage regardless of the size and shape of goods to wrap up.

Light weight and easily stored when not in immediate usage.

Elasticity and flexibility are reappraised along with a positive contribution to benefit the environment.

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### INSTANT BAGS



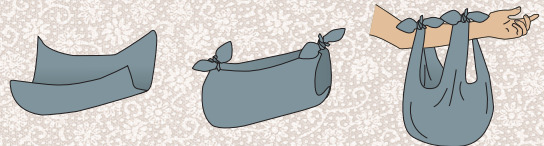
1. Fold a 'furoshiki'.
2. Shorten by tying up the two edges created by the folding.
3. Tie the other side of edges, which are not folded, and create a carrying.



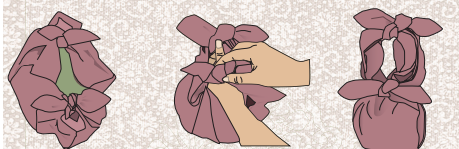
### OKAIMONO TSUTSUMI (SHOPPING RAP)



1. Spread a 'furoshiki' flat out.
2. Tie two sides of the 'furoshiki' edges (create two circles)
3. The two circles become two handles.



### KINCHAKU



1. Spread out a 'furoshiki'. Tie two sides of the 'furoshiki' edges (create two circles)
2. Thread one of the knots into the circle of the other side, putting goods inside the 'furoshiki'.
3. The knot (circle) becomes a handle.

