

# Christmas Cracker Hats

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English-style Christmas crackers weren't something that my family did with any regularity until a few years ago, when two of my sisters decided to turn them into an annual tradition, and started making crackers for everyone in the family.

They're such a fun addition to Christmas dinner festivities that we've all started looking forward to them each year -- so much so that my sisters' cracker-making has expanded to include a whole host of far-flung relatives and family friends. They now produce close 50 crackers annually!



About three years ago or so, I volunteered to help reduce the burden on my sisters, and I took over a portion of the cracker-making -- about a dozen or so.

Traditionally, Christmas crackers include a snapper, a paper crown, a silly joke, a candy treat, and a prize, all placed inside a small cardboard tube, which is then wrapped in tissue paper or gift wrap and tied with ribbon.



The snappers and the crowns are an essential part of the experience. But the snappers can be hard to find locally, and the crowns almost impossible.

I did find some crowns on Aliexpress, but the quality of the tissue is really poor: more like toilet paper than like tissue, and the hat usually rips when a person tries to

put it on. They cost about 20 cents apiece.

I realize that's still pretty cheap, and that these are meant to be a throw-away item. But still. I hate disposable items and don't like buying things of such poor quality, so I decided to see if I could come up with a readily available substitute for these poor-quality purchased crowns.

I considered making them from tissue paper, but then thought that if I was going to go to the trouble I should make them out of something sturdier.

It was then that I thought about my stacks of saved wall calendars -- mostly lovely scenery images that are too nice to throw out.



I disassembled the calendars and cut the colourful pages into 4" strips, which I glued together to make lengths of 23 1/2", large enough to fit most heads. I glued these strips into loops, then pressed the loop flat and folded it in half and then into thirds.



To finish the crown I cut across at an angle to make the tips. I have made about 130 of these so far -- enough to last my sisters and me through two years of cracker-making, with some to spare.

In addition to a paper crown and snapper, a silly joke, and a candy treat, each cracker also contains a small gift. Finding suitable prizes can be a bit of a challenge, since we like to include something cute or useful, selected with each recipient in mind, with the added proviso that the prize has to fit inside the cardboard tube along with the rest of the items.



We generally include a small toy, a mini tool or gadget, game pieces, or an item of jewellery: the photo shows a few of the prizes I've put into my crackers. It 's fun to come up with new ideas each year and to choose prizes that best suit each person on our list.