



TRANQUIL MEDITATION: Sitting in meditation helps to place you in a tranquil state before starting your next activity.
CHRISTIAN SCHLEGEL/THE EPOCH TIMES

The Humble Sitting Mat

Stay grounded—the floor might be a better way

By **SI MA YANG**
From Pureinsight.org

When you sit on a comfortable chair or lie in your bed, have you considered that ancient people sat and slept on the floor? The people of ancient China invented the first floor furniture—sitting mats. Wooden furniture pieces developed around the mat. There were short-legged lap desks, low tables, and chopping boards with legs.

The floor bed came about during the Warring States Period and became the prototype for all later dynasties. A complete collection of floor furniture was designed during the Qin and the Han dynasties that is representative of Chinese furniture with a low height.

Great changes occurred during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties. Minority groups of the north and west introduced taller furniture, for example, the Hu bed, a tall bed used by Chinese nomads. Taller furniture, such as round and square stools, became more acceptable. Beds and couches gradually were built higher, to the point where one could sit on the

edge and dangle one's feet in the air.

Tall furniture during the Sui and Tang dynasties, such as long-legged chairs, stools, and tables, became popular with those in the upper classes. During the Song dynasty, peasants also began to use long-legged beds, tables, towel racks, chairs, and stools.

Considering the thousands of years of using floor furniture, the custom of sitting on high chairs has only a brief history of about 1,000 years. One might wonder why it did not occur to the ancient Chinese that sitting on a taller chair might be more comfortable.

It does not appear to make sense, especially in light of the incredible technological developments and inventions in ancient China recorded in "Meng Xi Bi Tan" by Shen Kuo of the Song dynasty. Did it take that long for those intelligent ancient people to realize they could actually sit up higher in a long-legged chair?

In fact, it was a matter of taking a different course. Huang Di, the legendary ruler known as the Yellow Emperor, developed Chinese culture along a more spiritual path—that of

cultivation to improve the body and mind. All scholars sat cross-legged, paid attention to good posture, and regulated their breathing and qi before picking up their brush pen to write. Everyone practiced sitting in meditation and placed themselves in a tranquil state before they conducted any activity.

Later, Chinese society left behind the culture of cultivation for one of materialism. When cultivators departed the everyday world for secluded mountains during the Song dynasty, long-legged chairs and stools began to dominate the Chinese furniture market. When the spiritual and moral elements of ancient Chinese culture diminished in China, there was a corresponding transition from sitting on the floor to reclining in a chair.

Perhaps there are different perspectives to consider when we think of what progress means. Are we really going forward, or backward? We may be able to find valuable lessons from an advanced ancient culture that preferred the humble sitting mat.

Adapted with permission from Pureinsight.org

Dorm Room Decorating

By **RACHEL PAXTON**

When I helped my daughter move into her first college dorm room, I wasn't prepared for how tiny her room would be! Floor space was definitely scarce, and it was obvious she would have to come up with some creative storage solutions.

Decorating a dorm room can be tricky, because obviously your roommate will want to have a say in how the room is decorated. Whether you are moving into a dorm room for the first time or you are looking to re-decorate your existing dorm room, hopefully these decorating tips will give you and your roommate some creative ideas to give your dorm room a great new look that you both will love.

Vacuum sealed space bags are great for transporting clothing to college. You can purchase these inexpensively at Walmart or on eBay. You won't believe how much you can get into these bags. I don't recommend the extra large bags, because they are quite heavy when full and difficult to carry. These bags can be stored under a bed or stacked in the closet.

Small storage ottomans or benches can provide seating and storage areas, and are easy to move around and fit into small

spaces. They are great for storing blankets, pillows, hats, gloves, and a great place to stow away book bags or back packs.

Buy some decorative hat boxes in varying sizes for distinctive storage. Shaker boxes also make great storage. Both of these types of storage can be purchased inexpensively on eBay.

Hard case suitcases can be stacked up to create coffee or end tables, and used for storage. Most of these can be spray painted.

Hang a shoe pocket organizer in a closet or on the back of a door to hold small items (cosmetics, hairbrushes, CD players, pens, pencils, socks, underwear, etc.).

Stackable plastic crates and bins can be used to store things like books and snacks.

Baskets are easy to find and can be used to store many items. Most of these can be spray painted to match your decor.

Chalk board paint can be used to paint on many items to make them into a chalkboard message board.

Dry erase boards on the back of the door are handy for communicating with friends and roommates and making notes to yourself. You can also get a dry erase calendar at an office supply store to keep track of your busy schedule.

Picture frames can also make

great message boards by removing the glass and replace it with cork. Another idea is to fabric cover the piece of cardboard or a dry erase board. Most picture frames can be spray painted.

Area rugs can add a note of individuality to a room. They can also help warm up the room and help soundproof it as well.

Before you get started decorating, make sure you look over all the dorm room do's and don'ts in your college handbook. Many college handbooks are available on the college's web site.

It's also a good idea not to buy all your accessories before you actually see the dorm room for the first time. Dorm rooms are all different, and you want to make sure all your furniture and accessories will fit in the room. There are usually many thrift stores in college towns, so you shouldn't have a problem finding extra furniture after you get there.

Checkout these websites for more great ideas: <http://www.home-decorating-room-by-room.com> and <http://PebbleZ.com>.

Rachel Paxton is a freelance writer and mom who is the author of *What's for Dinner?*, an e-cookbook containing more than 250 quick easy dinner ideas. <http://www.creativehomemaking.com>.

Waste Not, Want Not

By **BARBARA GAY**
The Epoch Missouri Staff

One of my favorite sayings has always been, "If life gives you lemons, make lemonade." I guess you'd say I'm a real make-the-best-of-it kind of person. I also have a real problem with waste—especially food!—so whenever I find a way to avoid throwing away something and making good use of it instead, I love it!

Recently when I bought some "fresh" baked bread from my local grocery store, I was thoroughly disappointed when I cut into it and found that although the crust was almost over-done, the inside was the consistency of angel food cake—yuk!

The worst part was that I might have to throw it away; I really didn't want to do that, even though the cost was pretty minimal. So, I put it in the fridge, desperately hoping I would figure out something to do with it, and I eventually did.

I had found a meatloaf recipe that I decided to make later that week which called for bread crumbs, so I thought I might at least use it for that. Then, in the same recipe book, I also found something else: an idea for how to use up the rest of the loaf of bread.

Making croutons had never really occurred to me, and since I'd never done it, I was a bit unsure about it. But, the bread was there, so "no time like the present," as they say!

With a little help from the book to get started, I created my own recipe for croutons, and you can modify it to fit your taste as well. And, if you take a look at your local grocery store, you're sure to find a lot of possibilities for different "flavors" for your croutons.

Here's the basic idea:

1) Using a serrated bread knife (if you don't have one, get one—they make it possible to cut the slices evenly without squishing or smashing the bread), cut your loaf of bread into slices (whatever thickness you prefer).

2) Lay the slices in a baking pan (I like using a roasting pan), to form a single layer, and bake at 325 degrees F for 10 minutes. (I wait to cut the bread into cubes and remove the



CROUTONS: Don't waste old bread, instead make croutons.
PHOTOS.COM

crust until after it's lightly toasted—it cuts easier that way.)

3) Remove from the oven, cut the crust off all slices (set aside), and then cut the toasted bread into squares (whatever size you prefer), laying them back into the baking pan in a single layer.

4) For the seasoning you can choose either olive oil, or melted butter or margarine, and then at least a couple of spices—garlic and basil works well for a first try.

5) Sprinkle oil/butter/margarine over the toasted bread squares, followed by spices/seasonings. (It works well to use approximately ¼ cup oil and ½ teaspoon each spice per 12 slices of bread.)

6) Bake the croutons for another 20 minutes, stirring well after 10 minutes and again after removing from the oven.

7) Cool completely while draining on paper towels. Seal tightly in storage bags, containers, or jars. Use as needed for soups and salads (they also make great snacks!); keeps

for about 3 weeks at room temperature and indefinitely if frozen.

8) Now, remember the crusts? Using either a food processor or a plastic bag and a rolling pin (put the crusts in the bag and seal; use the rolling pin to crush into crumbs as fine as you need) make bread crumbs that you can use in all your favorite recipes.

Hints:

*You can save old slices of bread (the ends or ones that have gone stale) and use instead of a full loaf (freeze if not intending to process right away)

*Any bread will do, and each kind of bread will make a unique kind of crouton

*Try different spices and combinations of flavorings (check your local grocery store's choices)

*Put in decorative jars or canisters (buy cheap at garage sales or secondhand stores!) and give as gifts to all your salad-loving friends and relatives

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