



Dancing Ghosts

These six ghosts hold hands in a circle under a tree, gently bobbing up and down independently of each other, while playing a game of “Ring Around the Roses.”

I first made this decoration almost 15 years ago. These six ghosts danced under a large maple tree in our front yard for several years before I had to move into an apartment. That didn't stop me from putting them back up, as (with permission from the property manager) I stretched a rope between buildings and attached the whole getup to it. The home I live in now doesn't have an appropriate layout for them, so they are forced to sit in storage. But since a friend has asked for instructions on how to make this decoration, I decided I would share.

The sizes are not set in stone, you can adjust these items as needed to fit whatever area you have for them. Nor are the materials. When I first made it, I used eight-foot long “1x2s” for the structure. Every year I would realize a change that would make it easier to take down and store, or that would enhance the overall design. Nor are the number of ghosts. Making a smaller structure will accommodate fewer, smaller ghosts... as your individual needs may dictate.

Since I'm not putting it together for display this year, I've just taken photos to show the particulars. I hope it all makes sense... I hope it all comes together for you... I hope you like it... and I hope your ghosts will bring as much joy dancing for you as they have for me!

Ingredients



Structure

- Collapsible tent poles (3)
- Dark string
- Cable ties (small)
- Fishing tackle (Barrel Swivel w/ Interlock Snap), two per ghost
- Clear fishing line (tinted works best)
- Rope or other line for suspending the structure

Ghosts

- Muslin or cheese cloth (5' squares), two per ghost
- Styrofoam balls (or half balls), one per ghost.

Optional

- Wire
- Light clamp, low wattage light, and extension cord

Building the Structure

Lay out the tent poles with the centers crossing (Figure 1). Mine were approximately 8 ½ feet long, giving me approximately 4 feet between the ends of the poles (which is why you'll want to do this part outside). As mentioned above, you can use any long, straight material for this part, but I found that the flexibility of tent poles worked really well for independent (and therefore, more realistic) movement. I wrapped and twisted some wire around the centers of the poles to keep them together, but string will work just as well (Figure 2).

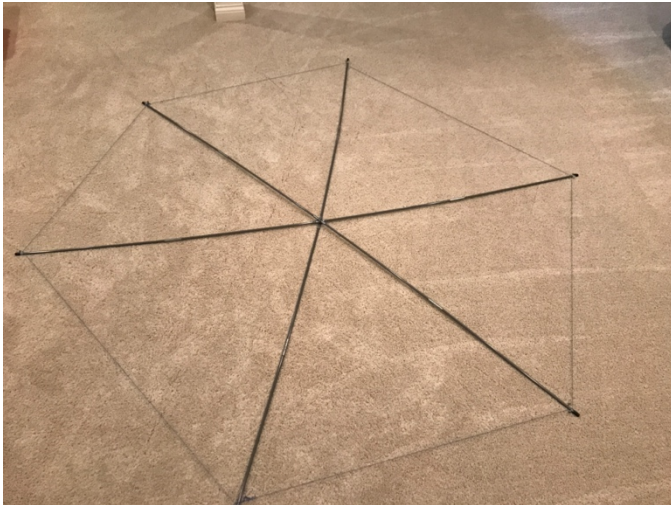


Figure 1



Figure 2

To hold the poles in this position and keep them from collapsing onto each other, I tied dark string between the ends. Leaving some slack here will help accommodate the ghosts' independent movements... too taut and their movements will be too stiff.

Using small cable ties, I attached a barrel swivel to the end of each pole (Figure 3). Using this hardware just makes it easier to take down and put back up every year.

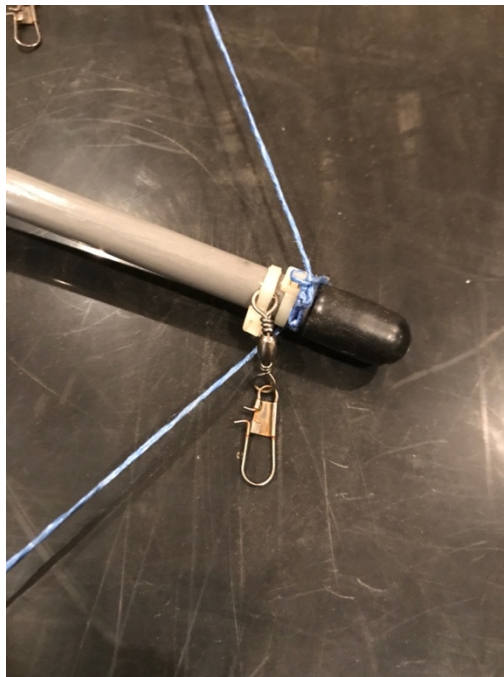


Figure 3

Now you need to make the connecting lines that are used to attach the ghosts to the structure (Figures 4, 5, and 6). The length of these will vary depending on where you hang your ghosts. Make them all the same length. They should be long enough to draw attention to the ghosts and away from the structure, but short enough to hold the ghosts off the ground (mine were 2 feet long). To do this, take a length of fishing line and tie a loop on one end. To the other end, attach a barrel swivel (again, it just makes it easier next year). Connect the loop to the barrel swivel on the end of the tent pole (Figure 7). Make one of these for each ghost/tent pole.



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

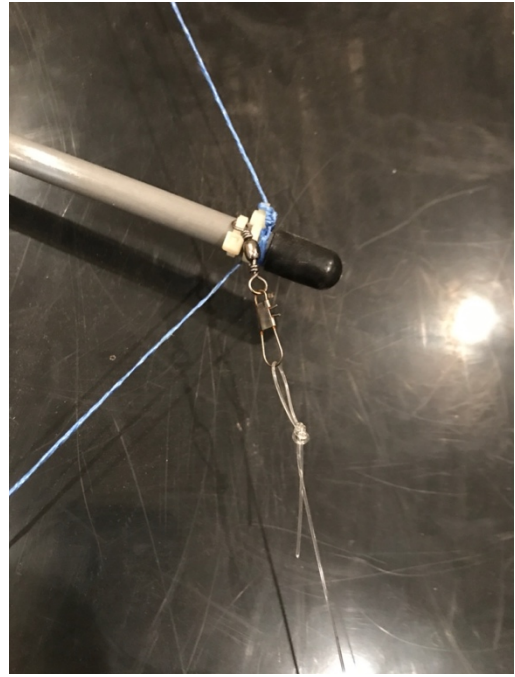


Figure 7

Making the Ghosts

To make the heads of the ghosts, I used 6" half-spheres of Styrofoam. I had planned to change these out with full spheres because even though it didn't show that way in real life, the photos showed them as halves. But I've also been toying with the idea of using plastic skulls... I haven't yet decided. (Side note: In fact, you could do this whole thing with skeletons instead of ghosts, which – although more expensive – would actually be easier. Just sayin'.) These "heads" need to have a loop of fishing line attached (Figure 8). I used a 12" needle to poke a hole through the center, but a bamboo skewer would work quite well. Feed some fishing line through this hole and tie off a loop at the end. Note: attaching a washer or other large item – such as a toothpick – to the fishing line underneath, will keep the loop from pulling through.

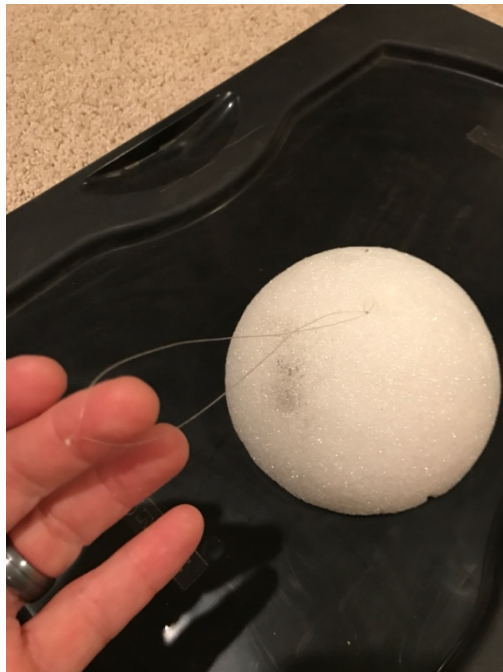


Figure 8

As shown in the "plan" drawing (Figure 9), each ghost is made of two squares of cheesecloth or muslin. I tried this with a single sheet (of actual sheet), but the fact that there were only four corners made it look... well... wrong. The cheesecloth is lighter and more translucent, so it's a better choice all around. Lay them out as shown so that there are eight corners.

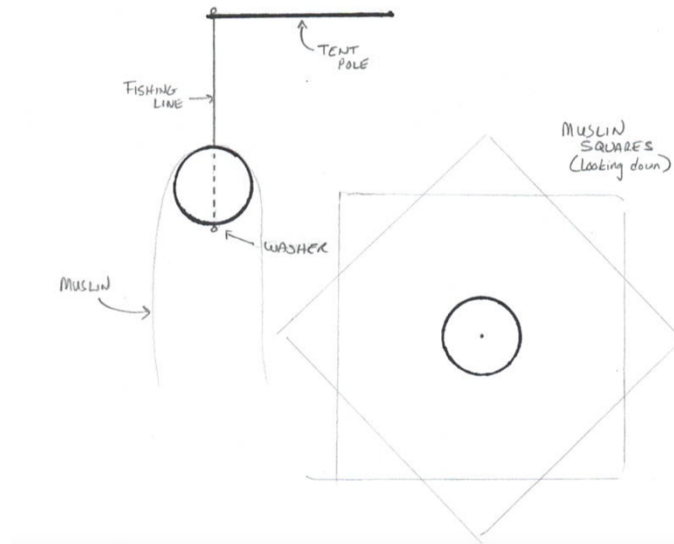


Figure 9

Place a head in the center of the material, “fish” (har, har) the loop through it, and connect this loop to the barrel swivel on the end of the tent pole (Figure 10). I rubbed a small amount of Elmer’s[®] white glue on the cheesecloth around where this line pokes through, just to keep it from fraying and getting bigger.

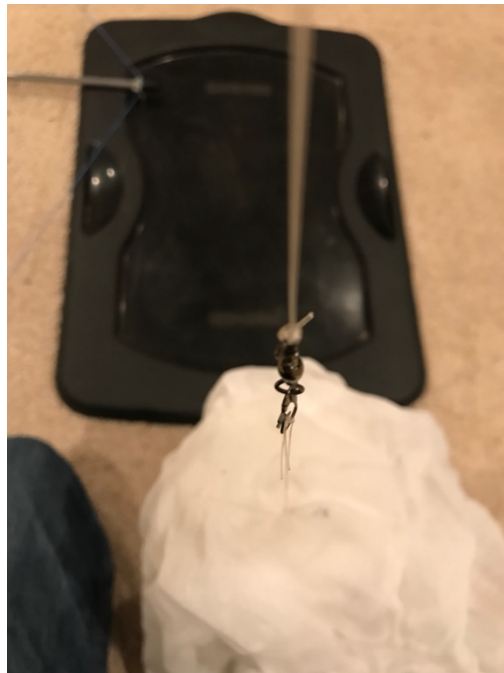


Figure 10

Erecting the Decoration

The location you choose for this decoration has only a few requirements: There must be something from which to hang it (a tall tree works wonderfully), and there must be sufficient room for the ghosts to move about, unobstructed. So, here's what I did:

I tossed a rope over a horizontal branch about 10 feet off the ground and tied the end to the center of the structure. Then I hoisted it until the ghosts were clear of the ground and tied off the rope. Voila!

MANDATORY

You **MUST** tie corners of the ghosts together so it will appear they are holding hands. They look stupid if they're just standing there (like 11-year-old boys at a middle school dance). I used a square knot (not too tight) so I could untie it later, and I tied opposite corners of the "bottom" piece of cloth. That made it look like the "arms" were coming out from under the sheets. Trust me, it looks better that way.

OPTIONAL

I put a small wattage bulb into a clamp light (Figure 11), attached it in the tree above the structure, and put it on a timer. This dimly lit the ghosts at night, adding just the right amount of lighting to see the ghosts, but not the structure. A black light might... hmmm.... Make sure you weatherproof this.



Figure 11

BEWARE...

One year, I ventured out at night to take a photo. As you can see from this photo, there are lots of leaves on the ground... EXCEPT within their circle! I promise you I did not set it up that way... To this day, I don't know how it happened (cue theme to The Twilight Zone)!

