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A PARTY draw

By Denise Davy
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Bhupi Rajput carefully traces the outline of a beautiful lotus flower onto a woman's hand using henna paste she squeezes from a cone.

The henna is a soft golden brown and during the next few days it will darken.

The other women at this henna party sip sangria and munch on cheese and crackers as they wait to have part of themselves decorated.

"The parties are always really, really fun," says Rajput. "It's also a relaxing atmosphere."

When Rajput started organizing henna parties six years ago, she never thought she'd be travelling around southern Ontario nonstop trying to keep up with the demand.

The talented henna artist from Cambridge divides her time in the warm months between bridal showers (she averages three a week) and weekend festivals, including dragon boat races and multicultural shows.

From October to May, she is rushing about attending women's shows, yoga shows, women's conferences, scrapbooking parties and corporate parties.

"I'm really, really busy," says the 39-year-old mother of two.

Bridal showers are a huge part of her summer business, with most of the demand from women with ties to India and Pakistan.

Some women want henna tattoos because they're thinking of having a permanent tattoo, and want to test some designs and decide where they want it on their body.

The most popular spots are ankles, lower back, shoulder and upper arms.

"They've seen it on TV or in a movie and say it's something they always wanted to get," said Rajput.

The darker your skin tone, the darker the tattoo. Most henna tattoos last one to four weeks.

When Rajput hosts a henna party, she usually serves



Bhupi Rajput draws a design on a woman's leg.

vegetable pakora, coconut balls and lentil soup.

Rajput learned the ancient art of henna (or mehendi) eight years ago while backpacking through India.

She was living in England and had a degree in design technology.

When she moved to Canada, she decided to take up the craft full time, much to the delight of loyal customers, who range in age from teenagers to women in their 80s. She has given henna tattoos to children as young as three.

The henna she uses is all natural and she cautions people against using black henna as it can contain harmful chemicals.

Henna is actually a green powder derived from the leaves of the Lawsonia Inermis plant.

The powder is mixed with other substances and applied to the skin.

Many of her most popular designs are her own, including dragonflies, lotus, Indian love goddesses and Chinese characters.

She says her art is influenced by the latest trends in fashion and Bollywood cinema. She also studies traditional techniques and designs.

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THE HISTORY OF mehendi

No one knows how many centuries henna has been used as a cosmetic, but the earliest signs of henna have been found in Egyptian tombs. It is more difficult to pinpoint in countries such as India where bodies are cremated, not mummified or buried.

Mehendi grows in hot climates, and has many uses other than cosmetic.

Mehendi is most often seen on auspicious occasions.

Its main function is to decorate the hands and feet of a bride (and sometimes a groom) for the wedding ceremony.

Mehendi is also used to mark such celebrations as an engagement, birthday or just to celebrate life.

The connection of adorning with it on the wedding night is linked to the union of husband and wife.

An Indian woman will wear henna until she is widowed.

Mehendi is also included in the Kama Sutra as one of the 64 arts for women.

Mehendi is also used for the Ghodh Barahi, or the seventh month of pregnancy, to celebrate that the baby can now be born in the last trimester without complications.



Ted Brellisford, the Hamilton Spectator

Bhupi Rajput travels around southern Ontario attending bridal showers, weekend festivals, women's shows, yoga shows, conferences, scrapbooking parties, corporate events and in-home henna parties. The parties, she says, are 'really, really fun.'



Henna tattoos last from one to four weeks.



In some cultures, the pregnant woman will have her hands and feet adorned with mehendi, just like a bride.

All of Rajput's henna recipes are available on her website at mehendi.com.

Or you can call her at 519-620-9410.

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