

# Kids can create 'peas of art'

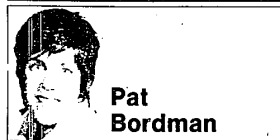
Each year the American Society of Civil Engineers sponsors a contest through the University of Detroit Department of Civil Engineering to see who can construct the sturdiest bridge made entirely of toothpicks and white glue. The bridge must meet several criteria including a maximum weight of 1 1/2 pounds, 6 inches width, 10-14 inches length, and be capable of supporting at least a 3 pound weight.

The winner of this contest is determined by the bridge that weighs the least but supports the most weight. Enormous amounts of toothpicks and glue go into the building of these struc-

tures. Though the contestants use frivolous materials, they are serious about their work.

Children are just as serious about their projects. Here is an idea that imitates the essence of this contest, yet is easy enough for a child to do. Instead of using glue to hold the whole gizmo together, why not use something a little more fanciful as connector — like peas!

What is needed are dried whole peas. (They can be found in the dried food section of some of the smaller independent food stores.) Place about a cup of dried peas in a quart container filled



Pat Bordman

with water and leave overnight. By morning the peas will have absorbed the water and will be filled out and ready for use.

**SIMPLY PLACE** one toothpick at a time carefully into the pea. Increase the size of the construction one pea and one toothpick at a time. More than one toothpick can be inserted into a pea, but gentleness is the byword.

Don't allow the peas to be exposed to the air for too long or they will dry out again and be difficult to work with. The peas tend to split in two if they are too dry.

The amazing aspect of this project is that the peas will dry with the toothpicks inserted in them and the construction becomes quite sturdy and fairly resilient. It could be called a "peas of art."

By the way, the winner of the U-D contest is decided by suspending weights from the center of span of the

bridge. The bridge supporting the most weight before breaking is the winner. The winner's bridge is actually destroyed to prove how much weight it can hold.

Unlike the students involved in this contest, children know that permanence is not what is important here. Creativity, ingenuity of design, and the process itself count.

The contest is open to area high school students. If you know a young person interested in such things, Mark Ahlheim, chairman of the Engineering and Science Council at U-D can supply further details about the contest which will take place this year on March 28. Patricia Bordman has taught elementary school and conducted workshops and lectures on education. She also has studied photography at Oakland University. She and her husband have two daughters and live in Farmington Hills.

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