

Rainstick

A **rainstick** is a long, hollow tube partially filled with small pebbles or beans that has small pins or thorns arranged helically on its inside surface. When the stick is upended, the pebbles fall to the other end of the tube, making a sound reminiscent of rain falling. The rainstick is believed to have been invented by the Mapuches and was played in the belief it could bring about rainstorms. It was also found on the Chilean coasts, though it is not certain if it was made by the Incas. Rainsticks are usually made from any of several species of cactus. The cacti, which are hollow, are dried in the sun. The spines are removed, then driven into the cactus like nails. Pebbles or other small objects are placed inside the rainstick, and the ends are sealed. A sound like falling water is made when the rainstick has its direction changed to a vertical position.

Two species of cactus used are: *Eulychnia acida* and *Echinopsis pachanoi*.

Similar instruments can also be found in Southeast Asia, Australia and Africa, where it is often made using bamboo rather than dried cactus.

Rainsticks may also be made with other common materials like paper towel rolls instead of cactus, and nails or toothpicks instead of thorns, and they are often sold to tourists visiting parts of Latin America and also the Southwestern United States (which has a history of Spanish and Mexican cultural influence).

Further reading

- Exploratorium Article [Make your own rainstick](http://www.exploratorium.edu/frogs/rain_stick/index.html) (http://www.exploratorium.edu/frogs/rain_stick/index.html)
- "The Rain Stick" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Sb7OfXGhUE>
- Moseley, Christine, and Carmen Fies. "Rainsticks: Integrating Culture, Folklore, and the Physics of Sound." *Science Activities* 44.1 (2007): 2-5. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 27 Sept. 2011.
- Nugent, Jeff. "Permaculture Plants, agaves and cacti" SARI Sept 2011



Traditional style cactus rainstick

Chilean Rainstick

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sound of a rainstick	
Classification	percussion instrument
Hornbostel –Sachs classification	112.13+133.1 (vessel rattle with friction)
Inventor(s)	Multiple possible origins: best known is the Mapuche design; similar instruments in Southeast Asia, Africa and Australia
Related instruments	
HoshoMaracasRainstickVibraslap	

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