



## What are Devil Sticks?

Devil sticks, flower sticks, juggling sticks, or simply sticking. This prop is well recognised around the world by many people, and not just those in the flow arts community. Devil sticks were a common sight at Grateful Dead shows in the 60's and 70's, and a popular kids toy in the 90's.

This trio of sticks is made up of two hand sticks, or control sticks, which are used to juggle and manipulate a larger baton. This baton can be straight with tassels on each end, or it can be tapered, thinner in the centre and wider at the ends, with no tassels.



So, what's the difference between devil sticks and flower sticks?

The style with the tassels are sometimes called 'flower sticks' and the tapered style is often referred to as 'devil sticks', although many people use the term 'devil sticks' for both styles as this name is more widely recognised.

## A Brief History

It's commonly believed that juggling sticks were used in ancient China over 2000 years ago, although there is no hard proof of this. They were referred to as 'the flower sticks' due to the large tassels attached at each end of the baton, and they were longer than the ~60cm sticks we generally see today.

A legend says that a troupe of Tibetan performers played in front of the Emperor of China. He was so blown-away by their stick play that he proclaimed there must be a devil spirit in the stick giving it a life of its own, thus the name 'devil sticks'.

The first ever image of juggling sticks comes from Prague and dates back to 1820. Two brothers of Indian heritage, Mooty and Medua Samme, were touring Europe from 1813 to 1827, performing what they called 'Chinese Stick Play'. The brothers usually performed a mix of traditional Indian style with European influences.



Image credit: [Juggle.org](http://Juggle.org)



Juggling sticks remained popular in the Orient and Europe throughout the 19th century, and then in 1906, Adele Purvis Onri and Rosa Lee Onri (of The Onri Troupe) performed with the Ringling Brothers Circus, making them the first known women to perform with juggling sticks.

In 1939, juggler George Latour impressed audiences and pushed the boundaries of sticking when he [performed](#) using pool cues instead of a more traditional set of sticks. Now, if you've ever played with juggling sticks, you'll know that balance is extremely important in your sticks. Using off-centred pool cues shows some serious skill.

During the 1950's, juggling sticks started to become more popular within the hobbyist juggling community and were no longer just for professionals. By the 1970's, they'd exploded in popularity and were regular attendees at Grateful Dead concerts and various other events.

By the 90's, juggling sticks had become a common Christmas gift request, they were being used in youth circus classes as a fun prop for kids, and technical jugglers were looking for and finding new tricks, pushing the general skill level higher and higher.

If you're interested in a more thorough account of this stick trio, check out [this video](#) by Lukas Reichenbach ([record holder](#) for many impressive stick tricks!) that delves deep into the history and origins of devil sticks.

## Modern Sticks and Sticking

Like most props, modern juggling sticks have evolved in the materials used to make them and the way they're manipulated.

Instead of only wooden sticks, we can now also find polycarbonate or other types of plastic sticks, carbon fibre sticks, LED sticks, and of course, the trusty aluminium fire sticks. Most modern sticks come with some form of grip (often silicone or some other type of rubber) covering the length of both the baton and the hand sticks. This grip aids with control and makes the sticks easier to manipulate. If you're after an added level of difficulty, you can find sticks with no grip.

Modern sticking, as with most other forms of object manipulation, has evolved remarkably over the years. Early stick spinners were commonly seen using more basic (in terms of today's tricks) movements combined with rhythm to create their captivating performances. Nowadays, it's more and more common to see tricks involving lots of fast spins, throws, contact moves, and multiple batons.



Juggling sticks have become very popular at various competitions and festivals around the world. The Japan Juggling Festival, first held in Tokyo in 1999, often sees performances by an extremely high calibre of stick jugglers, many of whom juggle more than just a single baton with extraordinary skill. Meanwhile, in the US, the World Juggling Federation was founded in 2000 with the motive to increase awareness of juggling as a recognised sport - competitive juggling, which of course includes devil sticks.

## Fun Fact

The [Guinness World Record](#) for the most helicopter spins with devil sticks in one minute is Carlos Mir from the US. In 2021, Mir completed a whopping 113 helicopter spins in just 60 seconds! That's almost 2 rotations per second!