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The first Russian nested doll set was carved in 1890 by [Vasily Zvyozdochkin](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasily_Zvyozdochkin) and designed by [Sergey Malyutin](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergey_Malyutin) who was a folk crafts painter in the [Abramtsevo](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abramtsevo_Colony%22%20%5Co%20%22Abramtsevo%20Colony) estate of [Savva Mamontov](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savva_Mamontov%22%20%5Co%20%22Savva%20Mamontov), a Russian industrialist and patron of arts.[[3]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matryoshka_doll#cite_note-russianlife-3)[[4]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matryoshka_doll#cite_note-Billington-4)

The doll set was painted by Malyutin. Malyutin's doll set consisted of eight dolls—the outermost was a girl in a traditional dress holding a [rooster](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rooster). The inner dolls were girls and a boy, and the innermost a baby

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Zvyozdochkin and Malyutin were inspired by a doll from [Honshu](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honshu), the main island of [Japan](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan). Sources differ in descriptions of the doll, describing it as either a round, hollow [daruma doll](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daruma_doll%22%20%5Co%20%22Daruma%20doll), portraying a bald old [Buddhist](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist) monk,[[5]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matryoshka_doll#cite_note-5) or a [Seven Lucky Gods](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Lucky_Gods) nesting doll.

Savva Mamontov's wife presented the dolls at the [Exposition Universelle](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exposition_Universelle_%281900%29) in Paris, where the toy earned a bronze medal. Soon after, matryoshka dolls were being made in several places in Russia and shipped around the world.

**Themes in dolls**

***known as a Russian nesting doll, Stacking dolls, or Russian doll,***[***[1]***](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matryoshka_doll#cite_note-1)***is a set of wooden***[***dolls***](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doll)***of decreasing size placed one inside another. The name "matryoshka" (матрёшка), literally "little matron", is a***[***diminutive***](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diminutive)***form of Russian female first name "Matryona" (Матрёна) or "Matriosha".***[***[2]***](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matryoshka_doll#cite_note-2)

***A set of matryoshkas consists of a wooden figure which separates, top from bottom, to reveal a smaller figure of the same sort inside, which has, in turn, another figure inside of it, and so on.***

***The first Russian nested doll set was made in 1890 by***[***Vasily Zvyozdochkin***](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasily_Zvyozdochkin)***from a design by***[***Sergey Malyutin***](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergey_Malyutin)***, who was a folk crafts painter at [Abramtsevo](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abramtsevo_Colony%22%20%5Co%20%22Abramtsevo%20Colony). Traditionally the outer layer is a woman, dressed in a [sarafan](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarafan%22%20%5Co%20%22Sarafan), a long and shapeless traditional Russian peasant***[***jumper dress***](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jumper_dress)***. The figures inside may be of either gender; the smallest, innermost doll is typically a baby turned from a single piece of wood. Much of the artistry is in the painting of each doll, which can be very elaborate. The dolls often follow a theme; the themes may vary, from***[***fairy tale***](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairy_tale)***characters to***[***Soviet leaders***](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_leaders)**. Matryoshka dolls are often referred to as "babushka dolls", *babushka* meaning "grandmother" or "old woman".**

Matryoshka dolls[[7]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matryoshka_doll#cite_note-FromRussia-7) are often designed to follow a particular theme; for instance, peasant girls in traditional dress. Originally, themes were often drawn from tradition or [fairy tale](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairy_tale) characters, in keeping with the craft tradition—but since the late 20th century, they have embraced a larger range, including Russian leaders.

Modern artists create many new styles of nesting dolls. Common themes include floral, [Christmas](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas), [Easter](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter), religious, animal collections, portraits and [caricatures](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caricatures) of famous politicians, musicians, athletes, astronauts, "robots," and popular movie stars. Today, some Russian artists specialize in painting themed matryoshka dolls that feature specific categories of subjects, people or nature. Areas with notable matryoshka styles include [Sergiyev Posad](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergiyev_Posad%22%20%5Co%20%22Sergiyev%20Posad), Semionovo (now the town of [Semyonov](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semyonov_%28town%29)),[[8]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matryoshka_doll#cite_note-8) [Polkhovsky Maidan](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Polkhovsky_Maidan&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Polkhovsky Maidan (page does not exist)), and [Kirov](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kirov%2C_Kirov_Oblast).

**Political Matryoshka**[**Edit**](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Matryoshka_doll&action=edit&section=3)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s during [Perestroika](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perestroika), freedom of expression allowed the [leaders of the Soviet Union](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_leaders_of_the_Soviet_Union) to become a common theme of matryoshka, with the largest doll featuring then-current leader [Mikhail Gorbachev](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Gorbachev).

These became very popular at the time, affectionately earning the nickname of a "Gorby", namesake of Gorbachev. With the periodic succession of Russian leadership after the [collapse of the Soviet Union](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collapse_of_the_Soviet_Union), newer versions would start to feature [Russian presidents](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_presidents_of_Russia) [Boris Yeltsin](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Yeltsin), [Vladimir Putin](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Putin), and [Dmitry Medvedev](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dmitry_Medvedev).

Most sets feature the current leader as the largest doll, with the predecessors decreasing in size. The remaining smaller dolls may feature other former leaders such as [Leonid Brezhnev](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonid_Brezhnev), [Nikita Khrushchev](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikita_Khrushchev), [Joseph Stalin](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin), [Vladimir Lenin](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin), and sometimes several historically significant [Tsars](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Russian_rulers%22%20%5Co%20%22List%20of%20Russian%20rulers) such as [Nicholas II](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_II) and [Peter the Great](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_the_Great). [Yuri Andropov](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri_Andropov) and [Konstantin Chernenko](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konstantin_Chernenko) almost never appear due to the short length of their respective terms. However, some less common sets may feature the current leader as the smallest doll, with the predecessors increasing in size, usually with Stalin or Lenin as the largest doll.

Some sets that include Yeltsin preceding Gorbachev were made during the brief period between the [establishment of President of the RSFSR](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_presidential_referendum%2C_1991) and the collapse of the Soviet Union, as both Yeltsin and Gorbachev were concurrently in prominent government positions. During Medvedev's presidency, Medvedev and Putin may both share the largest doll due to Putin still having a prominent role in the government as [Prime Minister of Russia](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Russia). As of Putin's re-election as the 4th President of Russia, Medvedev will usually succeed Yeltsin and preceded Putin in stacking order, due to Putin's role solely as the largest doll.

Political matryoshka usually range between 5 and 10 dolls per set.

**World record**[**Edit**](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Matryoshka_doll&action=edit&section=4)

The largest set of matryoshka dolls in the world is a 51-piece set hand-painted by Youlia Bereznitskaia of Russia, completed in 2003. The tallest doll in the set measures 53.97 centimetres (21.25 in); the smallest, 0.31 centimetres (0.12 in). Arranged side-by-side, the dolls span 3.41 metres (11 ft 2.25 in).[[9]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matryoshka_doll#cite_note-9)

**As metaphor**[**Edit**](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Matryoshka_doll&action=edit&section=5)

Matryoshkas are used [metaphorically](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphor), as a [design paradigm](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design_paradigm), known as the “matryoshka principle” or “nested doll principle”. It denotes a recognizable relationship of “object-within-similar-object” that appears in the design of many other natural and crafted objects. Examples of this use include the [matrioshka brain](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matrioshka_brain%22%20%5Co%20%22Matrioshka%20brain), the [Matroska](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matroska%22%20%5Co%20%22Matroska) media-container format, and the Russian Doll model of [multi-walled carbon nanotubes](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_nanotube#Multi-walled).

The [onion metaphor](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onion_model) is of similar character. If the outer layer is peeled off an onion, a similar onion exists within. This structure is employed by designers in applications such as the layering of clothes or the design of tables, where a smaller table nests within a larger table, and a smaller one within that.