

Formats of the Danish Christmas seals (Julemærker)

Between 1904 and 1950, one Julemærke was issued each year, printed in sheets of 50 individual seals. The motifs range from depictions of the reigning royal couple to landscapes, national-historical themes, the work of the Julemærkefonden, children, and—more and more prominently—Christmas themes. In 1951, four different seals appeared for the first time.



Since then, the number has tended to rise, with at times considerable variations. The range extends from 2 seals in the years 1958, 1981, 1988, and 2001 up to 64 seals in different designs and sizes in 2024. Counting the provisional issues as well (see below), no fewer than 100 different Julemærker were released in 1959.

These individual seals are usually perforated. But imperforate versions have existed since the very first issue. The 1904 issue also exists with sawtooth roulette.

If one encounters an imperforate pair with a blank field in the center, it originates from a printing sheet: the printing sheets have always contained several of the large panes described below, separated by unprinted areas to allow division into individual large panes.

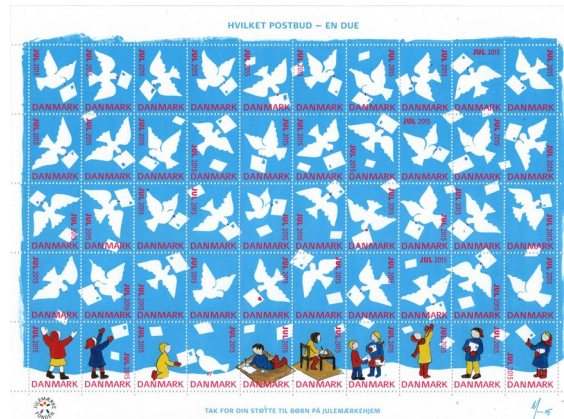
On three occasions (1951, 1959, and 1982), the planned new seals could not be completed in time for nationwide distribution across Denmark. In those cases, earlier issues were provisionally overprinted with the new year's date.



Large Panes

Since 1951, each year's large panes have followed a new overarching theme or key motif and are designed as a cohesive artwork by a single artist. The individual Julemærker either depict that theme each in its own right, or they represent cropped sections of a larger composite design.

On three occasions (1970, 2003, and 2015), Queen Margrethe II of Denmark personally designed the Julemærker.



Large panes exist in perforated and imperforate form and—since 2009—also as die-cut issues.





Specialist collectors further distinguish the perforated panes by the exact configuration of perforation along the four outer margins of the pane.

In graphics and color, the perforated and die-cut panes are almost always identical. An exception occurred in 2009, when a second, short-notice printing of the die-cut pane became necessary and differs in color from the first printing.

In 2021, two designs in the die-cut large pane corresponded to paired designs in the perforated large pane. As a result, the perforated large pane contains, to the best of my knowledge, the only Julemærke without any inscription whatsoever that is not a Scala proof (see below). Whether this was a conscious design decision or an oversight, I cannot judge.



Miniature Sheets

Since 1982, in addition to the large panes, miniature sheets have also been issued. These initially contained 8 individual seals, and since 1998, 10, all surrounded by a margin.

For many decades, the seals in the miniature sheets were identical to the corresponding individual seals in the large panes. Since 2013, however, they have increasingly begun to differ: while the overall design of the large pane is retained, details are altered.

Since 2009, miniature sheets have also been issued in a die-cut, self-adhesive version.



Miniature sheets are an independent distribution format and, since 1982, have also been included in perforated form in the souvenir folders. Between 1982 and 1985, and again since 2009, they have also supplied the annual Julemærke booklets. In those years they thus simultaneously served the function of booklet panes (see below).

In 1982, there were two variants of the miniature sheet: in one version, a female Christmas elf appears in the upper left; in the other, a male elf.

In 1998, for the first time, a single miniature-sheet seal deviated from its large-pane counterpart, due to a slightly different arrangement of the Julemærker in the two formats.



Since 2013, the number of miniature-sheet seals differing from their large-pane counterparts has steadily increased. Sometimes the variations are minor,

sometimes they are very noticeable. Below are some examples. In each case, the seal from the large pane is shown first, followed by its counterpart from the miniature sheet. For certain Julemærker, one has to look very closely to recognize from which format they originate (for example, the fox).



For 2020 and again since 2022, the miniature sheets still reflect the overall design of the corresponding large pane, but all of the seals in the miniature sheets differ consistently in their details from those of the large pane.

In addition, since 2009 the Julemærkefonden has gifted special miniature sheets in slightly altered designs to its supporters. These usually carry inscriptions such as “Til vores JulemærkeVenner” (“For our Julemærke friends”), “Til dig som Julemærkeven” (“For you as a Julemærke friend”), and/or a heart with the word “Tak” (“Thank you”). These special miniature sheets appear only in perforated form, and a considerable number of their seals are found neither in the large panes nor in the regular miniature sheets.





Quite often, the regular and the special miniature sheets match fairly closely apart from small details. In some years, however, they differ markedly, as each sheet highlights different sections of the current large pane, with additional adjustments in detail. An example from 2018 shows this clearly.



In 2021, one of the seals in the special miniature sheet included the usual identification mark, whereas its counterpart in the perforated large pane did not (see above).



Since 2013, the Christmas seals in normal size can therefore be grouped as follows:

- found only in the large pane (the majority of seals),
- identically present in the miniature sheet as well,
- found exclusively in the miniature sheet (either in similar or completely different design).
- For perforated seals, an additional distinction is made between regular and special miniature sheets.

Booklets and Booklet Panes

Julemærke booklets were introduced in 1982. Until 1985, the panes they contained were identical with the corresponding miniature sheets in perforated form. The same has again been the case since 2008.

Between 1986 and 2007, most booklet panes differed from the miniature sheets by a narrow blank margin. This was due to the adhesive binding used for the Julemærke booklets during those years. Only in 1999 and 2004, when the miniature sheets had no colored margin, was there no visible difference between booklet panes and miniature sheets.



Booklet panes and miniature sheets also often differ slightly in size for production-technical reasons.

In 1982 there were two different miniature sheets/booklet panes (see above), which resulted in two variants of the booklet.



Between 1982 and 1997, one booklet was issued each year, containing a total of 24 Christmas seals in three identical panes of eight seals each (pane: 4 x2).

Since 1998, there have been two booklets each year: one containing 10 seals (pane: 5 x 2) and another 30 seals. Since 1999, both booklets have differed in cover design.

Scala Proofs

A special distribution and collecting format for large panes and miniature sheets/booklet panes are the so-called Scala proofs: these document the individual printing stages up to completion on separate sheets.



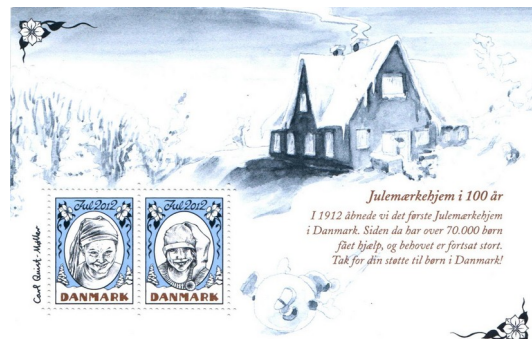
The AFA Julemærke catalog already records such a Scala proof for the very first issue of 1904. Scala proofs exist both in perforated and imperforate form.

Souvenir Sheets

For the first time in 1953, and again in 1958, two imperforate souvenir sheets were issued in Copenhagen on the occasion of exhibitions devoted to Christmas seals. They contained reprints of Christmas seals from Denmark, Iceland, and the former Danish West Indies.



Since then, a further twelve souvenir sheets have followed, almost all perforated (the only exception being 1980). They were mostly issued on the occasion of philatelic events, sometimes also to mark anniversaries in the history of the Danish Julemærker.



These souvenir sheets usually contain reprints of earlier Danish Christmas seals, occasionally in enlarged format (double height and width of the original). On the back of these reprints there is almost always a note indicating that they are reprints and the year of issue.

Reprints

Since 1976, at least two reprints of earlier Julemærker (from 1904 onward) have been issued each year, usually containing ten perforated seals. The margin shows both the original year of issue and the year of reprint. The reverse likewise bears a note on the reprint and the year of reprint.



Several of the early Julemærke issues have been reprinted multiple times in various years after 1976.



Since 1992, two reprint sheets have regularly been issued each year, presenting the Julemærker in chronological order as reprints.

MEGA Julemærker

In 2011, another issue format was introduced with the so-called MEGA Julemærker: five die-cut, self-adhesive seals per year, based on the design of the current large pane. They are mounted on a liner and each is twice the height and width of the normal Julemærker.



Annual and Souvenir Folders

From the very beginning, the respective Julemærke was also presented in an “annual folder.” This was a fold-out card, with one seal affixed to the front cover and several (usually 3 × 3) seals from a large pane affixed inside. From 1942 onward, the annual folders were graphically designed to match the motif of the current Julemærke.



Since 1979, the so-called souvenir folders have replaced the annual folders. The 1979 folder is unusually large in format compared with both the earlier annual folders and the later souvenir folders. It contains either the right or the left half of the large pane, without margin.

In the following two years, parts of the current large pane were still inserted into the annual folder. Since 1982, however, the souvenir folders have consistently

contained the current miniature sheet. In their format, they resemble the Julemærke booklets, but are somewhat taller and wider.



Postal Stationery

Strictly speaking, postal stationery presupposes the imprint of a valid postage stamp. Since Christmas seals are not postage stamps, there can be no true postal stationery items among them. The term is used here only by analogy for postcards and envelopes bearing imprinted Christmas seals.

As early as 1905, a postcard appeared with the year's Christmas seal printed in the upper left corner. A reprint followed in 1980. In 2014, another postcard was issued with an additional imprint.



Since the 1980s, both postal services and, in particular, Danish banks have used envelopes or postcards with preprinted franking indicia that incorporate the design of one of the current Christmas seals—or at least a sketch of that year's basic motif.



Finally, mention should be made of the incorporation of the annual Julemærke motif into cancellation marks.



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