

## Twist of the Wrist

A simple turn of the hand and catch of the foot helps you make Natarajasana even more expressive

By Kristin McGee

**N**atarajasana, also known as Dancing Shiva Pose, is one of my favorites. I feel so majestic and alive when practicing this uplifting backbend because it's done standing upright. Once in the pose, I feel like a graceful ballerina or figure skater. But, if I haven't fully warmed up or if I come into the pose incorrectly, I feel like a total klutz!

I've always known I needed to be very open in my shoulders, back, hip flexors, and psoas muscles in order to do the full expression of this asana. What I didn't know, until recently, is that a simple turn of the hand and proper catch of the foot could make the pose that much easier—and much more gentle on my body. This wonderful adjustment also prevents me from losing control of everything else just because I have to twist my shoulder and arm in such an awkward way to complete the pose. Now, I can be the graceful Swan Lake dancer or Olympic ice skater who brings her body into position with such ease and poise.

Not only does this hold come in handy for Dhanurasana (Bow Pose) and



Grabbing the foot from the inside (*top*) causes the shoulder to twist in an awkward way—but if you hold the foot from the outside (*below*), your shoulder opens more readily.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VIDUHA BARRIOS, [www.yogafit.net](http://www.yogafit.net)

Eka Pada Rajakapotasana (One-Legged King Pigeon Pose), it will make all the difference between simply lifting the leg behind you and a full expression of Natarajasana.

After warming up with Sun Salutations and standing poses, do some hip openers for the psoas and hip flexors. My favorites are Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero's Pose) and Runner's Lunge with the back leg up a wall. To open your shoulders (as well as your hips), try Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose). You can also lie on your stomach with your elbows at the wall and walk your hands up to stretch your chest and shoulders. And, of course, you can do some backbends, either Dhanurasana (Bow Pose) or Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Facing Bow Pose).

Now you're ready come into the magnificent Natarajasana. Stand in Tadasana (Mountain Pose) at the front of your mat—or a few feet away from a wall so you can support yourself with one hand. Ground down through your left foot and bend your right knee, bringing your

**This hold will make all the difference between simply lifting the leg behind you and a full expression of Natarajasana.**

heel towards your right buttock. Now, stretch your right arm out to the side with your palm down at first. Then, turn your hand over to the right so your palm faces up and your thumb points behind you. Turn your body, from your waist, to the right to open the front of


*Continued on page 86*

## Practical Magic

*Continued from page 11*

your shoulder. Bring your arm back, and clasp the outside of your right foot, your thumb on the sole, fingers on the top. Once you have the foot, spin your body forward again and start to lift your right leg, turning your elbow to the ceiling as you bring your left arm up, bend at the elbow (triceps facing forward), and catch hold of the inner right foot.

I've always had my hand turned up the right way, but I would take it to the inside of my foot instead of the outside. This forced me to crank my shoulder around in a very uncomfortable way just to get my foot up behind me—and then I would lose my balance. If you place your hand on the outside of your foot, you can easily bring your right elbow back around, and your foot automatically lifts up behind you.

Once you're in this position, work on lifting your chest higher and bringing your foot towards your head as you arch back. If you're open enough in your hips, back, and shoulders, you will eventually be able to touch your foot to your head. Keep practicing, and continue to be open to the subtle changes. I can't imagine how many hours every day a prima ballerina or professional figure skater practices in order to perform with such ease and grace. As you continue to practice with proper preparation and precise placement, you too can create the most challenging, awe-inspiring asanas in the dance of your life. 

**Kristen McGee** has been teaching yoga since 1997. She has recently released a DVD for children, *Kristin McGee's Bendgirl Yoga*. Visit [www.kristinmcgee.com](http://www.kristinmcgee.com) for more information.