

Design Resource

Palm Leaf Basketry

Handmade Palm Leaf Basket Making

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, B. Srikanth and Tejesh J.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/palm-leaf-basketry>



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2. Tools and Raw Materials
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Introduction

Karaikudi is a city in Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu State. The crafts of Kariakudi are well known in South India and also famous for art, architecture and culture. Palm leaf Basketry is one among the well-known crafts. Palm tree also known as Palmyra tree is one of the important trees in Tamil Nadu, whose basketry is the major source of income for the rural communities.

Palm leaf baskets are made of very intricate designs, which have a special attraction. The products are mainly used for local or daily activities. The palm leaf basketry is locally called as “Kottans” in Tamil Nadu. The experienced and skilled artisans develop new varieties of designs according to the taste of the local people and market. The products made are durable, which lasts for longer time.

It is believed this craft is originated from the particular community of people called Nadar (and the other community of villages near the Keelayapatti village in Karaikudi) who used to climb the Toddy Palmyra trees to collect the toddy (kallu) from the plant. One fine day it accidentally led to the folding of the leaves as a vessel to drink water and as a flat vessel for food. This led to the idea of weaving these leaves as a carrier to carry goods in the farms and also carry the rice to the relative's houses during the weddings and functions. Later the designs of the baskets were improvised and explorations happened in shape, sizes, and forms of the final product.



Colorful decorated palm leaf basket.

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Work environment of artisans involved in basket weaving.



Artisans of Project Kottan, Cultural foundation.



The strips are arranged in order to start weaving.

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The rim of the basket is stitched.



Mainly women artisans are involved in palm leaf basketry.

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Tools and Raw Materials

Palm leaf basketry making is craft practiced from many generations and has been a culture and tradition in their community. The tools and raw materials used for making the products are easily available in the local market. Palm trees are abundantly available in Karaikudi and as well as nearby villages. Artisan uses long knives to harvest the leaves and small sized knives to separate the mid rib from the leaves. The strips are dyed with vibrant colors to give more attraction to the products. Leaf strips are dyed using chemical colors, which are available in the local market. Other materials used are:

- **Sathagam (Knife):** This knife is used to cut the midrib of the palm leaf.
- **Needle (Posi) and Thread:** Needle and thread are used to stitch the outer rim of the basket for strength purpose.
- **Ole Machine:** Ole is a cutting machine used to cut the leaves into equal strips.
- **Colors:** Colors are used to dye the leaves.
- **Colorful Beads:** Beads are used to decorate the baskets.
- **Alam:** Alam is added in the color for dyeing process, helps to strengthen the color richness.



Palm leaves are cut into different length of strips.

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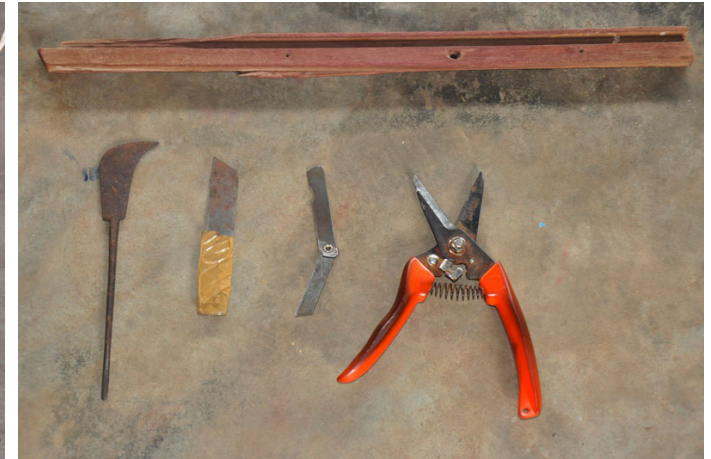
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Palm leaf strips are dyed in different colors.



Blade and cutter used to cut the palm leaf.



Different colors used in dyeing the strips.

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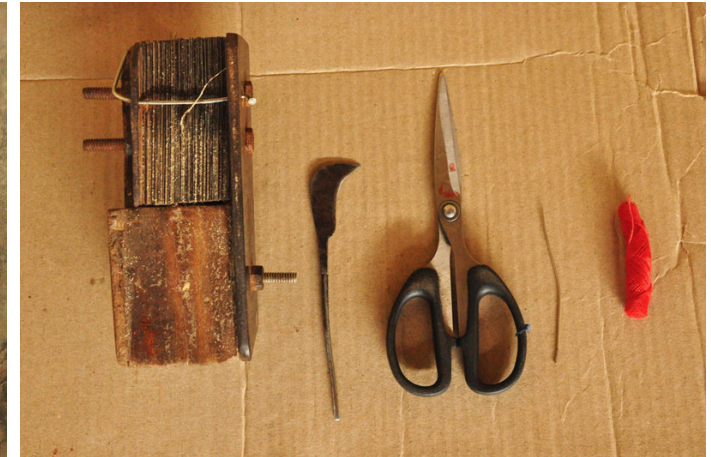
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Tools used to measure the length and width of the baskets to be weaved.



Needle and thread is used for stitching and supporting tools.

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Colorful beads are weaved to the baskets to give more attraction.

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Making Process

The Palmyra palm grows in abundance along the southern coastline of the Indian peninsular from Cochin to Madras. The tree on the whole is extremely useful to the inhabitants of this area. The fruit, leaves and stem of the tree together fulfill all the requirements of the village communities, from manure for personal adornment. The pliable, tender Palmyra leaf has good structural strength, so it is used to make decorative Olai (leaf) baskets. Palm trees grow in high temperature areas. They grow up to 100 feet height crowned by large fan-shaped leaves that radiate from its tip. Each tree has approximately twenty-eight fronds of fully opened leaves. They are leathery, brittle and greenish brown in color. But the best material for making Palmyra baskets is the Kuruttu, the tender new leaf.

The new leaves appear once a month amidst the nature fronds. It is soft, liable and ivory-colored. In order to retain these qualities, it is harvested before it unfolds into characteristic fan shape. Each leaflet folds along a midrib locally known as eerke, which is used as a rim for the basket. The leaf stem is the strongest part of the leaf.

It is slightly concave in section and has a rough skin on both sides. The skin of the inner section known as naar has a hard, smooth, shiny surface and a fairly high tensile strength and is a popular material for baskets. As naar products are longer lasting, this raw material is much more expensive than the delicate leaf.

The palm leaves are harvested in the month of April and May and left to dry under sunlight for a day. The dried leaves are stored in places where it doesn't come in contact with water. The leaflets at the base of the fan-shaped leaf are known as "throw leaflets" and those at the tip is known as "nose leaflets". The artisan removes these because they are too short and narrow to use for basket weaving. The dried palm leaves are washed with plain water and the excess water is rinsed. The midrib of the leaf is removed with the help of sathagam (knife) and the leaf is cut into strips of required size with the help of a cutting machine locally called as Ole machine. These strips are then taken for dyeing process.

For plain baskets the leaf strips are dipped in boiled water and kept it to dry and for colored basket the strips are dipped in colored water. This process is mostly done for strengthening process but it is not put in the water and boiled because it damages the leaf. Few strands of strips are dipped for multi-coloring, which gives an attractive look when weaved into a basket.

Before weaving, the basket water is sprinkled on the strips to keep them moist and avoid breakages while weaving. Based on the required size of the basket the palm stripes are arranged vertically and horizontally interlocking each other. Over that a wooden slab is placed on it and held with hands and feet for support. Once the base is weaved the strips are bent and the sidewalls of the baskets are interlaced and weaved till the required length. At the end, the midrib of the leaf is used as a rim and weaved at the mouth of the basket with a thread for strength and enhancing the outlook of the product.

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Since palm leaf baskets are flexible and are easily deformed they have to be double-layered and reinforced at the rim with a stronger material. The excess strips are folded and interlocked inside the basket in a manner that the ends are not visible. Beads are pasted or weaved on the baskets to embellish.

Mainly women artisans are engaged in making these baskets. The baskets making are done in a traditional way. The woven baskets are used for the purpose of storing food and grains.



Midrib of the palm leaf is removed.



The leaves are cut into strips for basket weaving.

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Palm leaf strips are dyed in colors.



Strips are measured for the required width of the basket to be weaved.



Dyed strips are arranged in order to start weaving.

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The strips are weaved in crisscross pattern.



Extra strips are cut after weaving.



Once the base is weaved the strips are folded to weave the side walls of the basket.

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Rim is fixed at the mouth of the basket.



Colorful beads are added to decorate the basket.

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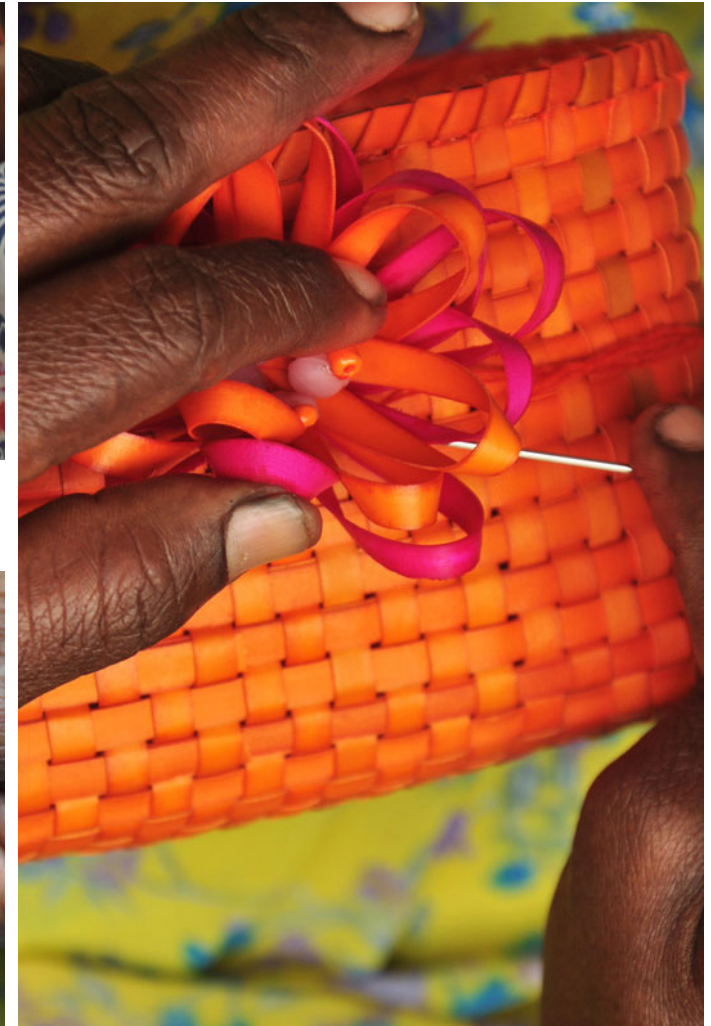
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The rim is stitched to the basket to strengthen the grip.



Decorative items are woven separately and then stitched to the baskets.



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Products

Varieties of products are made using the palm leaf such as baskets, fruit baskets, mats, pen stands, flower vases and gift boxes. The baskets are used for multi purposes as storage containers as well as decorative items. Different colors are used for the products, which are very eye-catching. The traditional baskets are mainly woven by the women in the household. At the early period the baskets were mainly used for carrying rice to the relative's house during marriages or packaging gifts and containers filled with offerings to give at family functions and rituals.

New innovation with designs and patterns according to the modern customers taste are made to increase the market for these products. Colorful beads are added to the products, which enhances the beauty of the products. The crafts are made during the off-season and also during the leisure times of the women in the home. The women artisans involved in making these baskets also support their family financially. The products made are durable for many years and washable.

The artistically made basket has high demand in domestic markets as well as in International markets.



Multi color strips are weaved for design patterns.

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Beautifully designed Palm leaf baskets.



Vibrant colors are used to make it look more elegant.



The baskets are used for multi purposes.



Different sizes of the baskets are weaved as per customers demand.

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As palm leaf baskets are flexible and are easily deformable they have to be double-layered.



The baskets are durable and re-usable.



The baskets can also be used for gift packaging.

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Contact Details

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You can get in touch with

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