

# PLANT MATERIALS FOR BASKET WEAVING

By Caroline Hawkins

Since you will be putting a lot of effort into making your basket, it makes sense to collect and use good quality material. A significant part of a basket weaver's skill is having an understanding and knowledge of suitable plants, their uses and the appropriate season for harvesting them. Your local environment, which includes yours and your friends and neighbour's gardens, are bound to have plenty of plants suitable to use for weaving baskets. Basket weavers tend to become perennial opportunists when it comes to sourcing their materials!

## **Basic Tools and equipment:**

Secateurs and garden gloves to gather materials.

A small sharp knife for stripping lengths.

Large eyed needles for stitching and a pair of scissors.

Clothes peg to hold the core material together.

An old towel used damp to wrap fibres and keep them pliable.

## **Harvesting Plant Materials:**

Harvesting from your own garden is the best option or friends and neighbours are often more than happy to oblige. Collecting plant material from public places requires permission from the appropriate authority and permits are needed for national parks. Making friends with the gardener of a public place is good way around this. The choice of materials that can be used is as wide as your imagination. The main requirement is strength along the length of the material. If you can hold a length in both hands and pull it without it snapping, it will be suitable for basket making. Leaves that have already gone brown and dropped are already deteriorating and will not make good weaving material, go for healthy green leaves and take the time to dry them.

## **Storing materials:**

It's always preferable to use materials as dry as possible, if plants are used green shrinkage can occur, which can make the stitching or weaving loose and the basket flimsy over time. Once collected, spread leaves in an airy sunny spot to dry, then gather up and tie into bundles for storage. Store hanging in a dark, dry but airy situation to avoid colour fade and mould

## **Preparation:**

Most materials will need to be dampened if they are to be pliable enough to bend without splitting. The finer the material, the less dampening that will be required - wrapping in a damp towel will be sufficient. The thicker or woodier the material, the more dampening required - material needs to be soaked in a tub for several hours, overnight or even several days.

### Commonly Available Plant materials to collect in Victoria

Plant	Harvest	Stitching	Cordage	Coiling	Twining	Random	Structure
<b>Leaves:</b>							
Aunt Eliza <i>Chasmanthe floribunda</i>	Summer		✓	✓	✓		
Cornhusk	All year		✓	✓	✓		
Cumbungi/bulrush <i>Typha orientalis</i> Spike rush <i>Eliocharis</i>	Summer		✓	✓	✓		
Day lily <i>Hemerocallis fulva</i>	Autumn		✓	✓	✓		
Flax Lily <i>Dianella species</i>	Winter		✓	✓	✓		
Iris species leaves	Summer		✓	✓	✓		
Kangaroo paw	Summer		✓	✓	✓		
Mat Rush Spiny headed <i>Lomandra longifolia</i>	All year			✓			
New Zealand Flax <i>Phormium</i>	All year	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Red-hot poker	All year		✓	✓	✓		
Club rush and Juncus	Summer			✓			
<i>Watsonia</i>	Summer		✓	✓	✓		
<b>Palms:</b>							
Cabbage Tree <i>Cordyline Australis,</i>	All year	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Palm species leaves	All year		✓	✓	✓		
<b>Trees:</b>							
Casuarina needles, pine needles	All year			✓			
Jacaranda	Autumn			✓			
Pine needles	Autumn			✓			
Silver Birch	Winter			✓		✓	✓
Willow <i>Salix species</i>	Winter					✓	✓
<b>Vines:</b>							
Coral pea, Running postman <i>kennedya</i>	All year					✓	✓
Dodder Laurel	All year					✓	✓
Grapevines, Passion fruit vines	Winter					✓	✓
Honeysuckle, Jasmine, Clematis	Winter					✓	✓
Wisteria	Winter					✓	✓
Sea grass stems	All year			✓		✓	