**PLANT MATERIALS FOR MELON 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 neighbours 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!

**Commonly Available Plant materials to collect**

Plants suitable for twining:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Harvest all year | Summer  | Winter  | Autumn |
| Cabbage Tree, *Cordyline Australis*New Zealand Flax, *Phormium* Red-hot poker Cornhusk  | Aunt Eliza, *Chasmanthe floribunda**Watsonia* (green leaves)Iris leaves Kangaroo paw Day lily, *hemerocalis*Cumbungi, *Typha orientalis* *Eliocharis*  | Flax Lily *Dianella sp**Watsonia* (brown leaves) |  |

Plants suitable for structure:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Harvest all year | Summer  | Winter  | Autumn |
|  |  | GrapevinesPassionfruit VinesSilver Birch Willow. |  |

**Harvesting Plant Materials**:

Harvesting materials from native plants in the wild is against the law in many areas so it pays to check with authorities first. Harvesting from your own garden is the best option and as knowledge of which plants are preferable, friends and neighbours are often more than happy to oblige. 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.

**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.

**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 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 cracking. 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.