



Stitched Coiled Basket

Coiled baskets are a very old form of basket making. In Ireland, bee hives called "bee skeps" were made this way.

Here we will look at the easiest version of this method I have found for scouts.

To make a coiled basket we want lots of long grasses. If we can find long leaves instead of stems it is better because we don't have to cut off of the seed heads. (See Gathering Grass on a later page)

The basket is just a coil of grass with each layer stitched to the last layer.

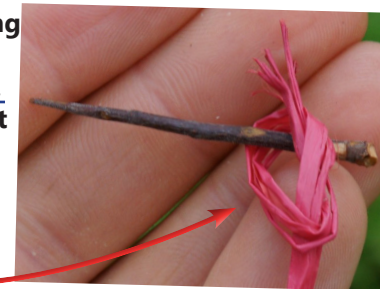


To stitch our coil together we could use thin twine (e.g. Jute) or inner bark strips from Lime, Willow or Elm. Or we could use bands made from Bramble (see last page).

We want arm span length of material for stitching.

To open up a space for our stitching we need a tapered slot. "Sealant nozzles" with a slot cut out work well. A narrow wooden spike will just about work instead.

We use a blackthorn needle when stitching with string. It is easiest to tie a loose overhand knot, slide in the thorn and then tighten the knot.



Stages

Requirements

For backwoods adventure skills a scout must have mastered one basket at Stage 4 and four types of basket at Stage 7.



Starting the Coil

We take a finger thickness bundle of the longest grass we have and fold one end over.



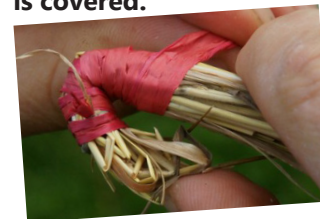
Now we place our stitching material in the loop we have created in the grass.



We wrap the stitching material around the grass until about 4cm is covered.

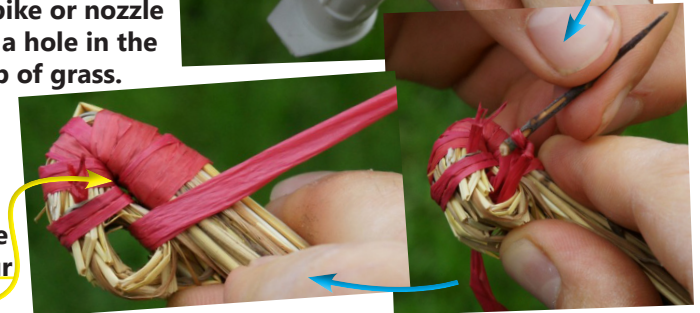


The coil is started by folding our grass over.



We now begin to stitch. Using our spike or nozzle we open up a hole in the original loop of grass.

When we stitch through we have enclosed the centre of our basket.





Stitching



We twist the coil to keep it neat.



By folding the grass around we continue our coil and repeatedly stitch through the centre. We want to keep the gap between our stitches even. When we our coil has gone all the way around once we will find that 'last layer' is no longer the centre. Now we will keep stitching to the previous layer of the grass coil for the rest of the basket.

As our coil gets larger the space between our stitches gets wider so we will need to add a double stitch sometimes. For neatness we try to do this every second stitch so it doesn't look too random.

From now on we just stitch the new layer of the grass coil to the last one. At the beginning this means we stitch through the centre of our basket.



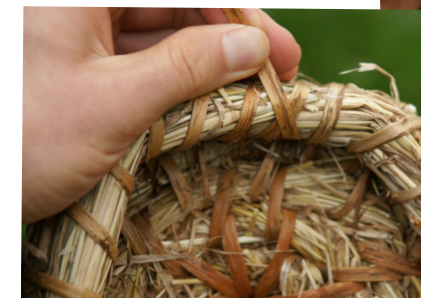
When we are happy our base is wide enough we pull the end of the coil up onto the edge of our base and keep stitching as before. The edge of our base is like the first layer of our wall.



We can see each layer of the wall is stitched to the last. Note: my finger is holding my last stitch tight.



When we are happy the walls are tall enough we stop adding grass and let the grass slowly taper to nothing.



When all the grass is help we want to lock our stitching in place so we stitch back a few times and then push the end on the sticher under another stitch.

Now our basket is complete we need to put it somewhere warm and well ventilated to dry full as damp grass will go musty over time.





Adding Materials

Our grass coil must stay at a constant thickness so after every few stitches we spread the end of our coil a little and push a few pieces of grass in under the last stitch. Then we re-twist the grass and continue stitching.



When stitching with string. As our string gets to short pull the needle out, or cut it off and tie a new arm span length of sting on. Pull things so the knot is hidden in the coil.



For Bramble or bark when a we have about two stitches left we push our new sticher under our grass coil with the pith facing out. Then stitch over with our old sticher. Take the new sticher and stitch over the old one. Now take the old end on push it where it will be hidden.



Traditional Stitch

The traditional way to do this method is to stitch under the last layers stitching rather than the last layer. I have found that scouts struggle hugely with this so I have shown an easier way.



Gathering Grass

There are a huge variety of grasses. One of the best common types for our work is Scutch grass (couch grass).

For scouts the best is probably Purple Moor grass because each years growth dies and stays on the root stump. So we can gather huge amounts of dry leaves without cutting tools.

To gather live grass we use a pruning saw, grass dulls knives very quickly.

We take a hand full of 60cm long grass and saw it off. Lay each handful in a neat bundle with ends together.



We want to remove all grass seeds as we gather, a scissors works well. Take out any weeds too.

We gather grass in June if the weather is sunny and we can dry the grass easily or in Autumn as soon as it starts to die back.

Note: Bailed hay is usually to short to work but if you can see that a bail has grass 60cm long it is great for large groups.



Bramble Bands for Stitching



Hold the bramble by an end leaf and cut any branches near the end with a knife.

We gather bramble for weaving and stitching from early Autumn through to late Winter. Brambles hanging from bushes are best.

We want arm span lengths of bramble for stitching.



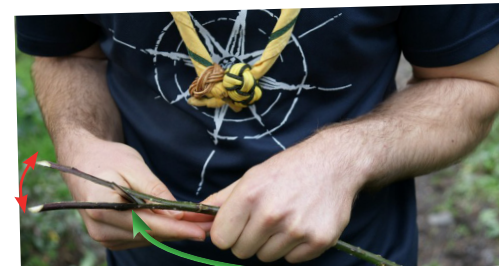
We scrape the first 20cm of thorns off the bramble with the back of our knife.

Now we can hold the end of the bramble.



To remove the rest of the thorns we either use the back of our knife, a bean tin with a hole drilled in the bottom or 6 layers of heavy denim fabric (we can buy jeans from a second hand shop, and when they get too torn up we can use them as char cloth).

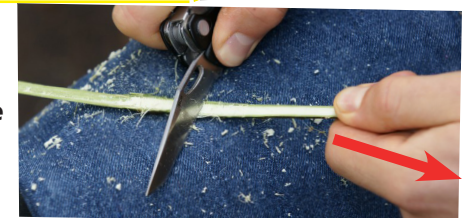
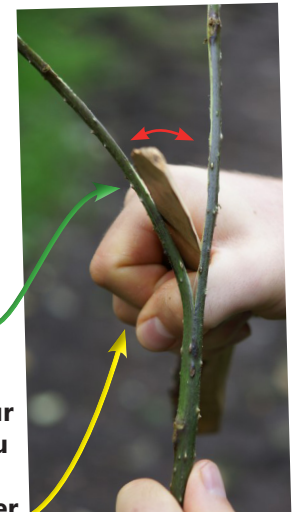
Now we cut the bramble at ground level. To split it we put the butt of our knife in a cupped hand and split against a log.



To continue the split we twist our knife or a very thin wooden wedge in the split. When the bramble splits we slide along and repeat. For safety: twist the knife (don't push toward your hand), brace your elbows and your hands against you as you split.

If one side of the bramble becomes thicker bend the thicker side more to pull the split back to the centre.

To remove the pith we place some heavy fabric on our knee. Take a secondary bevelled knife (pen knife or kitchen knife), press it down onto the bramble on our knee and pull the bramble back repeatedly.



This will scrape the pith out of the bramble. As the knife stays still this method is very safe.



To keep the bands an even width we can hold the knife so it slices the bramble instead of scraping it.

Finally, we coil up our bands tightly so they can be rehydrated in a bucket. We dry them and re-wet when needed.

