

BASKETRY: EVERYBODY'S CRAFT

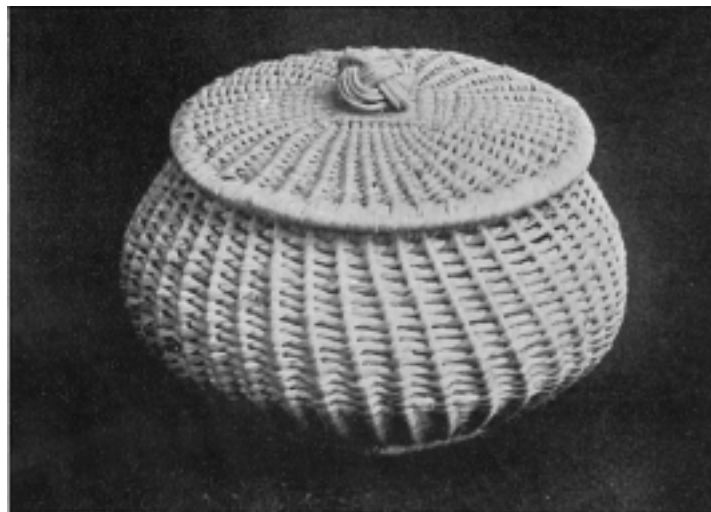
By CARRIE D. McCOMBER

BASKETRY is everybody's craft. Not every one who feels a stirring of art in the finger tips can chip stone or model clay into recognizable, to say nothing of artistic shapes, hammer out metals or tool and manipulate leathers with any success. All these demand a modicum at least of natural artistic ability and they want more or less hand training. But for basketry an average eye for preparation and a conscience that will not be stilled until faults are righted are the chief qualifications.

Acquire even a meagre knowledge of basket making and the world will presently resolve itself into an entertaining storehouse of material for weaving. Pass the

swamp and you cry out, "Here are cattails, their leaves are just ready for plaiting." Walk through the stretch of woods and the white poplars will beckon you to cut them down, hue them into slabs, beat them into strips and tear them into splints.

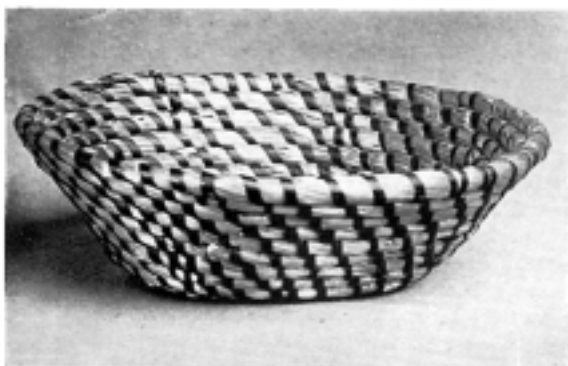
You paddle along the willow bordered stream and the slender withes entreat you to pluck them from their branches, peel off their bark and weave them into something, useful or not useful, it matters little which. The salt marsh with its ripening grasses rich with color hails you from afar, for nowhere except in the golden straw of the rye field or the long needles of the Southern pine will you find such wealth for coiled work. The very corn husks—



THE ANCIENT WRAPPED TWILING WEAVE OF THE VANCOUVER ISLAND INDIANS ADAPTED TO A CATCHALL BASKET FOR THE WHITE WOMAN'S DESK.

you call them "shucks" if you live in certain parts South or West—with their silken inner layers or coarse outer coatings streaked with glorious crimsons and yellows and purple are too tempting to be passed by. What delight to sort them over, redolent as they are of autumn and pick the richest with never a thought of cost! There is scarcely a meadow, wood or marsh, a hilltop or mountain without its free-will offering to the basket-weaver.

The Indian, of course, has known all this for ages. The Indian basket-maker works fingers and toes in gathering supplies, for the trained toes search out and draw up rootlets that the fingers can not find, among them the ones that provide the beautiful ivory white which is so conspicuous in

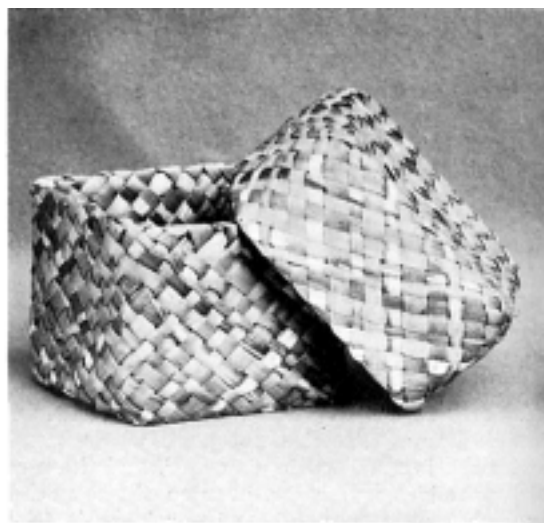


WORK BASKET MADE OF RYE STRAW COILS SEWED WITH PALMETTO. THE RICH GOLD OF THE STRAW HAS NOT FADED WITH YEARS OF USE

many of the best Indian baskets. The delicate maidenhair fern has been a valuable asset ever since fine basketry was made. Its stems provide the glossy black that is so valuable to the Indian and that the white basket-maker is learning to use. Trunks, branchlets, stalks, leaves, stems, vines and roots all have their part in the most ancient craft and the fruits too, the ones that dry and harden in usable colors serve a purpose as ornament. The bright red pod of one of the eucalyptus trees is an example.

Know any craft, even as an amateur, and the inventive spirit finds suggestions and designs everywhere. But no other craft calls into play such a variety of materials and few demand such a multitude of designs as basketry. Every basket has its own need in shape, size, strength and general appearance. In old Indian days needs were limitless for the mother cradled her baby, ground her corn, made her bread, cooked her meat and performed all her other housewifely tasks that called for receptacles in vessels of her own weaving. These vessels indeed lent their forms to the later clay utensils which were at first modelled in basketry, as fragments in the museums plainly record. And to-day's needs, though less strenuous, are not fewer.

City shops yield some of the most practical basket materials—reed, cane, willow, splints, wire and sweet grasses, green or brown pine needles which keep their color, raffia and sometimes rush. But the



HANDKERCHIEF BASKET MADE OF CATTAIL LEAVES WHICH FADE INTO TONES OF GREEN, BROWN AND TAN.

white woman with this help, conserving her time by a hasty shopping trip from which she returns laden with supplies ready for work, loses much of the inspiration gained by the Indian woman who must scour her outdoor world for spoils, laboriously peel, strip, cure and color them in the home dye tub. Verily Nature reserves the best of her products for the harvester. The Indian by giving herself to her task has made her product unique in all the world, and the white woman following, though afar off, is also gaining as she discovers and collects natural materials for her work.

At one of the National Arts and Crafts exhibits some time ago, some most attractive baskets made of dry knotty twigs attracted as much attention as anything there. "How did she ever reduce those twigs to pliability" asked a visitor. "By patient experiment and a long habit of origination" was the answer of one who stood near. Here is the secret of success in any craft.

The baskets illustrated are examples of what an amateur can accomplish with the commonest materials. Three weaves are involved—plaiting in the square basket, which is done over a block to give it shape; sewed coiled work in the golden rye straw; and the ancient wrapped twining weave of the Vancouver Island Indians in the catchall basket.

After years of use on a sunny sewing-table the rye straw has not lost its bright golden color. The coloring of the cattails in the square basket run through the shades of brown, green and tan into which the original green has faded, producing an autumn harmony. In the wrapped twining weave there are possibilities of artistic color combinations in the use of different tones for the spokes and raffia twiners. This basket is extraordinarily strong, being of three-ply texture, reed spokes and inside coils with raffia twining. Reed used in the more sturdy fruit baskets is sold in shops where school supplies are kept.