



My husband and I live out in the country, on ten acres of land. Spring of 2001 began the restoration of a section of this land back to tall-grass prairie. What was once an extremely dense area of solid cedar trees, is again an established prairie and glade with over 312 native species, many of which magically came back to life once the ground was again opened up to sunlight.



I studied botany at Iowa State University, but basically I'm a self-taught fiber artist. I've gone in several creative directions over the years. The latest includes making rustic furniture, and cedar log footbridges that connect paths through the prairie and woods. I also carve and wood burn gourds, and try to have a theme that includes images of the tall-grass prairie, native plants, and wildlife.



Natural

Fibers

Used in Basketry



Natural Fiber Baskets

by Martha Younkin

I started making natural fiber baskets decades ago, and it remains a passion for me. I use the shoots, vines, bark, and long



fibrous leaves of plants found around me. Willow, honeysuckle, wisteria, Virginia creeper, and akebia provide long, flexible vines. Shagbark hickory, eastern red cedar, American and slippery elm, redbud, and willow provide inner and outer bark. And the leaves of rattlesnake master, yucca, Siberian iris, cattails, rushes, and daylilies provide strong fibrous materials that can be thigh-spun into cordage or braided.

My instruction has come from several old Indian basket books, learning about their materials and techniques, and then integrating those things into

my own experimental efforts. The books are almost all out of print, with some from as far back as the early 1900's. Many of the plants in these old books are from out west, and don't grow here in Missouri. I found myself very envious of those young people who had old Indian grannies who would teach them about the different plants - *where to find them, when to harvest the materials, how to prepare them, and then finally how to work with them* to make the baskets!



Most all of what I've learned is from trial and error, putting together ideas and inspiration from those old Indian books.

I love the tactile element of working with the natural materials, and the workshops I do with people give me the opportunity to share that. I'm delighted when I have someone who's never made a basket, who finishes their piece with amazement and pride in what they have created.

Gathering the different plants, knowing how they grow, learning when to best harvest them, and preparing them to use, all add to the whole dimension of the piece – one with a history, with roots, with a story behind it. *The basket becomes a tool that helps root us to the past, as well as keep us connected to our present.*

Martha Younkin

-Natural fiber basket maker



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