

## Reed Baskets

Woven baskets are some of the oldest and most common functional craft. Baskets were containers for food, clothing, seeds, storage, in almost every culture around the world and for thousands of years. Southeastern Native Americans most often wove trays, sifters, pack baskets, and storage containers with lids using plants they found around them.

Weaving is the process of sewing or bending flexible material into three-dimensional objects. Southeastern Native Americans used rivercane to make baskets. Rivercane is a cousin of bamboo and it is very strong. Cane grows near water, along rivers and in swamps. To use rivercane for basket-weaving, the cane has to be split into strips. Rivercane can also be dyed. Basket makers wove reed in different colors into patterns and designs that were unique. Cane is now very hard to find because the habitats where it grew have been disturbed.

Native Americans in different areas used other plants to weave baskets. When the Creek were pushed out of the lands that would become southern Alabama and Georgia in the 1700s and early 1800s, many relocated to Florida and became the Seminole. Instead of cane, they began using Saw Palmetto to weave baskets.

Coiled baskets made from honeysuckle or soft grasses are another type of basket made in the past. Coiled baskets were made by Southeastern Native Americans and later enslaved Africans along the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia. Native Americans living inland, like the Cherokee, also used coiled baskets alongside wood and cane baskets.

### Learn More:

“Containers of Tradition: Southeastern Indian Basketry,:

<https://collections.gilcrease.org/articles/article-containers-tradition-southeastern-indian-basketry>



*Basket made of rivercane. Department of the Interior. Indian Arts and Crafts Board. Cherokee Field Office, Cherokee, North Carolina. (1963 - ?), National Archives*

# Instructions for Making A Reed Basket

**Level of Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Recommended Ages:** 8+

## Supplies

In Kit:

- 1 round wood basket base
- 11, 10" reed spokes
- plastic beads
- about 25', #3 round weaver reed

At Home:

- bucket filled with water
- clothespins (optional)
- scissors



**Instruction Video:** <https://youtu.be/gZtnYqhclIE>

## Instructions

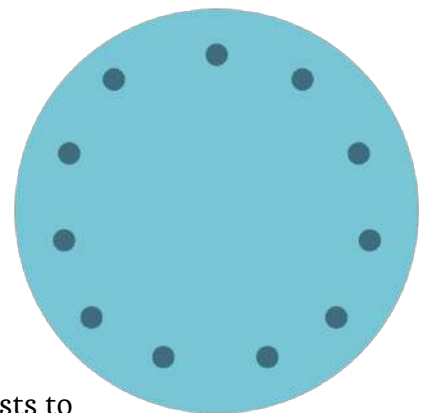
### Step 1: Soak Reed in Water

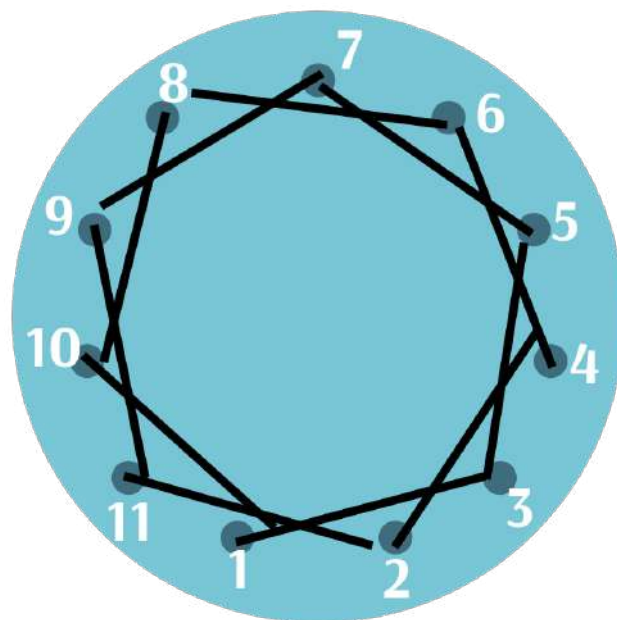
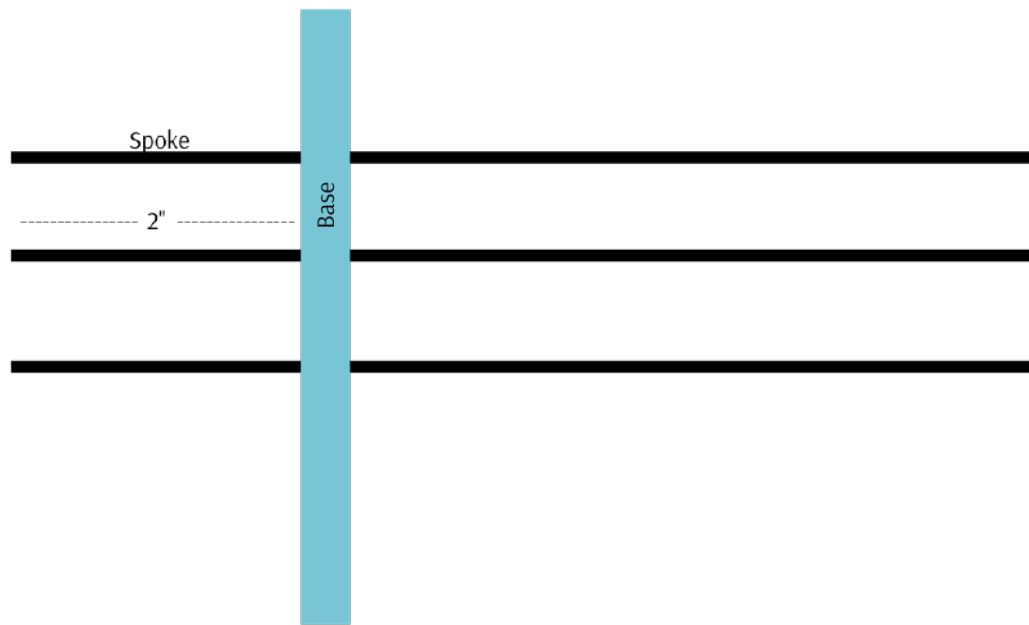
About 2-3 hours before you want to begin your project, soak the long pieces of weaver reed and spokes in a bucket of water. This will help the reed to be more flexible. Do not soak your plywood base. Your weaver reed will be pre-cut into 3-4 foot long sections to make it easier to work with later.

### Step 2: Prepare Your Base

Take your spokes out of the water. Push the spokes through each of the 11 holes on the base so that there is about 2 inches of reed on one side.

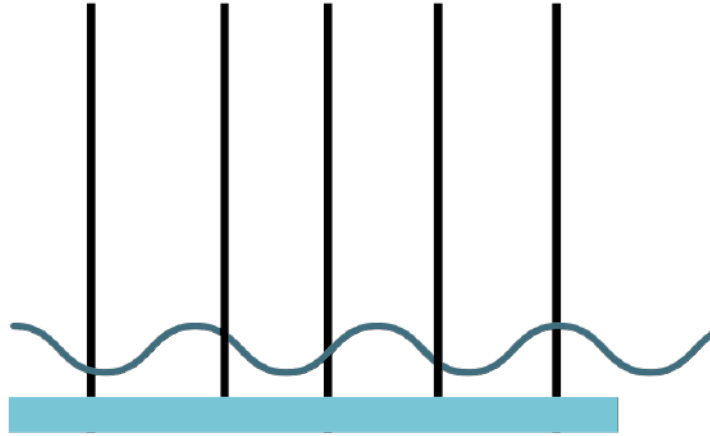
With help from a grown up, turn the base upside down so the 2" pieces of reed are sticking straight up and the long ends of the spokes are resting gently on your knees. Pick a spoke (#1), bend it to the right in front of the spoke next to it (#2), and tuck it so it rests to the inside of the next spoke (#3). Continue until each spoke is "locked" in place by the spoke next to it.





### Step 3: Weave Reed through Spokes

Dunk the spokes in the bucket to wet them. You will want to repeat this process as you weave your basket so that the spokes and weaver reed stay flexible. Flip the base over so that the bottom is facing towards your lap, then take a 3-4 foot section of wet weaver reed and begin by placing it on the inside of one spoke at the base of your project. Moving left or right, whichever way the tail of your weaver reed is pointing, you will go outside the next spoke, then inside the following spoke. Continue until you've gone all the way around all of the spokes then repeat, stacking the weaver reed on top of the first layer. Gently use your fingers to push the reed down so it is nice and tight but not so tight that the opening of your basket gets too narrow.



Optional: As you weave your basket, you can add beads to the spokes to add color and patterns. You can also add beads to the top of the basket as a part of the finish.

Step 4: Stop weaving your basket once you have at least 3 inches of spokes remaining or once you have woven your basket to the desired height. Bend the spokes over to create rounded arches at the top, then weave any extra weaver reed vertically into the side of your basket.

