



Native American Baskets

Native Americans for Kids

All American Indians made baskets: Baskets were a big part of daily life in tribes across the country. All Indians made baskets. They made woven baskets out of the natural materials available to them. Part of a woman's job was to never let her family run out of colorful baskets. Once baskets were made, they were used to store belongings on the open shelves, to haul and store food, and used for trade.

Did the geometric designs on Indian baskets have meanings? The answer is yes and no. Most of the symbolism in Indian art was realistic and not geometric - the painted art showed pictures of people and events. The geometric designs woven in baskets were not religious in nature. Nor did they stand for things like symbols of good luck. Someone might be carrying a basket and trip and because of that, avoid a snakebite. Suddenly, that basket might become a lucky basket. But baskets were not created with designs that gave you luck.

Pattern Names: The women gave names to various patterns so they could talk about them - the tree pattern, the leaf pattern, the mountain pattern, and so on. Women tried to outdo their neighbors with designs and colors. Every woman had her own designs. Others could not copy from her, although she could give a design as a gift to a good friend or to her children.

Collecting Materials: Secret basket making techniques were handed down from mother to daughter. Roots and twigs had to be soaked just right. Basket making was then, and still is, an art. Most baskets were made in the winter months. All summer long basket-making materials were collected. Grass was used like embroidery thread. Certain grasses were collected because of their strength and colors. Some women hiked into the mountains, the deserts, or the deep woods far from their homes to collect grass to make baskets. That was a dangerous thing to do.

Apache Burden Baskets: [Apache baskets](#) were colorful and well designed. They were woven from various plants. Some were lined with pitch, which is a natural waterproofing material made from pine trees. The waterproof baskets were used to carry water and other liquids. Baskets were used as storage containers for just about everything. Some were called burden baskets.

Cherokee Double Wall Baskets: In olden days, only the women made baskets. Baskets had fancy designs, and were made in a special way, with double weaving, using river cane, so that they were very sturdy. Designs were handed down from mother to daughter. Some baskets were painted as well as dyed. The Cherokee created paints from berry juice, nuts, and roots. Although their baskets added color and gaiety to the appearance of their homes, they were also useful. Baskets were used for just about everything - to gather the crops, to store food, to store belongings, to haul.

Hopi Baskets: The [Hopi](#) method of making baskets has not changed for hundreds of years. They still make baskets with the old patterns, in the old way, woven with long grasses, and designed with natural dyes.

Pumo Feather Baskets: While tribes in other parts of the country used feathers to designate acts of courage, the peace-loving Pumo Indians of California created a basket made out of feathers that was colorful and fun.

Pacific Northwest Baskets: Like [mats](#), baskets were a big part of daily life. Some Indian families had a family design they used when weaving baskets. But mostly, women tried to outdo each other with designs and colors. Secret basket making techniques were handed down from mother to daughter.

Baskets were made in the winter months. To get ready for the winter weaving, all summer long basket-making materials were collected. Grass was used like embroidery thread. Certain grasses were collected because of their strength and colors. Once made, baskets were used to store belongings on open shelves, to store food, and for trade.

For Kids

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