

Cherokee Basketry

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Clockwise from top) Fruit, vase, planter, and sewing baskets made by modern Cherokee women in traditional style. Image courtesy of the N.C. Museum of History.

Women in the Eastern Band of Cherokee made these baskets by hand a few years ago for the Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual Inc., a Cherokee-owned and operated cooperative. Traditionally, there have been four main stages of basketmaking. First, the artist gathers materials—usually river cane, white oak, honeysuckle, or maple—found in nature. Bark is removed, and wood pieces are split and trimmed down. The basketmaker separates the splints, the pieces to be used in baskets, in a process called stripping, and scrapes them smooth with a knife. Splints can be left natural or colored with dyes drawn from leaves, roots, or bark. Common dyes include butternut, walnut, and bloodroot. The basketmaker then finally begins weaving. In basic checkerboard construction, a series of side-by-side splints create a warp. Weft splints are woven one at a time under and over warp splints. Other techniques create diagonal or twilled patterns, or designs. Families may pass down dye methods, patterns, and techniques.