



Cattail Weaving

Knowing how to weave is an essential survival skill. In addition to being nature's grocery store and medicine cabinet, cattail are a great source of weaving material. You can weave berry baskets, plates, visors, cordage, water bottle holders and practically anything your imagination can think of! In this lesson we will teach an introductory lesson for basic cattail processing and weaving to make a cattail "fish."

Materials

- Cattail (green or recently dried such as end of summer harvests)
- Scissors or a knife
- Tarp
- Towel or old bedsheet
- Water
- Water bucket

Harvesting cattail

Cattail grow at most freshwater sources. If you are going to weave with cattail, we recommend harvesting cattail by cutting it at the base (you may need to wade into water to do this), then drying them out of the sun for a day or two. Why dry them? The long leaf blades will shrink quickly after harvesting them. If you weave with them still fresh and green (full of moisture), your weave will shrink and become loose and floppy. We want tight weaves.

Rehydrating the leaves

Once dried, cattail leaves are brittle and will break easily when woven. A standard technique for any natural weaving process is to soak your material so it is pliable when weaving. Don't worry. It won't swell up to the thickness it was when you gathered the material from nature. To rehydrate the leaves, lay them out on a tarp or in a kiddie pool. Wet them thoroughly with water, then lay a towel or bedsheet over them and wet this bedsheet. Fold the tarp over (like a burrito) and let them sit in the sun until the blades

are soft and pliable. This usually takes about 30 minutes, but check them occasionally and re-wet them as needed.



Weaving a fish

Gather a small flexible branch. Explore and experiment to find a species in your area that is flexible. Willow (which often grows near cattail) is a great option. In this example we used forsythia. Bend the branch over into the shape of a fish and tie it with a small piece of cordage at the base of the tail. You can even use cattail to make a piece of this cordage doing a reverse wrap if you wish. Select a piece of cattail. Using your fingers, slide them down the length of the cattail while gently squeezing and bending the blade. This “breaks in the cattail” to help it become a little more flexible.



Insert the thick end of your cattail blade on the inside of your fish frame. Then wrap it around the bottom edge of your frame and under the upper

side of your fish frame. Then wrap the cattail around the upper frame and down under the lower frame.



Continue this process until you are almost out of cattail. When you are almost out of cattail, tuck your remaining blade end back under a previous weave and then simply start a new blade and continue working until your fish is filled.



When you reach the “face” of the fish, you can wrap the blade around the frame and tuck the end under a previous weave or tie it off with an overhand knot.



It is important to keep your weaving strand of cattail moist as you work so it won't dry out and break. We recommend moving into the shade for weaving. Also have a bucket of water or spray bottle handy to dunk or spray your weave. You only need to let it soak for a minute to rehydrate. It's an opportunity to take a short break as well.



You can weave the tail section also. You can leave ends of weaves or tuck in small cattail sections to make “fins,” tie your fish to a string and a stick for a “fishing rod,” or weave more fish and make a mobile. If you have some wool, you can also weave or tuck the wool into your fish, then add a few drops of essential oils to the wool to create an air freshener.



Once you learn these basics, you are ready to try more advanced weaving projects!