

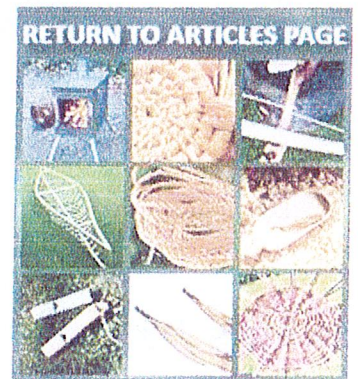


|                      |                                 |  |                      |                         |                           |                         |                       |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| <a href="#">Home</a> | <a href="#">How-to Articles</a> | <a href="#">Jon's eBooks &amp; Books</a> | <a href="#">Blog</a> | <a href="#">Gallery</a> | <a href="#">About Jon</a> | <a href="#">Contact</a> | <a href="#">Links</a> |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|

## How to Weave a Willow Basket

A step by step project for beginners

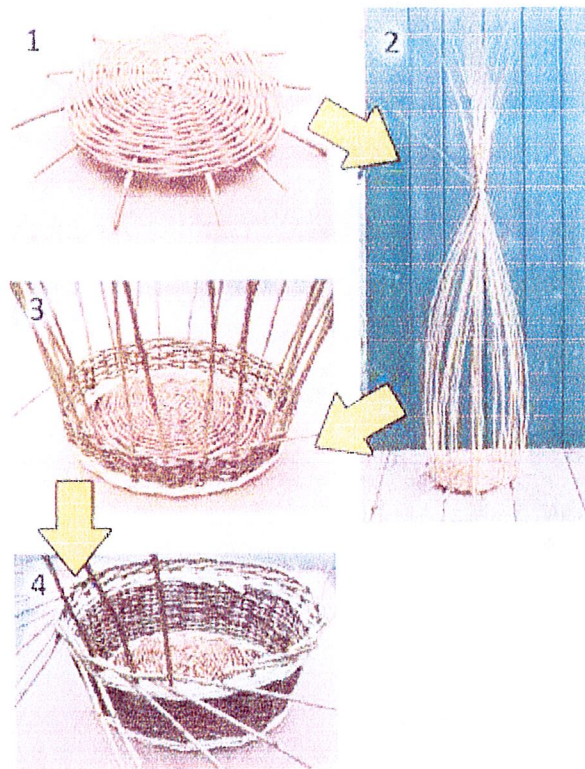
[©Jonathan Ridgeon](#)



The type of basket featured in this article is often referred to as a 'Stake and Strand' basket. The structure is made up of rigid willow rods (the 'stake' material), around which thinner flexible willow rods are woven (the 'strand' material).

The base is woven first, around which a series of 'side-stakes' are then inserted. These are turned-up vertically giving a structure around which to weave the sides. When the sides are complete, the side-stakes are folded over and woven into a border (the rim). Handles can then be added if desired.

1. A completed base.
2. Side-stakes have been inserted into the base and turned-up vertically.
3. The sides are built up by weaving around the side-stakes.
4. The side-stakes are then folded over and woven into a finishing border.



## Sourcing Willow

### - Picking willow from the wild

It is a joy to harvest your own willow from the countryside to make such baskets; and there are many types out there. However, not all Willow is suitable for basket making, many types are too brittle and will snap when bent to the extremes needed for basket weaving. If I find some shoots of willow growing in the countryside (often in overgrown hedgerows) I simply fold a stem at 90 degrees; if it snaps then it's not really good enough; continue searching for a different variety. Osier (*Salix Viminalis*) is perhaps the most valued of the wild willows. Also, I have found that types of Willow with colourful bark (sometimes grown in gardens) such as reds, yellows and oranges are often-times great. Harvesting in winter time is always preferred, otherwise you'll have a lot of work with stripping leaves!

For the project that follows you'll need to pick a good sized bundle of shoots (like pictured) around 4 foot in length.



### - Buying willow

There are commercial companies which grow and harvest willow specifically for basket making. Conveniently, many have online shops and offer courier delivery. Alternatively, you can order over the phone or take a car trip to their farm. I have personally used the following two companies:

[www.musgrovewillows.com](http://www.musgrovewillows.com)

Typically, commercial growers sell willow shoots which have been graded into bundles of different lengths (measured in feet). You can buy whatever quantity you like, the willow is weighed out in kilograms and tied in bundles of different weights for sale. There will likely be many types of willow for sale, as they treat the willow in different ways such as stripping the bark and steaming it etc, mainly to give different aesthetics. But as a beginner, to keep things simple you might want to just buy 'brown' willow. 'Brown' simply means that the willow has been harvested and then dried out with it's bark left unstripped, simple! In terms of the actual variety of willow, the most common is called 'Black Maul', which is incredibly flexible and durable; great for beginners.

So, if you're going to buy willow, for the project that follows in this article, I'd recommend a single **5kg bundle of 4-foot 'brown' willow of the variety 'black maul'**. 5kg is way more than needed, but this will give you a good selection of rods (they vary slightly in thickness) and you'll have spare for extra practice.

## Preparing the Willow

### - Drying

If you have freshly picked your own willow, then you will ideally want to Dry it. Baskets made from freshly cut willow will shrink and the structure will become all loose. This is because Willow shrinks the most the first time it dries out. It may take several weeks to dry completely.

If you have purchased 'Brown' willow from a grower, this has already been dried.

### - Soaking

In order for the willow to be flexible enough for weaving, Your dry willow needs to be submerged in water and left to soak. A good rule of thumb for the soaking time is one day per foot of length, i.e. If the length of your Willow shoots is 4 foot then soak for four days. Some willow can take a bit longer and it depends a bit on the water temperature too. When you think the willow is probably soaked enough, as a test bend a rod and see how it responds. **Note:** At the start of the actual project below, you will be informed of how much willow to actually sort out and soak.

## Tools

You wont need many tools for this project: a knife e.g. a bushcraft knife or pen knife; a pair of secateurs; a weight e.g. a cobble stone; a ruler/tape measure; and a basket maker's 'Bodkin' (a simple pointed tool used for separating the weave). However for this simple project a pointed stick or 6 inch nail will work plenty well enough as an improvised bodkin, If you don't have a proper bodkin, Just get weaving and you'll work something out when it comes to it.

## The Project

### A simple round basket - Step by step

The following tutorial is one of many diverse projects which feature in my book '*Willow Basketry: A How-To Guide*', available to purchase from Amazon, or in eBook form on this website, [see here for either](#).



As mentioned before, it is advisable to use willow which is somewhere between 3 foot and 4 foot in length for this project. Naturally, within the bundle, the willow rods will range in thickness, different thicknesses are suitable for different parts of the basket. The thicker rods are good for 'stake' material, and the weavers should always be of thinner material.

Sort the listed materials into separate piles. Then tie the stake material into one bunch and the weaving material into another. Soak for about 4 or 5 days.

Materials listed are exact amounts. Add in a good amount of extras just to be sure you have enough and to provide yourself with a good selection of rods for use. You could even double the amounts, any leftovers can always be dried off and used later for other projects.

### Materials List:

#### Stake material:

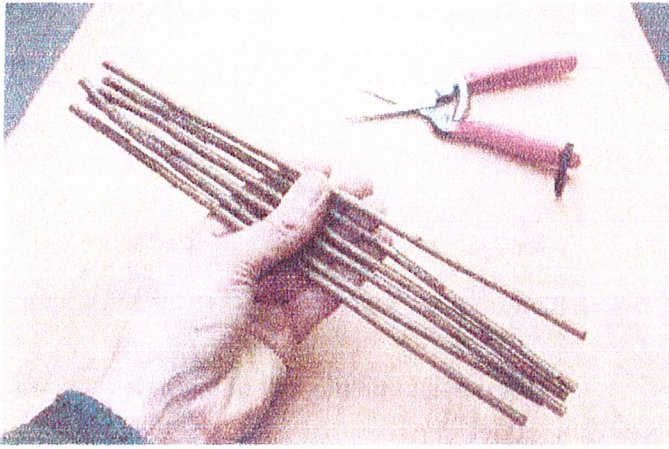
- 6 thick rods - The 'base sticks'. These should be the thickest rods in the basket (the ones which radiate out from the centre of the base)
- 24 Medium-thick rods - For the 'side stakes'.

#### Weaving material:

- 50 thin rods - (25 weavers for the base plus 25 weavers for the siding)
- 12 average thickness rods - For a weave called 'waling'.

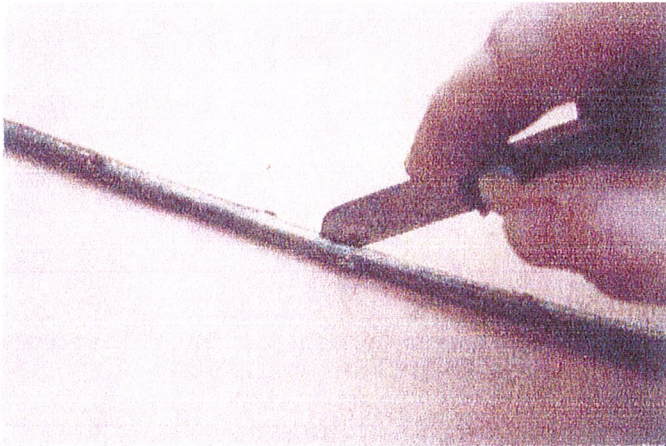
Note: For clarity of demonstration I have used a combination of different willows: unstripped willow and two types of stripped willow. You do not need to do this...

## Stage 1 - The Base

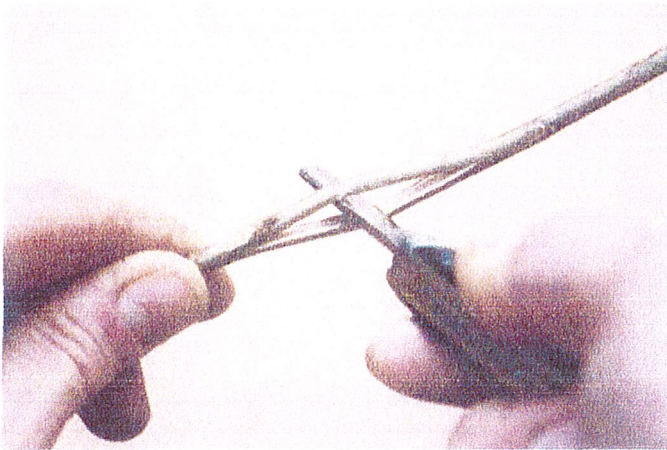


#### Making the 'slath':

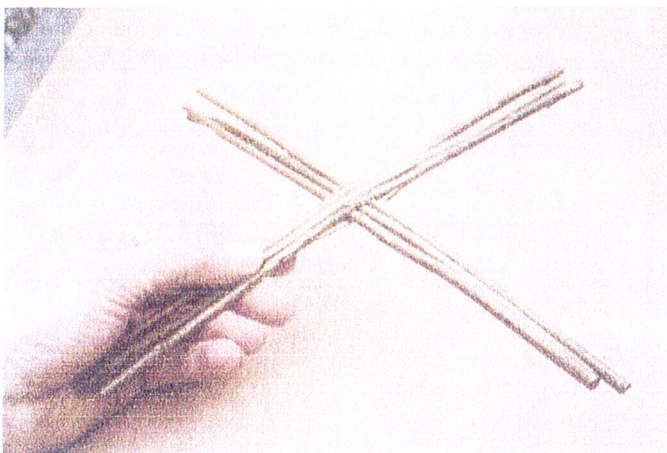
Take the six thickest rods for the 'base sticks'. From the butt end of each, cut a length 12" (30cm) long.



Half of these sticks need to be split at their centre using a knife.

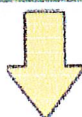
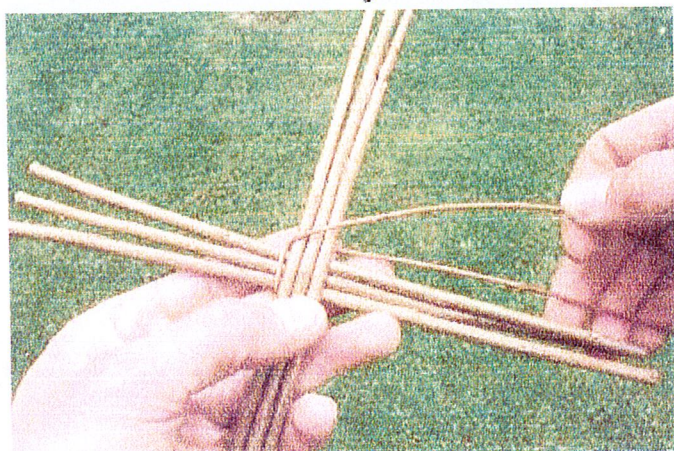
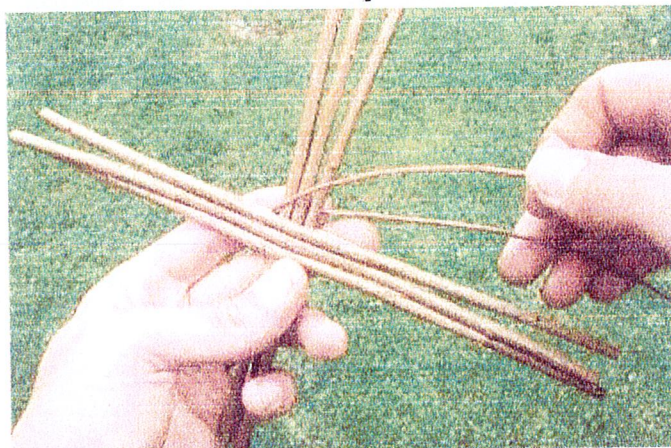
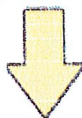
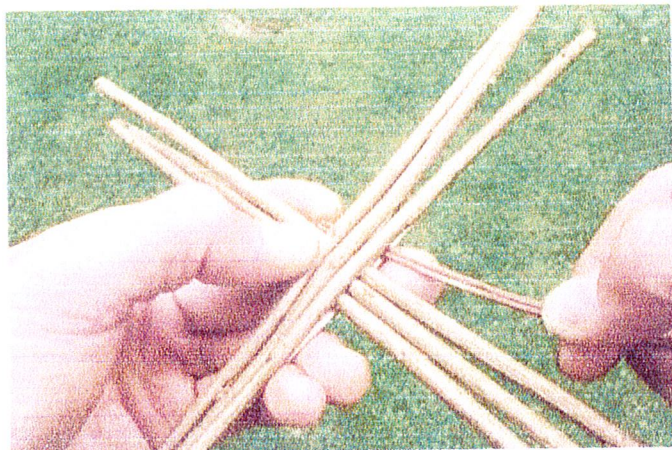


Working onto a surface, push the knife into the stick as central as possible. Then pick the stick up and push the blade through. Now turn the knife to open out the split, which needs to be about 2" (5cm) long.



The non-split sticks are now threaded through the centres of the split sticks to form a cross called a 'slath'. This is most easily done by first threading the three split sticks onto one non-split stick, then simply push the other two through into place. Note, it can be a good idea to alternate the thick and thin ends to keep things balanced.

Weaving the base: The base is woven with a 'pairing' weave. To begin, you'll be weaving clockwise around each of the four 'arms' of the slath to hold it tightly together.



Select your two thinnest longest rods to use as weavers. You'll start with their tip ends (the thinner ends). Trim a couple of inches off if they are damaged or very wispy.

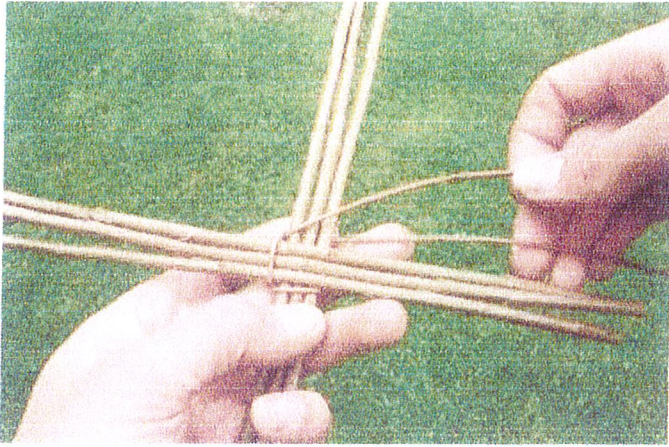
Insert the tips into the split of the slath as shown.

Then, position the weavers so that the next arm of the slath is between them, as shown.

Now, bring the weaver from the back up and over the next arm, and the top weaver down behind.

Do the same again around the next arm, bringing the weaver from the back up and over, and the top weaver down behind...

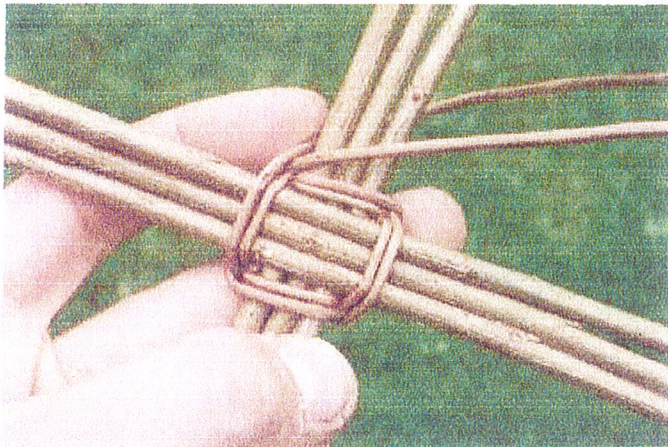
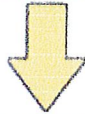
Rotate the slath as you go (anticlockwise) so that the handling is the same with each stroke. This will help a lot.



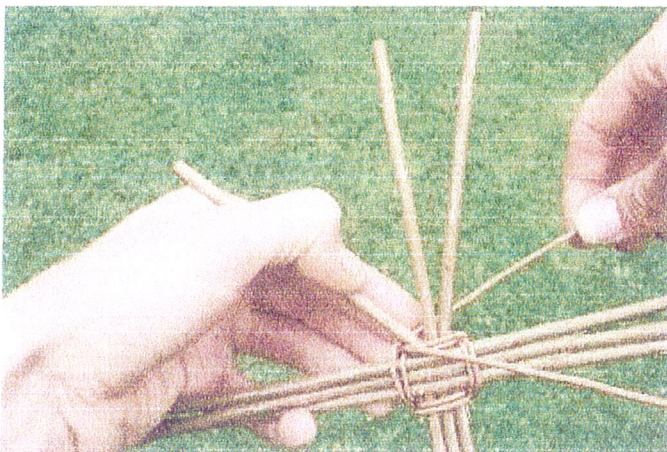
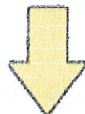
Keep the weavers pulled in tightly as you go.

Note that when the weaver from the back comes up, it should come under the weaver resting at the top, and then the top weaver goes down over it.

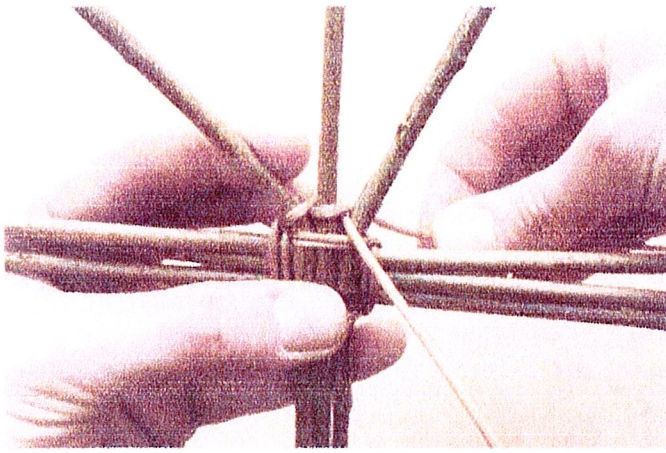
You will need to continue in this way until you have completed two rounds.



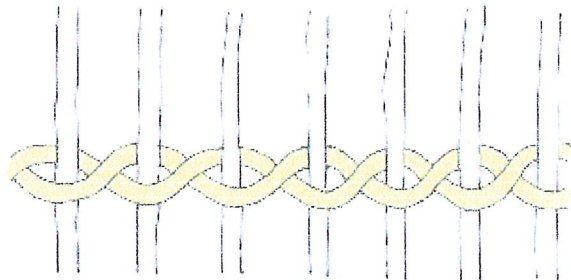
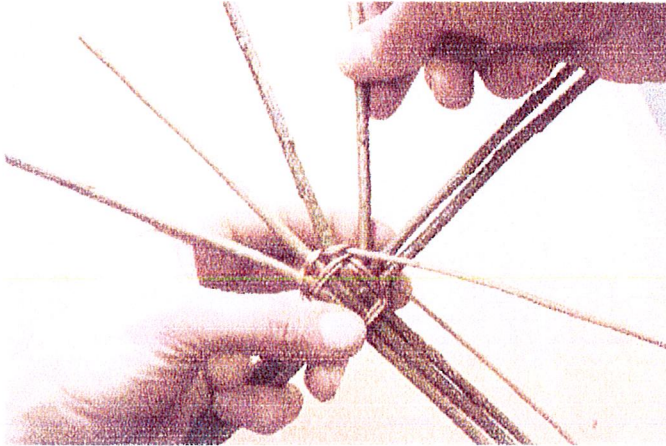
Position the weavers as if you are about to do a third round as shown.



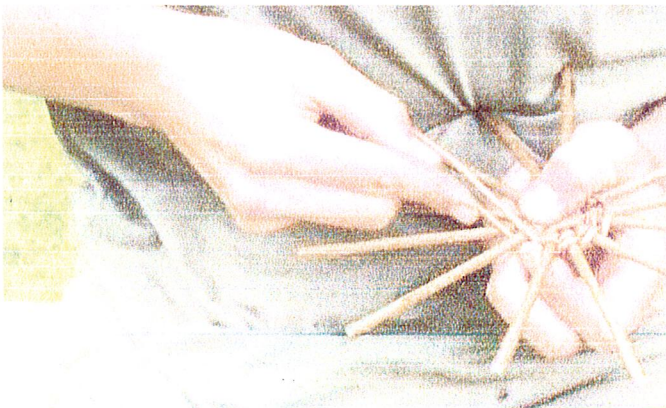
Continue with the same pairing weave, except now you'll need to weave between each individual slath stick. Think of each stick as a separate 'arm' like before. Bend each set of three sticks open as you come to them so they'll become spaced like spokes of a wheel. Be firm.



Pull the weave in as close as possible as you go.

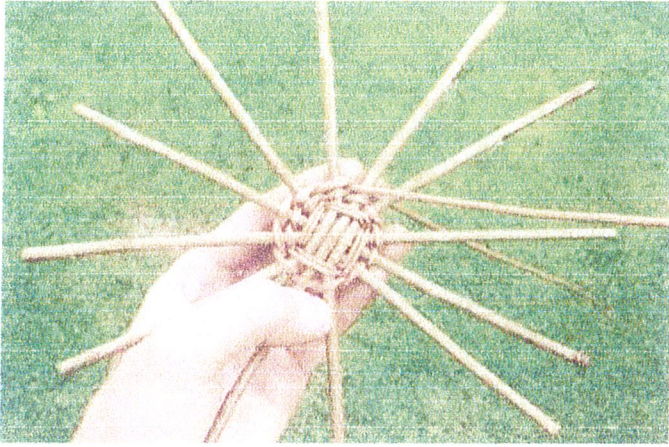


This diagram of a pairing weave woven around a series of stakes/ spokes should help in understanding how it should look.

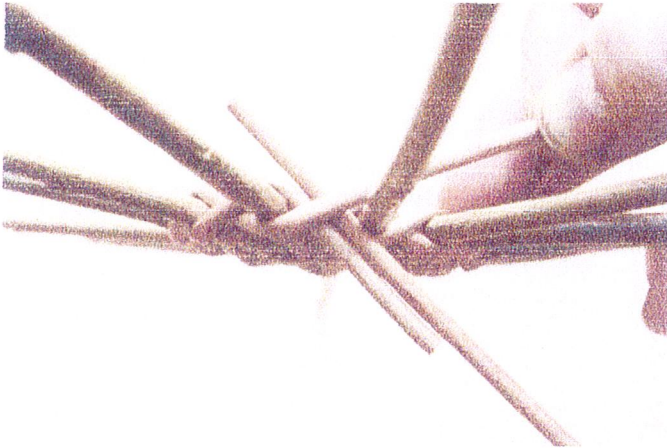


**\*KEY TECHNIQUE\***

To get a tight weave you must pull on the weavers firmly with every move. That means, when bringing a weaver up or down. Once woven, any slack can not simply be pulled out. Trying to claw at the weave to eliminate gaps later will also not work.



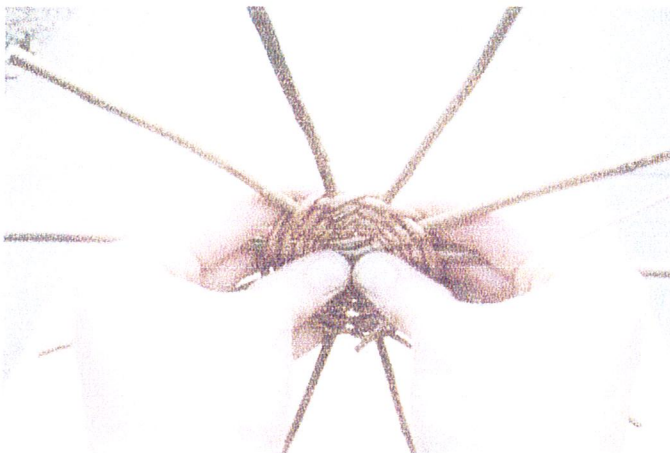
Continue weaving around and around...



Splice in new weavers as shown, simply adding a new weaver alongside the old one and continuing. Butt ends are replaced with butt ends and tips with tips. After replacing one, weave ahead at least a few moves before replacing the other. The protruding stubs should be trimmed after completing the base. Note, you can weave quite far towards the tip end (the thinner end) of a weaver, leaving only about 4" (10cm) before replacing it.

**\*KEY TECHNIQUE\***

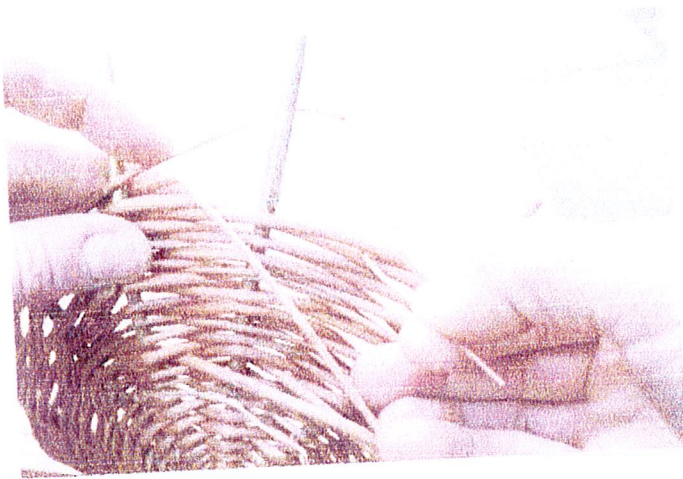
As well as doing the weave correctly, you need to focus on spacing the spokes evenly and keeping them level like a disk. To achieve this, hold the spokes where you want them to be while you weave around them, thus locking them in position.



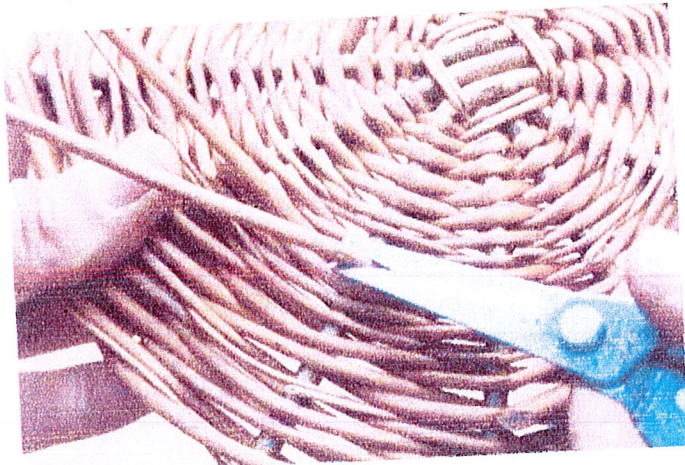
You are aiming for a base which is either flat or 'crowned'. Crowned means that the underside will be slightly concave. Crowning the base makes it stronger and also gives the basket a rim to sit on.

To do this, when the woven area is about 3" (7-8cm) wide, hold and flex it as shown, pushing the centre in with your thumbs. Turn the base around a little and repeat. Weave another row or two and then repeat this procedure again. The crowning can be worked toward or away from you as you weave. Monitor the shape as you go, you don't want the crowning to be too extreme either.

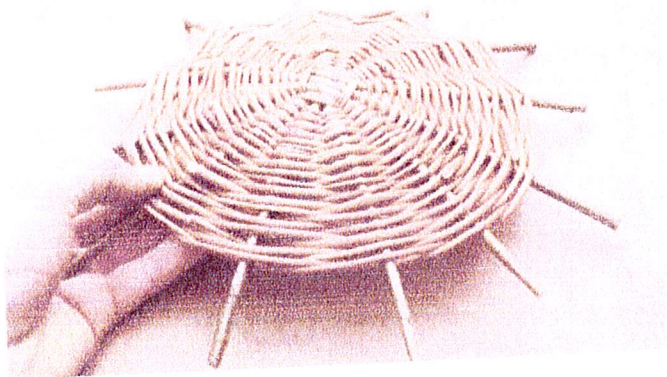
Note: While weaving, if you end up with one weaver working towards its tip end and the other working towards its butt, when you replace one of them, add the new weaver in so that it evens things out.



Continue weaving until the base is 8.5" (22cm) wide. It is preferable to finish with tip ends. Lock them off with a single move, threading the weaver which would go next, between the weavers of the previous row. This will keep the other end held in too.



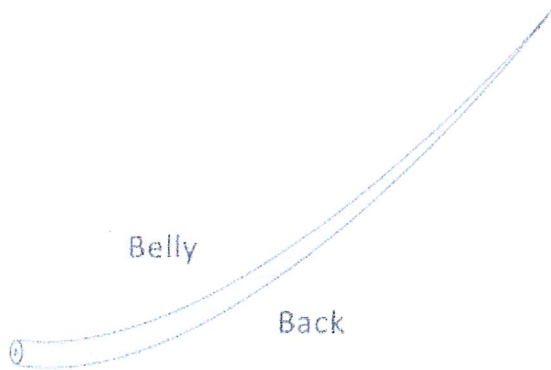
The weaver ends should now be cut off very close to the weave. However, the ends must still be resting against a spoke, or have no way of flicking out to the other side of the base.



Base complete. If yours does not look like this, that is totally normal for a first attempt; do not feel hopeless. If you are not satisfied you could always weave another now that you know how...

## Stage 2 - Staking Up

At this stage, you now need to insert new rods into the weave of the base alongside each spoke. These will then be turned up vertically, giving you 'side stakes' around which to weave. Use your medium-thick rods for this. Remember, the stake material must always be thicker than the weaving material.

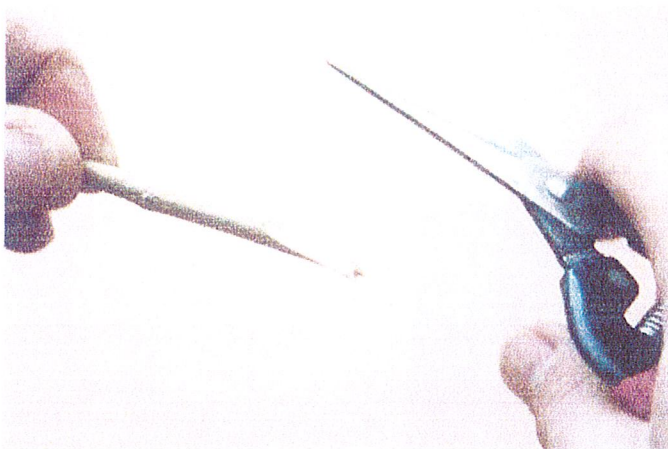


Before we start, you should notice that each willow rod has a natural curve in it. The outside of the curve is known as the 'back', and the inside is the 'belly'.

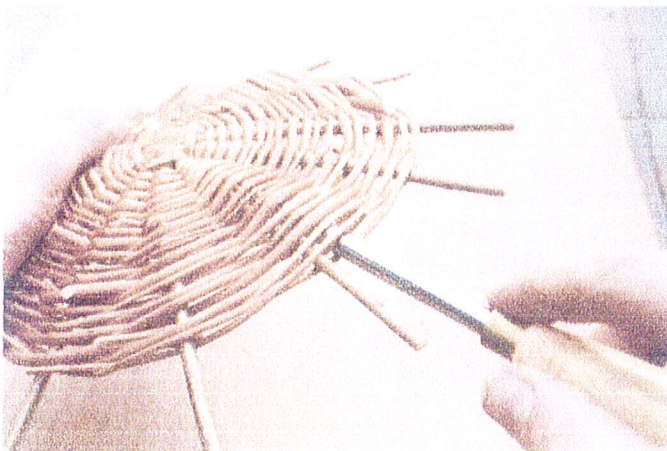
A basket of this size with spokes spaced as they are will require two side stakes inserting next to each spoke, a total of 24.

**\*Insight for future projects\***

If there was only one stake per spoke, the overall spacing of the side stakes would be much wider. As a result, the weave on the sides would be very loose. Too many stakes can also be a problem. With your own projects in future, you will need to carefully judge how many stakes a basket requires to achieve a nice tight weave. It can often be the case that for example, only a few of the spokes need to have two stakes inserting next to them in order to tighten up the overall spacing; the others needing only one. Note, no more than two stakes can be inserted next to any one spoke. You will learn more about all this in the projects to follow.

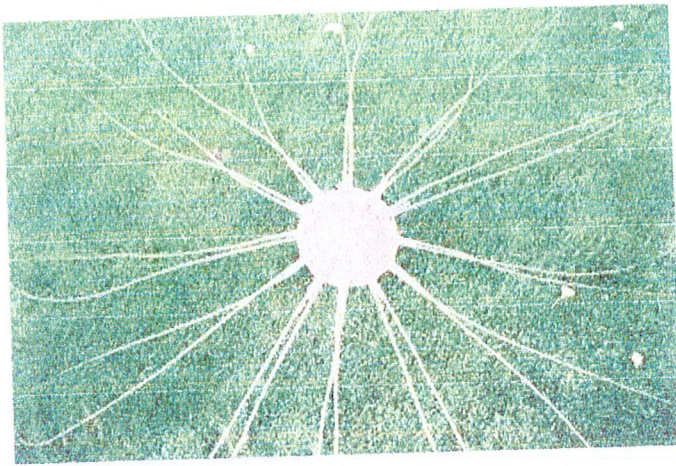


In order to insert the stakes, you will need to 'slype' the butt end of each, that means to make a long point. This can be done with a knife or a skilful snip of the secateurs. The cut surface should be on either the back or the belly, and not sideways. Be consistent.

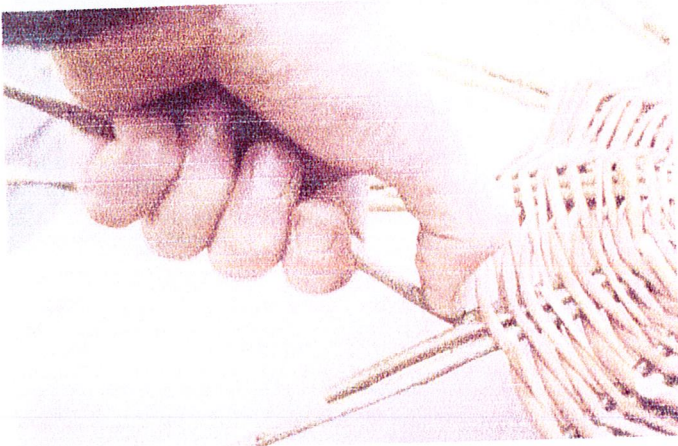


While holding the base with the concave side facing down (the underside), push the bodkin deep into the weave beside a spoke as shown. Remove, and then insert a stake belly side down into the weave as far as it will go. Repeat on the other side of the spoke. In this way, insert two stakes next to every spoke.

Inserting the stakes belly side down means they will be bent up against their natural curve, which will result in straighter sides. Note, Inserting the stakes back side up instead, gives sides which bow out more like a bowl.



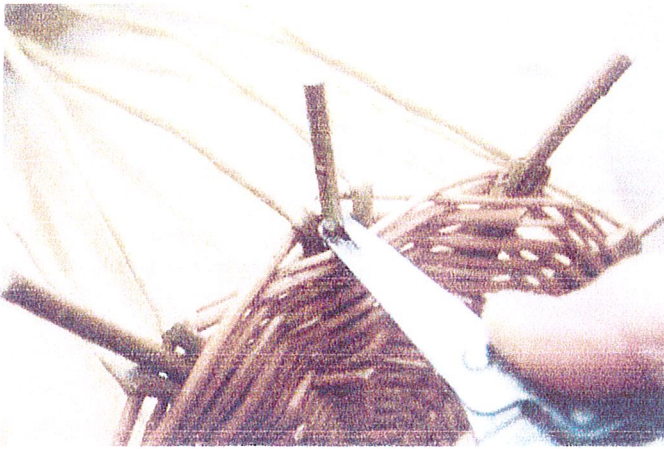
*All the stakes inserted.*



The stakes are now bent up, known as 'pricking up'. To do this, make a kink in each one slightly away from the edge of the weave, about 5mm (3/16"), no further. Use your thumb nail as shown. Let the rods relax back until you've kinked them all, then bring them all up in one go.



The stakes are held up with either a hoop as pictured (which is tied in place), or by simply tying them tightly together. If simply tied, do this high enough that the stakes are not leaning inwards. Also ensure they are not being held in a lopsided manner.



The base spokes can now be trimmed back level with the edge of the weave, ensuring that their ends are now further back than the turn-up of the stakes.

### Stage 3 - The Upsett



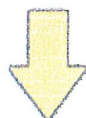
During the 'upsett', a weave called 'waling' is used as a transition between the base and the side. The main purpose of this is to begin to secure the stakes upright and also to space them more evenly.

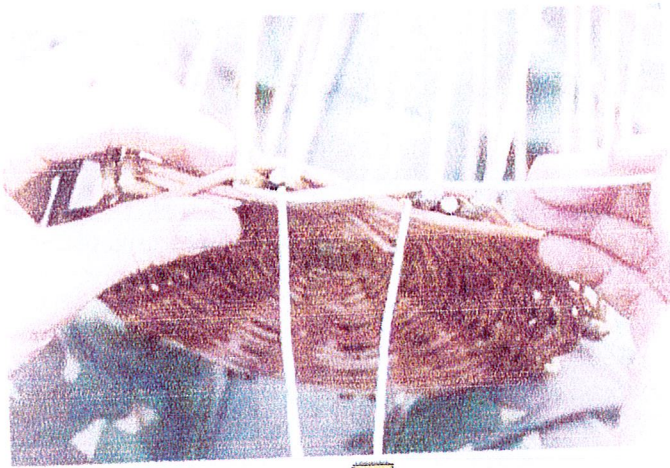
The method of 'waling' to follow involves weaving with three rods; it is called a '3 rod wale'. Use your average thickness weaving material for this.

To begin with, work with the basket lying down on your lap as pictured.



1. Take three similar rods and cut them to the same length. Start with the tip ends. Insert them a couple of inches deep (5cm) into the weave of the base on the left hand side of three consecutive uprights, as shown.



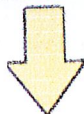


Note, for the first round, you will be weaving not on the side, but on the edge between the base and the side.

2. Begin by taking the leftmost rod over two stakes, behind the next and out to the front, as shown.



3. Now take the next leftmost rod and weave it in the same manner; over two stakes, behind the next and out to the front.



4. Continue in this manner around the basket, always weaving the next leftmost rod. Note, the rod in use must always pass over the top of the other rods.

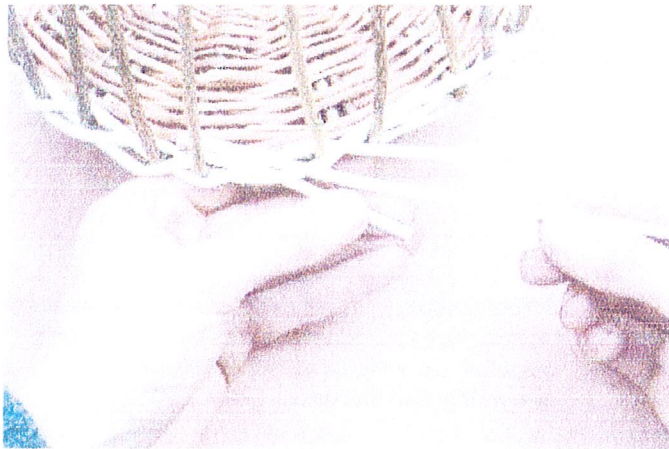
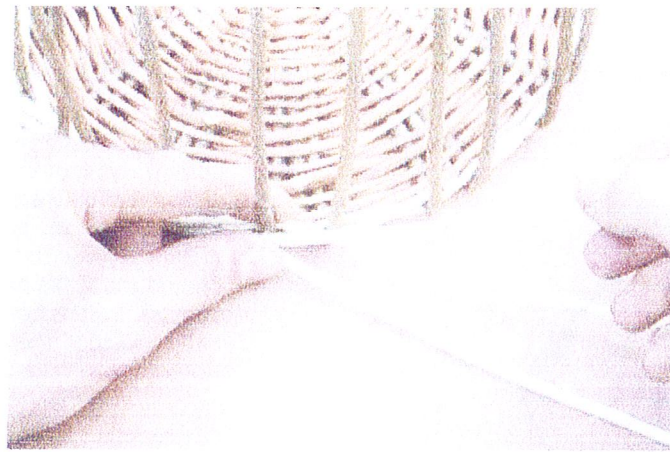
See in the photos how the uprights are starting to be spaced more evenly by pulling and holding them in place while weaving around them.

Once you've gone around the basket once, switch to working with the basket upright on a flat surface such as a table.

**\*KEY TECHNIQUE\***

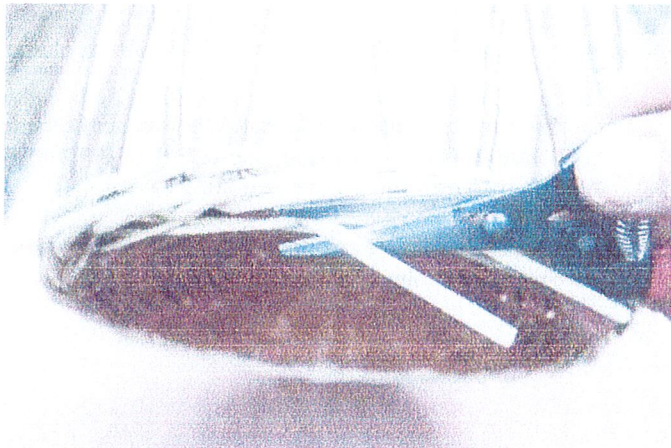
This photo shows correct weaving technique. The rod is brought across, pinched and held in place against the stake, before being taken behind the next stake. Note: avoid threading the end of the rod through the stakes

like a needle; that is hard work.



When you come to your ends, leave at least some length on the outside as shown. Add new rods in one by one starting with the left one as usual. The old end is pulled back slightly and then the new rod is simply inserted alongside as shown. Weave the new rod one stroke, before replacing the next, and so on... Note, when inserting a new rod, the end must go in far enough to be held behind the stake so that it can't flick back out once woven.

Finish when the rods come to their tip ends and the pattern cannot continue. Squash the weave down to make sure it is firmly seated. Note, by both starting and finishing the waling with tip ends, the pattern fades nicely in and out.



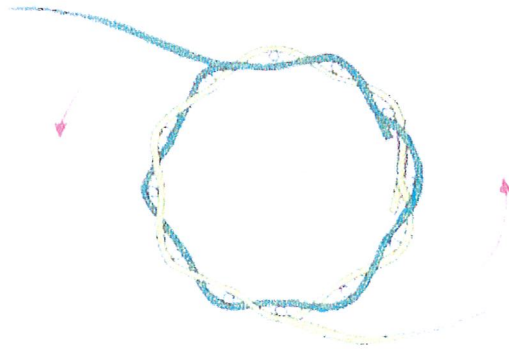
All the ends are cut off about half way between the stakes.

## Stage 4 - Weaving the Sides

There are many types of weave which can be used on the side of a basket. Being as this is your first, it's good to keep things simple and do a 'randing' weave. With randing, the weaver/s simply goes around the stakes, in-front, then behind, in-front, then behind, and so on...

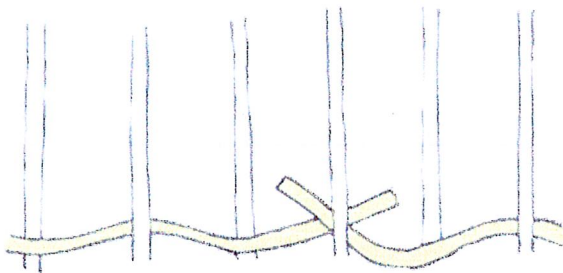
If you had an odd number of stakes then you'd weave with just one rod going around and around (obviously joining in new rods when necessary). However, because you have an even number, two rods need to be used, one 'chasing' the other.

Before you begin, place some kind of weight inside the basket, this will hold it steady and give you more control.



Begin by placing the butt end of a rod behind an upright, lying directly on top of the wale. Now weave it simply around the stakes; in-front, behind, in-front, behind. Do this for just a short distance. Now, the second weaver is added in behind the stake previous to where the first weaver started. Switch between weaving one weaver a little and then the other. It is important that one does not overtake the other at any point.

Remember to use good weaving technique as explained in the precious 'key technique' box. Also, continue to work on positioning the stakes evenly by holding them where you want them to be while weaving around them.

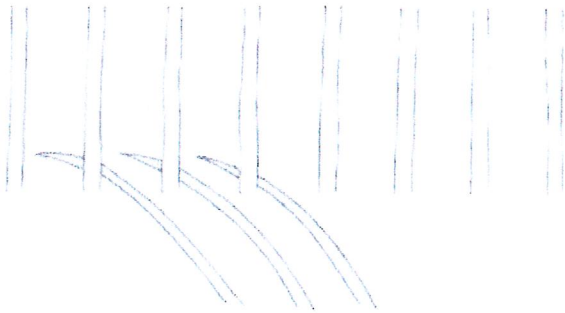


When weavers run out, add in new ones as shown. Join butts to butts and tips to tips. Note, trim some off tip ends so as not to weave with incredibly thin material.



By now the stakes will most likely be supported. Undo the tie (or remove the hoop). If they now lean too far out, re-tie temporarily.

Weave 3 1/2" (9 cm) high or a little more if you wish. Firm down as you go.



When that's done, weave a band of three rod wale on top. Same method as for the upsett, except the tip ends start simply resting behind the uprights as shown.



*Sides complete...*

Before moving on to weaving the finishing border, ensure the weave is firmed down and level on top. Push on the weave with your thumbs.

## Stage 5 - The Border

To complete the basket the upright stakes are turned down and woven into a border. The kind detailed below is a 'trac' border. There are many possible versions of this, you will be starting with a fairly simple one.

In preparation, a kink needs to be made in each stake slightly higher than the top of the weave. This ensures that each rod will bend at exactly the right point when turned down. The space below the kink allows room for woven rods underneath.



It is very important that the kink is made at the correct height. In this version, it is made at the height of three rod thicknesses. As a measure, hold three rods (off-cuts as thick as stakes) on top of one another, then bend a stake over them to the right as shown. Let the stake stand back up again, then do the next, and so on... Take care in getting them all the same. You may find it less fiddly to bend them over something else of equal size.



Each stake is woven in the same manner. To begin, take one down to the right in-front of two uprights, behind the next, then out to the front as shown.



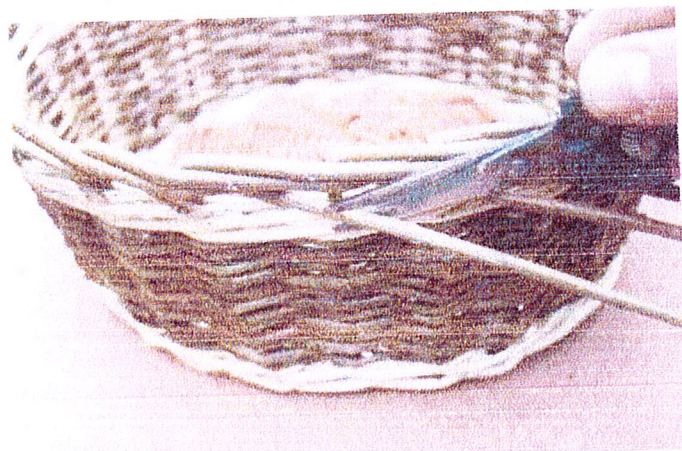
The next stake to the right is then woven in the same manner, and so on...

Ensure each stake is fully down before taking the next.



When only three stakes remain upright, they continue to be taken in the same pattern, except you'll now need to thread them into place under the already woven stakes where you started.

If you find it difficult to see how they should be threaded, look back at a complete portion and use it as your guide. Also remember that each rod lies on top of the one before it.



When complete, trim all the ends off with a slanted cut, making sure they still rest on the outside against an upright.

## Stage 5 - Picking Off



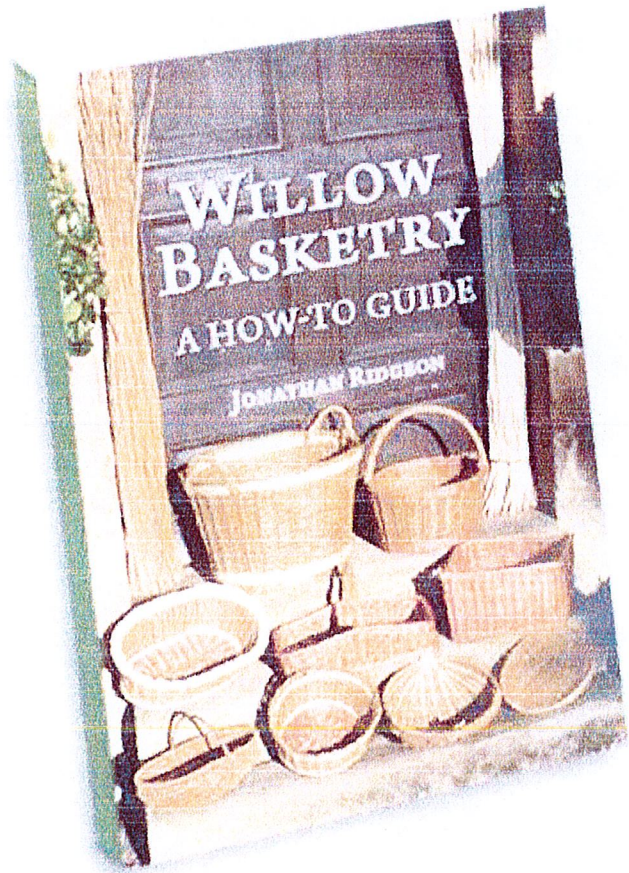
The last stage is to trim off any other excess ends anywhere on the basket. This is called 'picking off'. Make slanted cuts so they lie as flush as possible. Ensure they are not cut back too far, which would allow them to flick out to the other side.



**Congratulations on completing your first basket!**

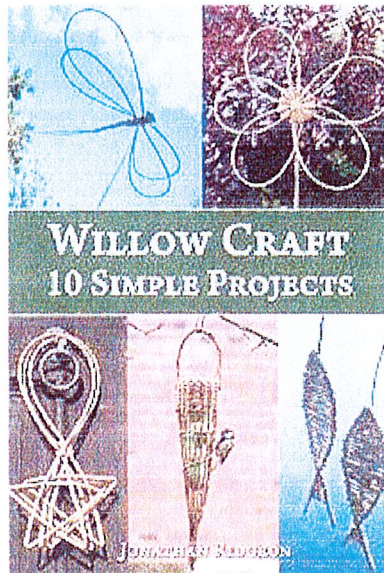
You covered some really fundamental techniques and principles in this project. If you feel that you need more practice to remember them, you may want to make a second attempt. If you like, you could always use different types of willow to spice things up a bit.

The project you have just finished is one of the many diverse tutorials which feature in my book *'Willow Basketry: A How-To Guide'*, available to purchase from Amazon, or in eBook form on my website, [see here for either](#).

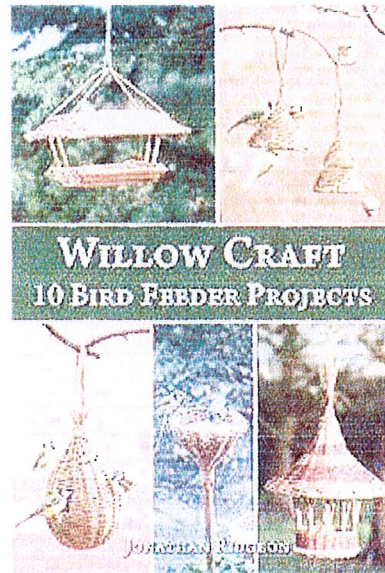


Other books by Jon:

[Willow Craft 10 Simple Projects](#)



[Willow Craft 10 Bird Feeder Projects](#)



Basketmakers' Association & Butcher, M. *Basket Borders: From the Basketmakers' Association* (Mickle Print Ltd 2004)

The Basketmakers' Association & Iacr Long Ashton Research Station. *Cultivation and Use of Basket Willows* (2001)

Vaughan, S. *Handmade Baskets From Nature's Colourful Materials* (Search Press 2006)

Gabriel, S & Goymer, S. *The Complete Book of Basketry Techniques* (David & Charles 1999)

Siler, L. *The Ultimate Basket Book: A Cornucopia of Popular Designs to Make* (Lark Books 2006)

Butcher, M. *Willow Work* (Mickle Print 1995)

Hammond, J. *Willow Basketry and Sculpture* (Crowood Press 2014)

