

From Spruce Roots to Baskets with a Haida Weaver

A lot of thought goes into planning to weave a hat or a basket, just in the gathering and the cooking and the splitting, but also in making sure that you have enough of the same sized roots to complete a project.

So when we go out digging spruce roots, we find an area that is quite clear and mossy. And you have to wait till a nicer time of the year, like early spring, when everything is fresh, and throughout the summer. And you, kind of like, lift up the moss, like a blanket. And sometimes, there might be a lot of roots, or there might be other types of roots, like hemlock or cedar or salal.

And then you kind of like to have to dig through and find the spruce roots and find the ones that are kind of uniform in size and straight, without curls or knots or too many other obstructions to it. And then you dig them out. It can take a long time.

And then after that, you have to cook them in a fire. And when they get hot enough, you take them out, and then use a piece of wood to like split, pull it through. And it takes off all the outer bark of the root. And it comes out quite light. And then, after you've cooked them all, then you have to split them in half and then bundle them. And then save them to further split and process for weaving.

The weft is the outside part of the spruce root, so it's rounded. And that's what you weave around the warps with. And the warps are the flat inner part of the roots. And it's all split and they're the even size. And I kind of like to think about it as the warps being like the bones of the basket. And the wefts being more like the weavers. Because they are like going around the bones.

The water is used to keep the spruce roots pliable, because when they dry out, they are a little bit brittle. And the water just like, hydrates them and keeps them supple and you can weave better with them.

There are a lot of different things to keep track of while you're weaving. Like you have to keep the tension the same; the same size weft and warp, and where your hands are. And each stitch hopefully looks even. And it looks okay, because if there's a mistake, your eye gets drawn to it. And when you do see mistakes, you have to take it apart, all the way back to the mistake and then correct it and keep going.