

Basketry

Thousands of years ago, everything Native Peoples wanted or needed had to be gathered and made by hand. One of the needed items was baskets. Baskets were essential for carrying and storing items. Native peoples weave baskets from plant material, which makes them lightweight but strong. Some plant materials used for the baskets include rushes, hazel sticks, beargrass, cedar and spruce roots. Baskets can be made in any size or shape, depending on what they are needed for. Historically, it was also important that baskets were easy to carry, as many tribes traveled during the summer and fall seasons to follow harvests. They could even be made to be watertight so they could be used to cook in. Burden baskets were also made, which were designed with a strap that they would wear on their head and that would keep their hands free while they gathered. If cared for, these baskets could last for generations.



Basket making material is gathered at different times of the year and most materials must be stored for a year before it can be used to make a basket. Basketmakers are important people in the tribe. Historically all women within a tribe made baskets but some women were better at making baskets than others.

The materials used, along with the shape and design of the baskets indicates which tribe the basket comes from. Each basketmaker typically has their own design or style. The basketmaker determines what they need the basket for, which then helps them decide what materials they should use and what shape and size the basket needs to be. For example, for gathering berries the basketmaker would make a solid straight basket. This type of basket would help insure that the berries were taken care of and would not end up being smashed.

When the Native peoples were sent to the Reservation at Grand Ronde they continued to make baskets. As more European people came through the area, they were interested in the baskets and wanted to buy them. Some of the basket makers then started making baskets to sell or trade. The Native people were poor and selling or trading baskets became a good way for them to make a living. They would even travel to the Portland area in order to sell their baskets.



The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde still has some basketmakers. But the art of basketry was almost lost, along with many other cultural practices, during termination. Today, basket makers are still considered valuable members of the tribe. Many classes are offered at the Tribe and it is one of the traditions that we are trying to preserve and continue.