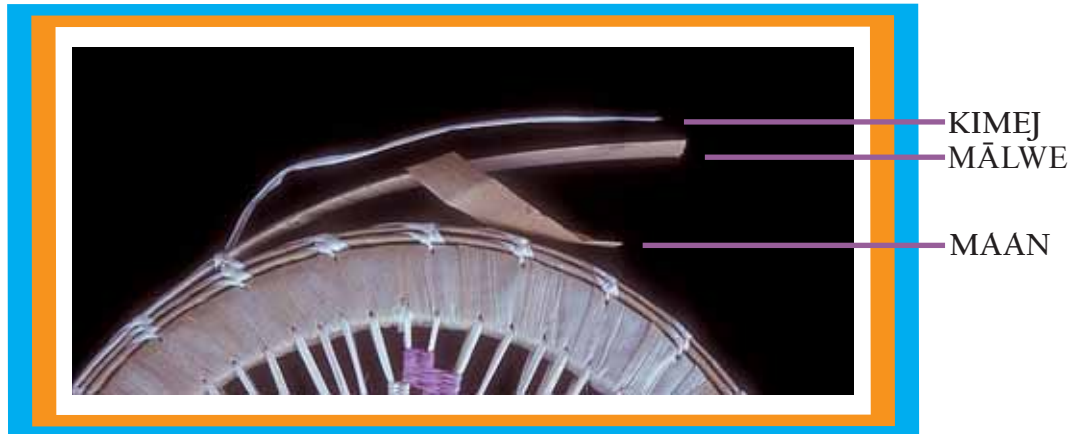


FIBER PREPARATION



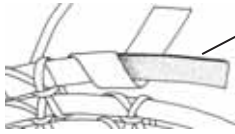
The Marshallese women are considered to be the finest weavers in Micronesia. But, before they can even begin weaving, countless hours are spent collecting and preparing the local plant fibers.

MĀLWE is the stiff core material used in baskets, wall decorations, headbands, ornaments, and fans. It is made from the great mid rib of the coconut palm frond.

KIMEJ is the white stitching material used in most handicrafts. It is made from the new shoot of the coconut palm.

MAAN is wrapped over the mālwe or used in handbags, hats, and mats. It is made from the prepared leaves of the pandanus tree.

JAB (not shown) is a fiber used to add color or decoration to mats, hats, and baskets. It is made from the hibiscus tree (“LO”).



MĀLWE (core material) - This flat, flexible material is made from the great midrib ("PAP") of a coconut palm tree ("Cocos nucifera")



1. Fronds being cut from coconut palm



2. Palm midrib being removed



3. Stripping off end leaves



4. Splitting the rib into sections



5. Scraping off the inner, pulpy part of the rib

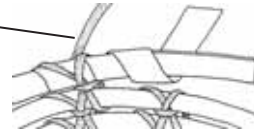


5a. Scraped piece in process



6. After drying for a day in the sun, the MĀLWE is twisted into rings and stored in a basket

KIMEJ (stitching and weaving material) – This beautiful, strong white fiber is made from the leaves of a new shoot of the coconut palm (“JUUBUB”)



1. Select a new shoot from the palm that has just begun to open.



2. Remove the leaflets and their midribs from the fronds midrib.



3. Scrape off the soft inner material from the leaflets.



4. Put the leaflets into a pail of water.



5. Boil the leaves for several minutes in fresh water until the green color in the leaves is almost gone.



6. Remove, untangle, and tie the leaves in bundles. Hang in the sun for 1 - 2 days to dry.

At this time the kimej can be dyed with natural or commercial dyes.



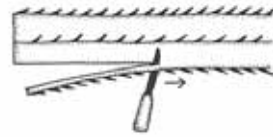
MAAN (wrapping and weaving) – This versatile fiber is made from the dry leaves (“MAANBIL”) and the green leaves (“MAANRAR”) of the pandanus or Screw Pine (genus *Pandanus*)



1. Collect brown leaves from the tree



2. Remove side and midrib thorns



3. Flatten and knead the leaf in your hand to soften it. Wrap the leaves into a roll and store in a dry place.



4. “JALJEL in MAAN”



MAANRAR

Collect the green leaves and remove thorns. They can be dried in the sun for several days and will turn a lighter color than maanbil. Or, you can cook-dry the leaves over a pit fire for 1 – 2 minutes on each side and then put them in the sun to further dry. This produces an off white shade. The leaves are then wound into a “JALJEL in MAAN” for future use.



a.



b.

Before you can weave with the softened pandanus leaves, they need to be stripped into thin sections (a) and the rough inside surface removed (b). The strips are flattened and rolled into a ball (c).



c.



Hibiscus Flower

JAB (used for color)

This fiber is made from the hibiscus tree (“LO”). A young tree with no side branches is cut down and the outer layer scraped off. The trunk is then buried in the sand in the lagoon water to loosen and soften the outer white layer. This stringy layer is then removed, washed, and dried in the sun like kimej. It is then ready to used or to be dyed.



Cowrie shells on Wall Decoration

COWRIE SHELLS

are used to embellish many handicrafts. The most commonly used cowries are the “money cowrie”, the “strawberry”, and the “gold ringer”.



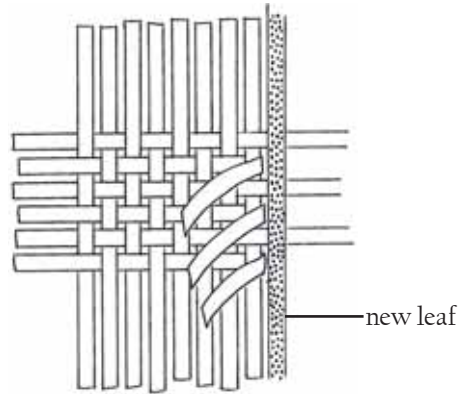
Cowrie shells being cleaned by ants

Cowries are collected at low tide and placed slit side up in a shady area where ants can eat out their insides. After the shells have been cleaned, holes are drilled in them.

WEAVING TECHNIQUES



Plaited pandanus leaves



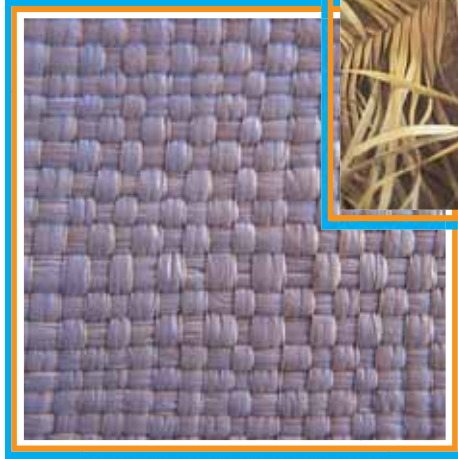
PLAITING

Plaiting with pandanus and coconut leaf products is common throughout the Pacific. This simple over-one, under-one technique offers many design possibilities. Patterns are created by using dark and light strips of pandanus leaves and by laying in strips of natural and dyed hibiscus fibers.

Mats are plaited on the ground on a hard surface while baskets are usually woven over a wooden mold.



Mat weaving



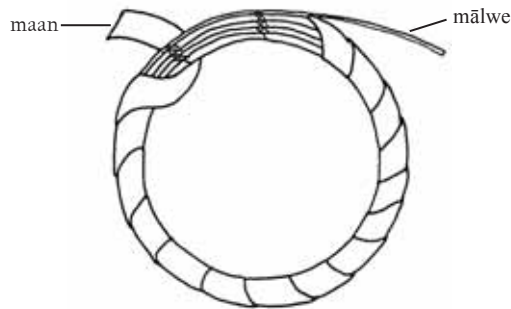
Plaited Kimej

COILING

Wall decorations, fans, and many baskets are made using the versatile coiling method. Coiling consists of stitching one row on top of another row. Kimej is used as the stitching material and mālwe wrapped with maan is the core material.

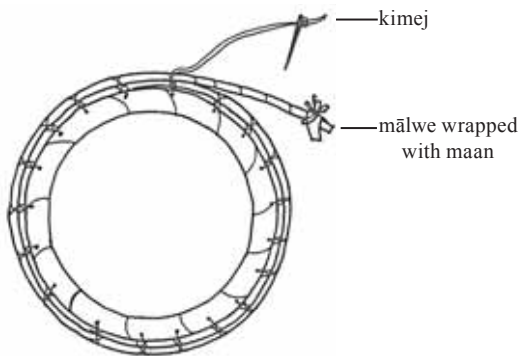


Coiling stitch



Foundation ring for fans, wall decorations, and basket bottoms.

With flat sides together, coil and stitch 6-7 rows of mālwe together and wrap with maan.



Several rows of coiling and stitching are done on top of the foundation ring before the inside weaving begins (next page) and the piece is completed.



The framework of most pieces consists of a prepared central foundation ring that is the core for further stitching and coiling.

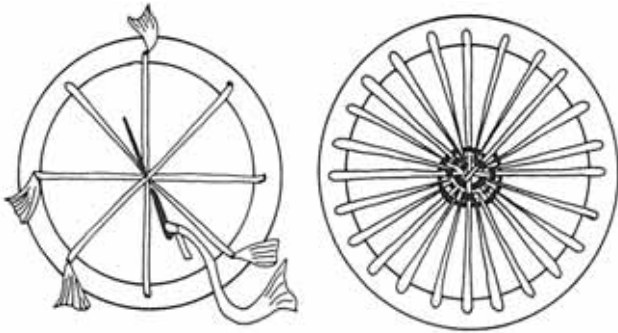


Flat coiled rows on bottom, and stacked coiled rows on side of a basket.

WOVEN DESIGNS

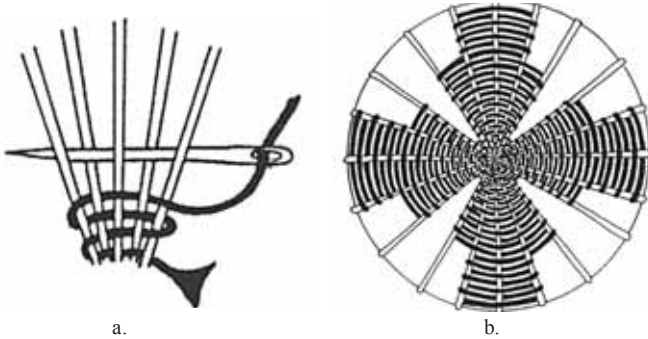
teneriffe (“BENBEN”)

Many Marshallese handicrafts are known for their colorful and intricate needle woven designs, “teneriffe”. This universal and historical technique can be traced back to the embroideries and laces of Europe’s Middle Ages.



Likiep fan detail

Before a teneriffe design can be made, the area to be woven must be warped or strung (“TO”) with kimej.



Woman stringing

To weave the design, weave over and under the spokes with a needle threaded with kimej (a.) Drop spokes to form designs (b.).

The teneriffe patterns are endless and provide a personal and creative outlet for the weaver.



Wall Decoration detail