

Basket Reed & Other Weaving Materials Glossary

Please note:

this is by no means a complete list of weaving materials.

If it bends, it can be woven with in some capacity.

As time allows this list will be updated, more detailed information added and it will continue to grow so please check back.

Basket Reed:

Cut from the core of the rattan plant (see below for more information about rattan).

Commercially available weaving material, commonly used in the US and somewhat in Europe.

Basket reed comes mostly in neat coils but may also be available in loosely tied hanks.

Basket reed is used to weave baskets, woven on chair and rocker seats and backs that have four rungs (called splint seats) and woven sculptures.

Also know by names such as Center Cane, Pulp Cane, Wicker, Rattan Core, etc.

Basket reed is cut into many different widths and types:

Flat Reed (FR or FF, may be referred to as splint but splint is more commonly used when talking about wood strips like ash or maple) – flat on both sides with a right (smooth) side and wrong (rough or hairy) side. Can be used for stakes, weavers, lashing material, rims and more depending on the thickness of the individual pieces.

Flat Oval (FO, half oval) – flat on one side (wrong side) and gently rounded on the other (good side). Can be used for stakes, weavers, lashing material, rims and more depending on the thickness of the individual pieces.

Round Reed (RR) – perfectly round (no wrong side). Can be used as spokes, weavers, rim filler, lashing material and more depending on the thickness of the individual pieces.

In Europe Round Reed is generally called Wicker or Cane while in the US wicker usually refers to a style of woven furniture. Sometimes you might hear Round Reed called “twine” but this actually refers to the technique called twining that round reed is used for.

Some factory made chairs like Brewers chairs used round reed to hold the pre-woven cane into the groove in the wood rather than spline.

Half Round (HR or split reed) – flat on one side (wrong side) and very rounded on the other side (good side). This reed is half of a circle/large sizes of round reed cut in half. Generally used for heavy duty rims (as on backpacks and work baskets, etc.), smaller sizes might be used as spokes.

Oval Core (OC or oval oval) – oval on both sides (no wrong side) like 2 pieces of flat oval glued together. Commonly used for ribs in ribbed baskets such as egg baskets and baskets woven around antlers.

Spline – is wedge shaped and used to hold pre-woven cane into the groove on chairs and rockers. It can also be used for ribs in ribbed style baskets like Egg and Melon baskets.

Basket reed is available in different qualities:

Top quality reed may be called different things by different suppliers such as: Select Quality, Premium, Superior Quality, etc.

Generally First Quality is a lesser quality reed.

ASK questions if you are unsure.

If a reed is being sold for a cheap price odds are that it is a lesser quality reed.

European Cut Reed had a waffle like texture and was very flexible. This type of cut seems to be completely off the market.

Basket reed is available in different colors that may be natural or artificially produced:

Top quality reed is generally a natural light eggshell to slightly tan color. Top quality reeds are bundled together to be very uniform in color. However there are different species of very good rattan that have a reddish hue.

Woodgrain reed (sometimes sold as Second or Third Color Reed) has natural color variations produced by nature. These may be streaks of gray, tan or brown and resemble the grain patterns found in wood. These reeds may be slightly hairier than Top Quality Reeds since overseas they are considered less important but they have a beautiful look and are great for the weaver on a budget who likes a very natural or woody look.

Some lesser quality reeds will have a wider color variation or be darker overall and more brown in color.

Bleached reeds are heavily processed and start out very white in color. They will oxidize and darken just like any other reed and will not retain the white color. These reeds are usually a lesser First Quality reed that is processed so the final product is VERY wimpy in nature while still thick. It is a good choice for kids camps, etc. that are on a tight budget. They also work well for weavers or stakes when you need flexibility but not strength such as a towel basket (stakes are bent tightly around the bottom bar of the handle).

Dyed reeds may be dyed with naturally occurring dyes (such as walnut shells and indigo) or commercially available chemical dyes.

Space-dyed or Variegated reed has multiple colors on one strand of reed so that the colors blend one into the next.

Smoked reeds were originally hung over smoke (usually smoldering dung piles) until they turned a milk chocolate brown color. Today the brown color is chemically infused overseas.

Cane:

Cut from the bark of the rattan plant (see below for more information about rattan).

Commercially available weaving material, commonly used in the US and somewhat in Europe.

Cane comes mostly in neat coils but may also be available in loosely tied hanks.

Cane is used to weave hand-cane rockers and chairs, splint rockers and chairs (woven around the rungs of a seat or back), it can be used in all parts of basket weaving, lashings on wicker furniture, wrapped handles of tea pots and woven decorative knots on rocks, sticks and other solid objects.

Cane types:

Strand Cane – long strips of cane used for seatweaving, basketweaving, etc. Hard to dye and stain evenly because the bark is not very porous but can produce a beautiful effect and has a “crackled” appearance.

Binder Cane – just a wider cur of cane traditionally used as the binder strip to cover the holes on hand-caned furniture. Hard to dye and stain evenly because the bark is not very porous. Makes a great lasher and wrapped/braided handles in basketweaving

Pre-woven Cane (Mesh Cane, Machine/d Cane) – a mat of cane which is woven on a loom, pieces of cane are glued together to make a 50 ft long roll. After the vertical and horizontal pieces are woven on the loom it is taken off and the diagonal; strands are woven in my hand. It is used to repair furniture that has a groove routed into the wood. The cane mesh is forced down into the groove and spline is used to hold it in place. Hard to dye and stain evenly because the bark is not very porous.

Hamburg Cane (Bleached Cane) – a heavily processed cane that is very flexible and white in color. It will oxidize and darken over time. NOT used for seatweaving because it is too flexible and the seat would stretch. This is the best cane to dye, it generally takes a dye very well and evenly.

Plastic Cane – different sizes of strand or mesh cane are reproduced from a plastic material and mostly used for outdoor furniture and canoe seats.

Strand Cane size:

The smallest width of Strand Cane currently on the market is 1.25 mm which is used for weaving miniature Nantucket baskets and the largest is called Slab Rattan and is usually 8-10 mm wide.

Strand Cane is usually referred to by name or millimeter size, sometimes both.

Extra Superfine Carriage - 1.25 mm

Superfine Carriage - 1.50 mm

Carriage Fine - 1.75 mm

Superfine - 2 mm

Fine- Fine - 2.25 mm

Fine - 2.50 mm

Narrow Medium - 2.75 mm

Medium - 3 mm

Common - 3.50 mm

4 mm Binder Cane

5 mm Binder Cane

6 mm Binder Cane

Slab Rattan – 6-8 mm wide

Slab Rattan 8-10 mm wide

Rattan:

The full article with pictures can be found at:

<http://www.countryseat.com/basketryreed.htm>

- There are between 550 and 600 species of rattan, which can be found in rainforest areas from South China to Australia and Fiji to West Africa and Madagascar. Basket reed is produced from the core of this thorny palm (mostly genera *Calamus*, *Daemonorops* or *Plectomia*) which grows like a vine into the forest canopy. Rattan for commercial use is harvested mostly in the jungles of South East Asia and Indonesia. Native peoples travel into the rainforests, sometimes whole families for months at a time,

to pull as many of the wild vines down from the forest canopy as they can. Much of the vine is left behind, tangled in the tree tops, the roots are left to grow again. The vines can be smaller in diameter near the roots and larger in diameter near the ends. Once rattan has developed, they do not increase in diameter as they age, they only increase in length. Some species of vines can grow to a few hundred feet.

- The rattan is cut into long pieces, approximately 20 feet or more, tied into manageable bundles and carried or dragged out of the forest.
- The rattan poles are now debarked and boiled in a mixture of kerosene and diesel fuel to prevent blue staining and kill any bugs or borers. The residue from the boiling must now be cleaned off and the poles are left standing or laying in the sun to dry.
- Bundles are made with mixed sizes, shipped to factories where they are graded by the type and size and of the rattan. The poles are now washed in water and very labor intensively cleaned using sand and a cloth. The joints, where the rings of thorns were removed, are scraped and the poles are closely sized. They are now ready to make chair cane and round core reeds.
- These same steps are used to process thick rattan cores and species that are used for the flat and flat oval reeds. Less care is taken with the outside bark since it is not usable and the thorough washing step is eliminated.
- The thick sizes of certain species of rattan suitable for flats and flat ovals are put through a machine that takes off the outer bark. Depending on the size of the core, the factories may polish the core in a sanding machine. Then flat ovals are cut from the outside, this is why sometimes the oval part is smooth and shiny. The rest of the core is sized and cut into flat reeds from 3/8" to 1" wide . Simple machines such as the one shown are used to cut the larger sizes of flat reed. Smaller machines are used for the sizes under 3/8".
- The flat strands are inspected for defects, graded by color (select quality and premium reeds are naturally whitish/eggshell in color. Second color reeds may have naturally occurring streaks of grey, black, rust or even purplish color running through the lengths.) and the tips are clipped to get rid of dark ends.
- The reed is weighed into one pound hanks, tied, coiled and hairs are clipped off the edges. All containers of reed go through a mandatory fumigation with methyl bromide (this is the same insecticide that is used on all produce that enters this country) before shipment to the US. Methyl bromide is considered food safe and is regulated by the EPA.

Seagrass: (this is NOT sweetgrass) A tall, thin and sturdy grass that grows in estuary areas overseas. It is harvested, dried and available in several different forms but most often twisted into a rope that is used in seatweaving and basketry.

Seagrass Rope (Hong Kong Grass) – two-ply twisted rope available in several sizes that is often used to weave seats on stools (that have four rungs), used to weave baskets and as a rim filler on baskets with lashed rims.

Seagrass Rope can be found packaged into 1 pound and 3 pound coils and some suppliers will break them down into smaller amounts like 50 ft. bundles.

#00 - diameter approximately 3/32" (2 - 2.25mm)

#0 - diameter approximately 7/64" (2.25 - 2.75mm)

#1 - diameter approximately 1/8" (3 - 3.50mm)

#2 - diameter approximately 5/32" (3.50 - 4mm)

#3 - diameter approximately 3/16" (4.5 - 5mm)

#4 - diameter approximately 1/4" (6 - 6.25mm)

Seagrass Braid – Several strands used to make flat braids, most often in approximately 5/8" and 7/8" wide. Makes a nice accent weaver or soft rim.

Seagrass Strands – The loose grass bundled into 1/2 pound bundles of straight strands. Approximately 100 straight strands per bundle. 4 - 5 foot in length. Used in coiling, as rim filler, accent rows, coiled rims and much more. Great smell and pale green color of natural dried grass.

Pre-Twisted Natural Grass Rush – The seagrass strands are twisted into a smooth rope that resembles natural rush (twisted cattails/bulrushes).

The full article with pictures can be found at:

<http://www.countryseat.com/basketryreed.htm#seagrass>

Seagrass or "salt-water-grass" grows on the riverbanks in estuary areas. The grass that we use in our baskets is not a true seagrass that grows on the ocean floor, but a grass that grows on land.

The leaves of the grass can grow to be approximately 10 feet. They are at least somewhat tended by the farmers that harvest the materials.

Twisted seagrass starts with the strands which are 3 to 4 foot in length, the bottom of the grass "needle" is used for the larger sizes and the tips are used for the thinner, more delicate sizes.

They are twisted and braided by hand using simple tools. Sizes vary due to each individual's skill and thickness of the grasses.

Many years ago in Asian countries, the salt-water-grass blades (which is a full needle leaf sliced in half) were used to bundle and tie up groceries (which were sometimes wrapped in old newspapers) for customers who carried all their daily groceries purchased in the open market.

Meat, poultry and beef were tied with the blades, even live struggling chickens were tied with thick blades around the wings. If a housewife would buy 10 things, she would carry each item tied with a blade of grass, dangling at her side. Most of the time, items were not even wrapped. Imagine a live/dead fish dangling at the end of a seagrass blade hanging from your waist.