Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI)

The Past Weaving the Future Project: Passing on Traditional Knowledge throughout the Republic of the Marshall Islands

Marshallese Basket (Iep) Toolkit
Summary: The HPO and WUTMI’s Weaving Project consisted of four components: 1) Locate Master Weavers; 2) Conduct a Workshop on Traditional Weaving; 3) Train participants to become “Skill Docents”; 4) Development of Weaving Portfolios. WUTMI first identified two Master Weavers, Mrs. Kiop Leon of Arno Atoll and Mrs. Belleri Annam of Mejit Island, who then led two weaving workshops at WUTMI’s 2nd Annual Meeting in 2007. One Workshop focused on making a type of Marshallese sitting mat called a Tēkao, and the other workshop focused on making baskets, or Iep. The workshops were one week long, and each participant learned how to weave and finish the product taught in the workshop. As the participants of the workshops continue to practice and build their weaving skills, WUTMI hopes that they become “Skills Docents” to their communities. In addition to the workshops, two manuals, or “Toolkits,” were created, listing the materials used to make these products (one Toolkit is for making Tēkao, and the other is for making Iep), as well as providing step-by-step instructions on how to weave them. These Toolkits will be duplicated and distributed as the final part of this project.

Statement of Intention: This toolkit is intended for use by Marshall Islanders to guide them in their learning of how to weave to these items. Some prior knowledge of weaving is presumed, as is the availability of knowledgeable people who can help if questions arise (In the Marshall Islands today, many older women still know these skills and are willing to help teach them when asked). Not all of the materials used in this toolkit are traditional, but they are rather a combination of traditional and modern materials. In the case of the Iep, due to time constraints and other considerations, traditional weaving skills are being utilized in a more modern context, as the box-shaped Iep with handles is of a more recent construction. However, the weaving skills taught and then used to create the Iep are traditional Marshallese skills.

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A beautiful basket
Tools and materials for making a basket*

- Pounding stone
- Pandanus leaves
- Mold*
- Jebōd
- Tape measure*
- Needle*
- Cardboard*
- Scissors*
- Glue*
- String
- basket

*Some materials used in the making of the lep are not traditional materials.
There are three different kinds of pandanus leaves for weaving a basket:

1. Maañ peį – these are the brown leaves that you pick from or under the pandanus tree.

2. Maañ rar – these are green leaves that you pick from the pandanus tree and cook on a fire that is not too strong.

3. Maañ kōjeje – these are green leaves that are put under the sun for drying.
Steps for making or weaving a basket.

- **Eppel** is the word that is used for collecting pandanus leaves.

- **Iiak** is the way we pull the sharp things, called “make,” along the edge of the leaves.

- **Jeljel** is the way we roll the leaves so that they’re nice and smooth.
After rolling the leaves (jeljel) we pound the leaves with the pounding stone.

- Use one of these tools for cutting or separating the leaves into the size you want for the basket.
- Start weaving the basket, using a mold.

- Glue the pieces of cardboard outside of the basket (this is the lining for the basket).

- Tape the cardboards together. This is for the basket to be firm and strong.
▪ Start weaving outer part of the basket, always start from the bottom.

▪ After weaving the bottom of the outer part of the basket, bring the finished lining that is still attached to the mold and put over it. Tie string around to hold the two pieces together.

▪ Now start weaving the basket until you get to the top of the mold.
Pull the mold from the finished basket and cut the edge of the basket so that it is even.

Weave two handles for the basket and sew them to the basket.

Ör is the Marshallese word that is used for finishing the edge of the basket and the handles together.
A completed and very beautiful basket!