

**Women United Together Marshall Islands
(WUTMI)**

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



PO BOX 195
Majuro, Marshall Islands 96960
Email: wutmi26@gmail.com
www.rmiwutmi.org

Marshallese Sitting Mat (*Tōlao*) Toolkit

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Summary: The HPO and WUTMI's Weaving Project consisted of four components: 1) Locate Master Weavers; 2) Conduct a Workshop on Traditional Weaving; 3) Participants train 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 *Tōlao*, 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 *Tōlao*, 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.

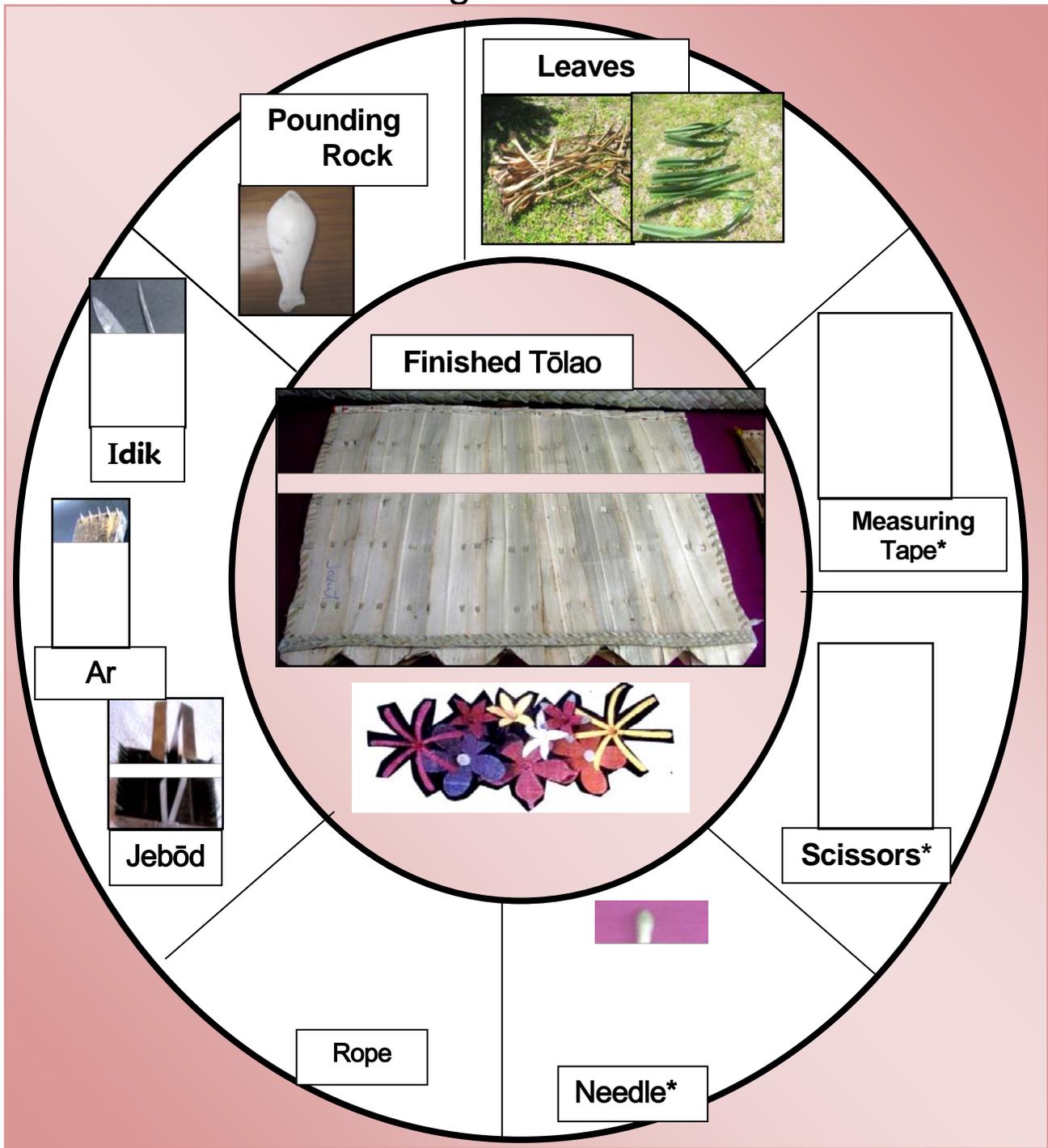
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How to Weave a Tōlao

Tools to use for weaving a Tōlao:*



*Some of the materials used in the making of the tōlao are not traditional materials.

Three types of leaves that are use in making tōlao:



1. Maañ pel – brown leaves that can be picked from the pandanus tree or the ones that have fallen from the tree.



2. Maañ rar – green live pandanus leaves picked from the tree and then put on the fire to soften.



3. Maañ kōjeje – Alive green pandanus leaves that are put under the sun.

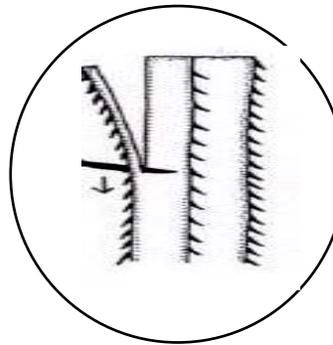
Steps in making a Tōlao:



1. Pick up brown pandanus leaves from the tree or under it.



Remove the needles



Needles



Midrib

2. Remove the needles and the midrib.



3. Roll the pandanus leaves.



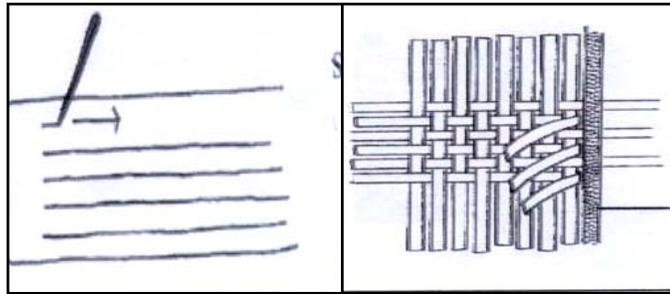
4. If you plan to weave a tōlao with the light brownish leaves, then you need to put the green leaves on the fire, and then afterward, roll them up and put them under the sun for 2 days more, then follow the steps below.



5. Pound the leaves that were rolled up in a bundle.



6. Measure the leaves and cut them according to the size of the tōlao to be woven.



7. Use the ar/jebōd to separate the leaves into narrower strips.



8. Fold over the middle of the leaves and insert the rope inside to form the midrib of the tōlao.



9. Begin to weave forward and upward half of the tōlao from the midrib and, when finished, turn and weave the other side.

A finished and completed woven tōlao that can be used for sitting, lying down, and other usages:



There was a song (for a game) in the olden days named KALAN WA that children used to sing while hiding under the tōlao.

The saying goes like this while you hide under the tōlao:

Kalan wa, kalan wa-e-e

Is it finished?

Do you know whose hands are these?

They're Grandmother's hands!!



