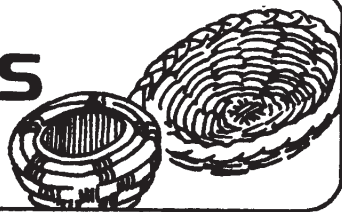


OF BASKETS



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Catherine Ingebretsen

Two of the most commonly used basketry materials are round reed, also known as wicker, and cane. The following background information about cane and reed is printed from the "Comcraft Cane Seating Handbook" with permission from Peerless Reed and Rattan Mfg. Co., 45 Indian Lane E., P.O. Box 8, Towaco, N.J. 07082 201-263-2660 (Please note new address & phone #)

The Story of Cane

It may surprise many to know that cane is stripped from rattan, leaving an inner core, known as reed. Rattan such as is used in our products is a vine which grows wild in the jungles of several islands in the South Pacific. It is sometimes confused with Bamboo, merely because its appearance is somewhat similar. But briefly, bamboo is hollow, while rattan has only a slight taper

There are probably as many as 150 different varieties of rattan, although only a dozen or so of the species are suitable for our purpose. At maturity the various types will be from 1/8" to about 1 1/2" in diameter, with larger sizes the exception. While each species has its proper botanical name, the natives prefer to use more descriptive Malayan names, such as Tohiti, Kooboo, Pakkie, and Oemoeloe, to identify the rattans with the particular region in which they grow or in some instances to describe the processing they receive.

The task of cutting and harvesting rattan presents the problem of penetrating into the thickest jungles, as that is where the choice growths are apt to be found. Armed with a wicked-looking wide-blade knife, natives of

all ages work their way through the jungle, slashing off the wild growing rattan vines about three feet from the ground. Cutting at this height leaves the plant root alive to produce another growth which will mature in about seven years.

The vine is left hanging while the natives continue deeper into the jungles, cutting as they go. On returning to the original cuttings in a few days, the dark bark has dried out, and loosened itself, while the treacherous needles have softened and lost a good deal of their sting. In pulling down cut vines much of the bark with thorns is removed. The vines are then cut into lengths of from fifteen to thirty feet, bent into bundles, and carried to the nearest stream. Eventually, the harvested stock reaches the stream, and on native boats of various types and descriptions is transported to a "Godown" on the sea-coast. "Godown" is the native name for the warehouse plant at which the various jungle products are accumulated for preparation and shipment abroad.

Next, the rattan is picked for quality, sorted for size, then given a sulphuring treatment. The latter serves the dual purpose of bleaching the color and preventing insect infestation.

The first step in processing of rattan into cane and reed products is a resorting for size. In this process, sticks which are unsuitable because of poor color, or any other defects are removed.

Following this operation the rattans are given a liquid bath, preparatory to the start of actual machining. The purpose of the bath is two-fold to remove surface dirt accumulated in transit, and to soften the rattan to the proper point for splitting.

The splitting operation begins by feeding the long sticks into a specially constructed machine which strips off the outside enameled surface into several segments. These segments which are rough cut will be as long as the original sticks, and will be uneven in width and thickness. However, the center core, or reed, as it is known, will be round and uniform in diameter. The rough strips taken from the outside of the sticks are next run through shave machines to obtain a uniform width and thickness, and provide cane in its final form.