

Bittersweet Basket Weaving

A wise woman once told me “There is no such thing as a *bad* plant – just a plant out of place”. Since she was hacking the base and roots of a Strawberry Guava sapling before dousing it with herbicide, this seemed a bit curious. And yet, it is the soul of reason. A plant has simple motivations – grow and spread. If freed of checks like disease, strong competition, and predation it grows and spreads A LOT. But we humans have an array of complex drivers and appetites – one of which, it seems, is to persistently move plants from one continent to another because we enjoy how they look, smell, taste, or otherwise suit our preferences. The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our plants, but in ourselves.

You may have guessed that this edition of Share, Learn, Adventure deals with one of those out of place plants and how you can use it for good! Squam Lakes Association spends a great deal of time and effort improving the natural beauty and overall health of the watershed by removing invasive plants from our waters and forests, but that doesn’t mean we can’t have a little fun while we’re at it!

If you are interested in volunteering with the SLA to help manage invasive species please give us a call at 603-968-7336 or email info@squamlakes.org.

Check out these links for more information about Round- leafed Bittersweet and what you can do to help slow down its spread. Hint – DON’T MOVE THE BERRIES

NH Department of Agriculture Food and Markets info sheet

<https://www.agriculture.nh.gov/publications-forms/documents/oriental-bittersweet.pdf>

American vs Oriental Bittersweet - ID and transportation warning.

<http://www.womenowningwoodlands.net/content/beware-oriental-bittersweet-holiday-decorations>

Weave your own basket. Instructions.

Step 1: Locate some Round-leafed Bittersweet. If you have some in your backyard, use that rather than harvesting it elsewhere to avoid potentially transporting berries. Pull a quantity out of the tree, looking particularly for bendy, whip-like vines. Avoid vines with berries. Clippers and or loppers will be helpful here. This is the best time of year to harvest vines since they're without leaves and easier to pull.

Step 2. Trim your harvested vines into 3 -6 foot long "whips" no thicker than your pinky finger. I coil mine into a 5 gallon bucket – anything that won't bend around and fit in the bucket won't likely be pliable enough for basket making. It's a good idea to do this part in the woods so you're only walking around with trimmed "whips" and not a whole mess of material that might have berries in it. DON'T TRANSPORT THE BERRIES. You especially want to keep an eye out for the very thinnest vines you can find – you'll use these for "cordage". They're ultra workable strands that can wrap around larger pieces and effectively bind them together. Very handy for wrapping up loose ends.

How much do you need? I fit enough material for one basket into a 5 gallon bucket but I'd recommend collecting a couple just to be safe.

Step 3. Soak. I soaked mine in hot water for 4 hours and that worked purty good. You could try soaking them overnight and that might work even better. I just left mine in the bucket for this step but feel free to load up your bathtub.

Step 4. We're actually weaving now! Make a hoop by taking one largish vine and winding it around itself (See video). Make a second hoop the same way, but leave a length unwrapped. Now, orient the two hoops so that the first one will form the handle and the other (with the tail still unwrapped) will be the brim of the basket. Continue winding that tail around the brim and use it to hold the handle hoop in place. This is probably hard to conceptualize without visual aids, so watch the video.

Adding a third hoop is optional, but I found it to be very useful. Wind up a third, smaller hoop, again leaving a tail, and secure to the bottom of the handle hoop. Which side of the handle hoop is the bottom? The side you secure hoop number 3, the structural base, to!

With this accomplished, the most difficult part of the process is behind you and you have a structural skeleton to work with. By now you will have found that cordage is every bit as useful as I promised it you and you've used it to keep ends under control and bind this skeleton basket together. At least I hope so.

At this point, things get pretty free-form. Use your creativity to wind your vines around this skeleton until the basket is filled in to your satisfaction. Be adventurous! Pay attention to the shapes of the vines and where they want to go and work with them. I found this to be very much a trial and error kind of project. Turn on some music or a podcast and see where the vines take you. Make that first basket and then use what you learned to make an even better second one!

Most importantly, have fun creating something useful from natural materials.

And then send us a picture of the result with the tag #ShareLearnAdventure!