

Chapter Two of “Pine Needle Basketry”

Making Your First Basket

Almost Every Pine Needle creation, whether it’s a basket, tray, or abstract sculpture, is made using the same simple technique – stitching a continuous coil of pine needles to itself. Once you’ve finished the basket described in this chapter, you’ll have learned how to:

- ~ **Make a thread-wrapped coil center**
- ~ **Stitch the coil together with a plain stitch**
- ~ **Add pine needles and**
- ~ **Shape the sides of the basket**
- ~ **Taper the coil to finish it off**
- ~ **Backstitch along the rim to reinforce it**

In fact, you’ll have all the skills you need to make hundreds of attractive pine needle projects.

A list of required tools and materials is provided on this page, but keep in mind that a basket is made up of more than pine needles and thread. A basket reflects its maker. Your mood and your work habits are intangibles that can help make your basket a work of art or turn it into an exercise in frustration.

Many pine needle crafters are perfectionists, so you won’t be alone if you’re one too, but perfectionism can work for or against you. Being careful will reward you with a finely constructed project. Unrealistically high expectations, however, can turn into a stiff neck, clamped jaws, and a basket that reflects your own tension. When your need to make perfect baskets rages out of control, take a break. Do something else for a while (perfectly, if you must), and try to relax those anxious muscles.

An apology to “Lefties”

The instructions in this book were written for right-handed people. If you’re left-handed, reverse the hand directions. Hold your basket so that the loose pine needles protrude from the top right. Insert the sewing needle to the left of each stitch and pull it out to the right.

Maybe you’re short on patience – one of those folks who are filled with fire for fifteen minutes at a stretch. No problem. Pine needle baskets aren’t made under deadlines. Forcing yourself to work with pine needles when you’d rather be hiking under the trees themselves will only leave you with a basket that looks as wild as you feel. Just set your work aside until you really want to pick it up again. And remember that the passionate approach, even if it only lasts for a few minutes at a time – often gives rise to wonderfully imaginative basketry shapes.

One other tip: many expert pine needle crafters claim that “mistakes” can give birth to imaginative new shapes and stitches. Try leaving just one mistake right where it is; you may be surprised by what it adds to your finished piece.

Preventing Tangled Threads

Spoiled threads such as nylon and waxed linen have a tendency to curl and then to tangle when you use them. To straighten out a length of thread before you use it, stretch it by standing on one end and pulling on the other.

Materials and Tools

- Pine needles**
- Containers for soaking needles**
- Towel**
- Sewing needle**
- Thread**
- Spring-loaded clothespin**
- Needle-nose pliers**
- Scissors**
- Gauge**
- Masking tape**
- Waxed paper or newspaper (optional)**
- Shellac and paintbrush - or spray acrylic (optional)**
- Lint-free cloth**