

## Collecting and preparing plants for weaving – Patricia Morton Workshop

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This document tells you how to collect, clean and dry plants for weaving grasscloth.

For most plants, leaves work well. But in some cases, the flower stems work better, as the leaves are too sharp, or too fragile. This list of plants was compiled by Rita Buchanan, and is used with her permission. I have not yet found all of these to try.

Gather leaves and stems when they've grown all they're going to grow, but are still fresh and green. I usually try to catch them just as the tips of the leaves are starting to brown, or after the blossoms have faded for the plants where you use the stems. Ideally, you want to pick them just past the peak of freshness, before they start to decay.

You can harvest leaves from the following plants:

- day lilies, Hemerocallis
- Siberian iris, *Iris sibirica* (note: not common bearded iris)
- yellow flag iris, *IRIS PSEUDACORUS*, Iridaceae/Iris Family, a.k.a. yellow flag, pale yellow iris, or water flag. This is a wetland plant.
- crocus (let them grow out to full length, as this feeds the bulbs)
- gladioules
- cattails
- pampas grass - the variation that has smoother, wider leaves, is better than the very sharp ones
- reed grass with fluffy top, a.k.a. feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster')
- sweet grass, *Hierochloe odorata* - often used by basket weavers
- sweet flag, *Acorus clamus*. a.k.a. cinnamon sedge, flagroot, gladdon, myrtle flag, myrtle grass, myrtle sedge, sweet cane, sweet myrtle, sweet root, sweet rush, and sweet sedge
- freesia, a genus of about 14 species, is a fragrant flower often used in cut arrangements.
- rushes (*Juncus*)
- crocosmia (members of the iris family)

Gather flower stems after the blossom's faded for:

- daffodils, *Narcissus* (many varieties work very well)
- jonquils, *Narcissus jonquilla*, with small, fragrant flowers
- gladiolus, a.k.a. Gladiole, Gladioli, Corn Lily, or Sword Lily, due to its sword shaped leaves
- bearded iris, the most common form of garden iris (very stiff)
- cattails - also very stiff

For either stems or leaves, wash them in a sink, tub, or trash can with dish washing liquid and a little bleach. This will clean them and kill mold, insects, etc. Rinse in clear water, and gently shake excess water out.

Dry them in a warm, sunny, well-ventilated spot. I try to lay them out without them touching much, except that I stack them at 90° angles to make a second or third layer.

Drying them on old window screens laid flat and raised up on blocks of wood works quite well. If you don't have screens, laying them on newspapers will do. Drying them in the back of a car where the sun will warm them also works well.

If you happen to have a barn, another good way to dry them is to gather them in bunches with a tightly wound rubber band, and hang them. I dry about 1/2"-3/4" diameter bunches.

The leaves and stems will shrink considerably while drying. You want to dry them to the point where they're brittle and thoroughly desiccated. This may take many weeks, depending on the weather, heat, and ventilation. They may not all get brittle, but when they are no longer shrinking any further or getting any drier, then that may be as dry as these plants will get.

Carefully wrap small bundles separated by plant type in paper, mark them, and store the bundles in a safe location. They can also be stored nicely in cardboard boxes. Note that some plants are susceptible to "nibblers" - particularly daffodil leaves and cat tail stalks. A garage, barn, attic, or other dry area is a good place to store them. They can be stored for years this way.