

Using Natural Fibers to Make Cordage

Many plants can be used for making cordage. For the beginner, a tree is a good source of material. Just inside a tree's outer bark, lies a fibrous layer called cambium, a great cordage material. Many different species can be used, but basswood and cedar are among the best.

Harvesting the Cambium

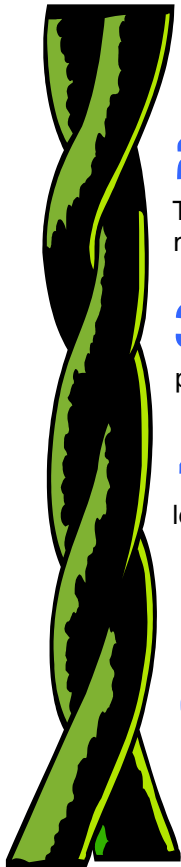
Slightly different harvesting methods are used for different types of trees. The basic method is to first peel off strips of the outer bark (which usually has the cambium – or fibrous inner bark-- attached), from the trunk and/or branches. Then peel off the cambium from this outer layer. Good cambium can be harvested from fallen trees if the tree has not yet rotted and, whenever possible, this method should be used to prevent unnecessary damage to healthy trees.

Preparing the Material

For long lasting cordage it is best to dry the cambium for a few days. For light duty cordage, little preparation is necessary.

Making the Cordage

One of the simplest methods of making cordage is done by holding a bundle of cambium at one end, twisting it tightly, and then folding it in half, allowing it to twist upon itself. Begin with a bundle of material that is half the thickness of the desired cordage.



1 Wet hands and moisten the material slightly to keep it pliable.

2 To remove any non-fibrous material from the cordage, rub and roll it between your palms. This also separates the fibers and makes it easier to twist. Work your way from one end of the material to the other.

3 Hold one end of the bundle tightly with your teeth. (Be sure that the plant you use is not poisonous)

4 Begin twisting the bundle with your fingers, starting near your mouth and working down the length of the material. Continue twisting until the material is tight and starts to kink.

5 Remove the bundle from your mouth, holding both ends tightly so you do not lose the twist.

6 Hold the twisted fibers horizontally in front of you and put the middle of the strand in your mouth.

7 While holding the middle firmly with your mouth, bring the two ends together, and release with your mouth. The two strands should twist together. You may want to tie a knot in the end to make sure the strands stay together.

You have made cordage!

St. Joseph County Parks

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