

# Traditional Native American Black Ash Baskets

Split ash baskets are made from the wood of a black ash tree. These trees are found growing in clusters within forested wetlands, swamps and bogs throughout Michigan. Because they usually grow amongst other shade trees, black ash will seek the sun to grow, producing tall, straight trunks. A tree is selected for its' straightness and the size of its growth rings.

Typically, a seven foot log with no blemishes or knots is cut from the base of the tree to then harvest the wood for use in weaving the baskets. The next, higher four to five foot section of trunk is used in the making of carved rims and handles.



Wood for weaving is prepared by pounding the growth rings (seasonal layers of wood) off of the trunk segment in two-inch wide strips running down the length of the log. To accomplish this the log is first scored with two parallel cuts, two inches apart and deep enough to cut through ten to twelve layers of growth rings. Then, by repeatedly pounding on the log with a blunt object, such as the end of an axe, the growth rings, comprised of summer and winter growth segments, will pop up and separate in strips the length of the log.

Since each growth ring strip is too thick to weave into baskets, each strip is split in half lengthwise using a traditional wooden device that allows the notched end of a strip to be passed in from the bottom side and feed up through a narrow opening at the top. The strip is then spread apart by hand as it comes through the top and continues to be pulled apart until the entire length is drawn through. A satiny smooth surface is now revealed in the inside of the split. So smooth is the split side that only the outside, which is rough and grainy, now requires "finishing". Smoothing this side is accomplished with a hand-knife in traditional fashion.

Finally the prepared black ash splints are cut to size, dyed and woven by hand into baskets. Some of these are fitted with a hand carved rim and woven lid while others may have carved handles. Some are left open. Baskets come in many different designs, patterns and sizes and are suitable for many uses. The only caution in use is to prevent direct contact with water, which WILL damage the basket.

Your basket has been hand made by the Pigeon family, members of the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians, also known as the Gun Lake Tribe, located in southwestern Michigan. The traditional art of basket weaving has now been passed down from Steven and Kitt Pigeon to the Edmund and Stephanie Pigeon family as it had been passed down from their elders to them. From generation to generation to generation, as it has always been so it may always be. Your purchase of this piece allows the circle to continue and continue .....

