

Contemporary art form stems from ancient times

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Baskets along with animal hides were the first carriers used by humans. In order to move things from one place to another, or store similar materials together, carriers needed to be made. In areas where plants, bushes or trees were available basketry evolved. In more desolate landscapes carriers were more often made from hides. A variety of sizes and shapes were made according to the need.

While it may not seem important today, just contemplate all the different containers we use on a daily basis. Everything from paper bags and bowls to canisters and suitcases, purses and briefcases to storage bags and boxes.



While the early baskets were strictly utilitarian, later creative designs emerged and intricate and colorful baskets were the result. Many designs had specific meanings and colorful dyes were used to enhance the beauty turning a utility item into a beautiful art form.

The common styles seen in Native American baskets were plaiting, coiling and twining.

Plaiting used flat materials that were split into even widths and lengths and woven in an alternating over-and-under pattern like a lattice crust on a pie. Loosely woven with open spaces this type of basket was used for winnowing dry materials and when more tightly woven could be used for draining wet materials. This is a simple style even used by children today using strips of construction paper and weaving them over and under for art projects.

Twining is a technique using a single stiffer strand for the warp and using two weft strands of a pliable material to weave much like a rug except only the hands are used, no loom.

Coiling is a method most often used in the Southwest or California basketry where the foundation is several strands of fine sticks or small bunches of grass like material around which fine splits of material such as willow or yucca is wound and then woven into the previous coil.

As always, some degree of knowledge is necessary to identify authentic Native American baskets from imitations. Look for closely woven baskets where the warp material is covered and not easily seen. Navajo basket makers most often use sumac or willow, while Hopi makers usually use split yucca. Becoming aware of the styles, designs, colors and materials used will differentiate Native American baskets from those made in other parts of the world.