Design A Grass Basket

Paint a basket design inspired by natural berry dyes!



People across Alaska use berries, as well as bark and leaves, of various plants to make colorful dyes. One way to use these dyes is to color beach grass, then weave it into baskets. Try making your own colorful basket design!

Left: Coiled Grass Basket by Lizzie Chimiugak, UA81-003-0078AB.

Materials Needed:

Grass Basket printable (or draw your own), watercolor paints, paintbrushes, water, paper towels. *Optional:* paper, pencil, crayons or colored pencils.

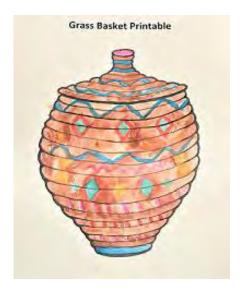
Instructions:

Step 1: Look at the basket pictures on the next page. What colors do you see? What kind of patterns did the artist make?

Step 2: Plan your own grass basket design. Think about what kinds of colors will be in your design. You can copy a design from the basket pictures, or come up with your own!

Optional: Sketch a picture of your design on white paper.

Step 3: Use watercolors to paint your design on the grass basket template. (You could also use crayons or colored pencils.) Try to use colors you could make with berry dyes. Which plant could produce each color?



Step 4: Let your artwork dry, and show it to your friends or family!

Extension: Think about what other materials you could color with berry dyes: fabric, yarn, paper, food, etc. Draw or paint a picture of a colorful object made with plant dyes!



Berry Dyes in Alaska

People across Alaska use berries, as well as bark and leaves, of various plants to make colorful dyes. Here are a few examples:

- The Dena'ina people traditionally use highbush cranberries or currants to make red, and blueberries for purple.
- The Gwich'in Athabascan people traditionally use the berries of the strawberry spinach plant to make red.
- The Yup'ik people traditionally dye beach grass pink with lowbush cranberries and black with crowberries.
- You can also use raspberries to make purple, cloudberries or strawberries for pink, or soapberries for red.



Dying fabric with blueberries.

Plants are used to dye materials such as beach grass, porcupine quills, hides, birchbark, fabric, and yarn. In Yup'ik cultures, artists traditionally dye beach grass, then weave it into baskets. Look at these basket designs!



Maker unknown UA67-098-0263



Maker: Maria Flynn UA70-053-0083



Maker: Theresa Smart UA84-003-0084AB



Maker: Betsy Altsuk UA81-003-0160AB



Maker unknown UA2001-013-0319AB



Maker unknown UA2018-011-0068



Information from: USDA Forest Service; Ethnobotany of the Fort Yukon Region (Patricia S. Holloway & Ginny Alexander, 1990); and Ethnobotany of Nelson Island, Alaska (Thomas A. Ager and Lynn Price Ager, 1980).

Grass Basket Template

