

# Design A Grass Basket

Paint a basket design inspired by natural berry dyes!



People across Alaska use the berries, 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 template, watercolor paints, paintbrushes. *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 can 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 the berries, 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 Dené (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**, cloudberryes 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

