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## QUILL WRAPPING MEDICINE WHEELS

There are, we have discovered, a variety of ways porcupine quill wrapping is done when it comes to the detail. Everyone doing this work seems to have developed some personal techniques that solve the problems of working with quills in this special craft. These instructions combine techniques that will work using some of today's materials. Having learned from this practice, older techniques may be attempted.

First a warning, working with quills requires care because they are sharp and must be handled with care. Move your fingers slowly when handling quills.

Sort out quills that are slender and long. It's best that they all be about the same thickness for each project. Your eye for this will get better with practice.

To clean, simmer them in a pan with a solution of water and a dash of mild dish soap and a bit of bleach. Let soak but don't boil. Pour into a colander and rinse with cool water. Repeat until soap is all rinsed out.

The wet quills can be dyed at this time, or if dried now, can be re-soaked and dyed later. Common fabric dye, like Rit, can be used to dye the quills. Mix a fairly heavy concentrated mixture of water and dye into an enamel pot. Heat the mixture to simmer and add the quills to be made that color. Stir the mixture regularly until the quills reach the desired color. This will take 45 minutes to an hour for each batch. When the quills are removed from the dye solution, rinse in warm water several times to clean. Spread out on paper toweling to dry. It's a good idea to dye more quills than you will need as they will vary in color. You will need to select the best matches for each wheel.

To flatten the quills in preparation for wrapping, we suggest using a regular table spoon with a smooth underside so it won't tear the quill. First cut off the ends of the quills as illustrated in Figure 1. Using the back of the spoon, and while holding the tip of the quill down with a finger pressed on a hard surface, apply pressure with the spoon, sliding it down the quill. Repeat it several times for it to remain flat. See Figure 2.

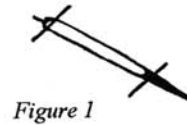


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

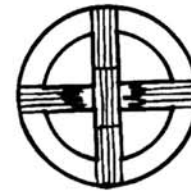


Figure 3



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Finished

Flattening and wrapping the quills are done here while dry, but many quill workers work with wet quills. Wet the quills in warm water before starting the flattening process. If the water is too hot, the quills will get like rubber bands, too spongy. The old way was to make them moist by holding them in the mouth for a minute.

Our illustrations show covering the ends and centers of the cross in the wheel with flattened quills. Lightly spread contact cement on that part of the wheel. Use a small craft paint brush to apply the cement. Cut the needed quills to the proper lengths and coat one side lightly with contact cement and let dry. Contact them on the surfaces as shown in Figure 3. If this is your first attempt at quill wrapping, you may elect to leave this step out until you master the next technique.

The next illustrations show the underside of the wheel as you wrap, as this is the side that will be facing you during wrapping. Before starting, lightly apply contact cement to the first section to be wrapped and let dry to tacky.

The end of the quill that attaches to the porkey is always used to start the wrap. Taking the first quill, bend the end and place on the wheel as in Figure 4. Begin the wrap as in Figure 5 and at the same time place the end of the second quill in position under the wrap as shown. Continue to wrap quill until it can not make another wrap as shown in Figure 6. Fold the second quill over the end of the first quill as in Figure 7. Fold the tip of the first quill to the right as in Figure 8. Bring the second quill back into alignment by folding over the top of the first quill tip as in Figure 9. Make one wrap, then place the end of the third quill in position under the wrap as in Figure 10. Continue wrapping in this sequence to the end of the section.

Figure 11 shows the finishing position of the quill in one of the center sections. To end each section, the tip needs to be tucked under the last wrap. To do this, using an awl, heavy darning needle or other sharp pointed tool, open a gap under the quill wraps. Trim the quill tip if needed, place a little glue on the end and tuck under the gap. With the sharp tool, force the tip under the quills tightly while pressuring the wrappings with the fingers until the ending is tight. Follow these steps until finished.

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