

# *Windrush Willow*

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## **DRIED WILLOW FACT SHEET**

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### **Introduction**

These notes are intended to give basic information on how to select order store and work with dried Willow weaving rods.

### **Contents**

Types of Dried Willow  
Willow Varieties to use  
Storing & Preserving Your Willow  
Soaking Times  
Weaving Techniques  
Drawings

## Types of Dried Willow

For basket making, willow varieties are grown from slips, (9 inch stem cuttings), which are inserted into the ground to a depth of 8 inches and roughly 18 to 24 inches apart. The slips are prepared from the parent plant during the dormant season, after the leaves have dropped and the new buds have yet to break. This is roughly from mid November to mid March, but depends on the mildness of the local climate. These slips will start to sprout in late March or early April and the new plant is known as a stool from which weaving rods or “Osier” rods are cut every year and these one year old rods are sometimes referred to as withies. The growth is cut as close to the original stool as possible. The most popular variety currently grown is *Salix triandra* “Black Maul.”

### Browns

For basket making, the above rods (Greens) are stood upright in the field for 3 months to dry and are then referred to as Browns or withies at which point they are sorted by length and tied in Bolts or Bundles (3ft 2” circumference at the base). To use Browns they first have to be soaked in water – these are now dead and can not form a living Willow Structure.

### Whites

Freshly cut willow “Greens” are stood upright for 3 months in a few inches of water in a light airy place – outdoors is fine. The willow begins to sprout and the bark loosens, at this point the bark can be peeled by machine or by hand, running it through a forked piece of springy metal known as a brake achieves this. After stripping the whites need to be dried in the open air.

### Bufs

Bufs can be made at any time of year; Browns are boiled for 8 to ten hours in fresh water. Tannins in the bark stain the willow a light chestnut brown the bark is stripped whilst the rod is still warm to reveal this colour, again after stripping the bufes need to be dried in the open air.

### Steamed Willow

Steamed willow is black and again can be made at any time of year, in this process the Browns are steamed for a number of hours and the bark which is left on turns black.

## Willow Varieties to use

Virtually any willow can be used to make baskets with the possible exception of “Crack Willow (*S. fragilis*), although it’s highbred crosses with *S.alba* and others are very useful.

Professionals favour *S. triandra* for its straightness, length and toughness. For ease of working, willow coppiced annually from dedicated “Osier” beds provides a much more uniform material than “hedgerow cut willow”.

## Storing Your Willow

Store your willow to be used in a clean dry and dark place – a garage is usually fine. Structures for use outside should be painted with a 50:50 mixture of boiled linseed oil and turpentine. This treatment should be repeated annually. However any wood preserver will work.

## Soaking Your Willow

Before you can weave with dried willow it must be soaked in fresh water and browns must be mellowed in a damp cloth for a further day or two; a table of soaking times follows:

	3ft	4ft	5ft	6ft	7ft	8ft	
<b>Bufs and Whites</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Hours</b>
<b>Browns</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Days</b>
<b>Steamed</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Days</b>

## Weaving Techniques

Three of the most commonly used weaving strokes are shown below. If more sophisticated weaving is required then it is recommended that a book on basket making be borrowed from your local library. This will have illustrations of many more weaving techniques.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR CARE OF WILLOW PRODUCTS

Willow products for outside use are generally made in “greens”, “browns” or steamed willow to extend their life they should be treated as often as possible with a wood preserver.

If made in greens (freshly cut willow) wait for the willow to dry out, (several weeks) before treating.

If made in browns or steamed willow the willow has been soaked in order to weave it will need a week or so in dry conditions before it is sufficiently dried out to treat.

Any wood preserver will work we traditionally use a 50:50 mix of boiled linseed oil and turpentine (or turps substitute, **not white spirit**). Both are natural materials available from your local DIY shop. The turps thins down the linseed oil and helps it carry into the wood. **Alternatively we can Supply Devon Wood Oil which is a mix of Chinese Oil, Linseed Oil Turpentine and Lavender Oil at £11 / 1 litre tin.**

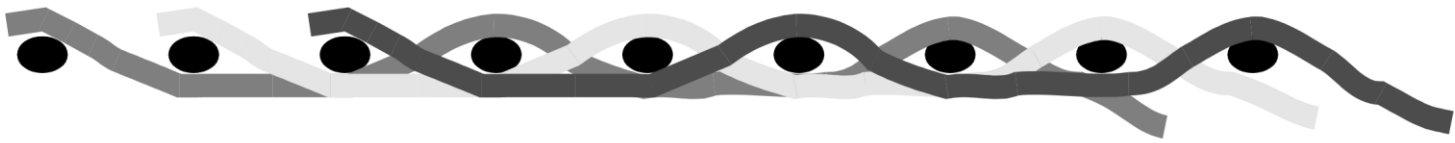
For item in contact with food a vegetable oil or cooking oil will do the job without contaminating the food.

Baskets and indoor products can be made of any of the above types of willow or peeled willow (whites or buffs). Blow any dust off, wipe with a damp cloth allow to dry (a couple of hours), then rub with a cloth made damp with a vegetable based oil.

<b>Expected life spans</b>	<b>Untreated</b>	<b>Treated annually</b>
Outdoor plant supports	2 to 3 years	3 to 5 years
Fencing	3 to 4 years	4 to 8 years
Indoor items + Baskets	10 years +	Indefinitely

# Basic Weaves

Three rod-whaling: this is a basketry stroke which is very useful for holding upright stakes in place at the base of your structure.



Pairing: this is working with two alternate weavers and is a very strong stroke.



Randing: this is the basic in and out weave which is very useful for covering large areas quickly. It can be done with several pieces of willow at a time.

