

Weaving Wakarei

Harakeke baskets for pēpi (babies) born sleeping



Summary of steps for weaving a four-cornered wakarei

A specific basket for pēpi (babies) born sleeping, made of harakeke (NZ flax)

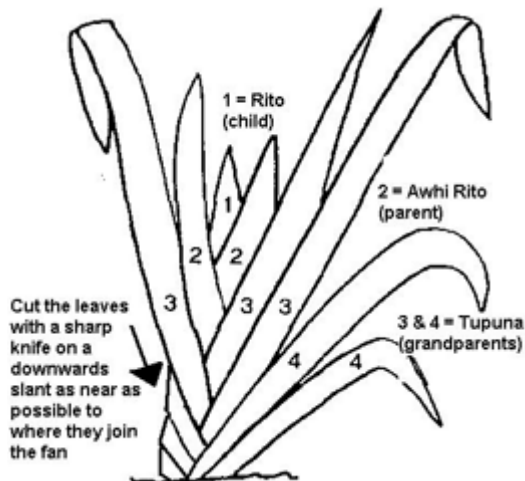
These practical instructions should serve as a reminder after our workshop, of the steps needed to weave these baskets. It is always preferable to seek a workshop or someone to teach you if you are a beginner weaver. It is not only the raranga (weaving) to learn but the important aspects of tikanga (right way of doing things) that go with it.

Why make these baskets? They were requested from and we have been donating them to 3 different departments at Whangarei Hospital. "By returning pēpi in a flax wakarei, we honour the sacredness of life and acknowledge the grief that may accompany its loss. This simple act transforms a clinical moment into one of dignity and aroha".

The name wakarei was gifted by Crystle Hona and for this purpose signifies the ending of the journey or final resting place.

Tikanga (traditions) around kōrari/harakeke (NZ flax):

Harakeke or kōrari, otherwise known as flax (*phormium tenax*), is one of the many resources we use to weave. It grows on bushes in fan like structures called whānau. In the centre of each whānau is te rito, the young shoot. On either side are ngā mātua, the parents. These three leaves are never cut. This is to protect the continuing life force of the plant.



1. There are many restrictions placed on the gathering, preparing and weaving of the harakeke. The first is karakia which should always be recited before harvesting. This expresses appreciation for the use of the bounty.
2. Cutting harakeke should be done in fine weather. Rain adds too much moisture, frost makes it brittle and wind can make it difficult to extract the muka (the fine fibre inside the leaf).
3. The unwanted scraps should be returned to the earth. Traditionally they were put back around the bush but we now know that this harbours pests and diseases so it is best to keep the area around the bush clean. Many weavers have a place away

from their raranga (weaving) plants to leave their scraps to compost.

4. Women with their mate wahine/ikura (menstrual period) are not permitted to harvest. In some areas women avoid weaving altogether at this time. This was seen as a time to rest and revitalise, for when work was taken up again they would have a new eagerness for the task.

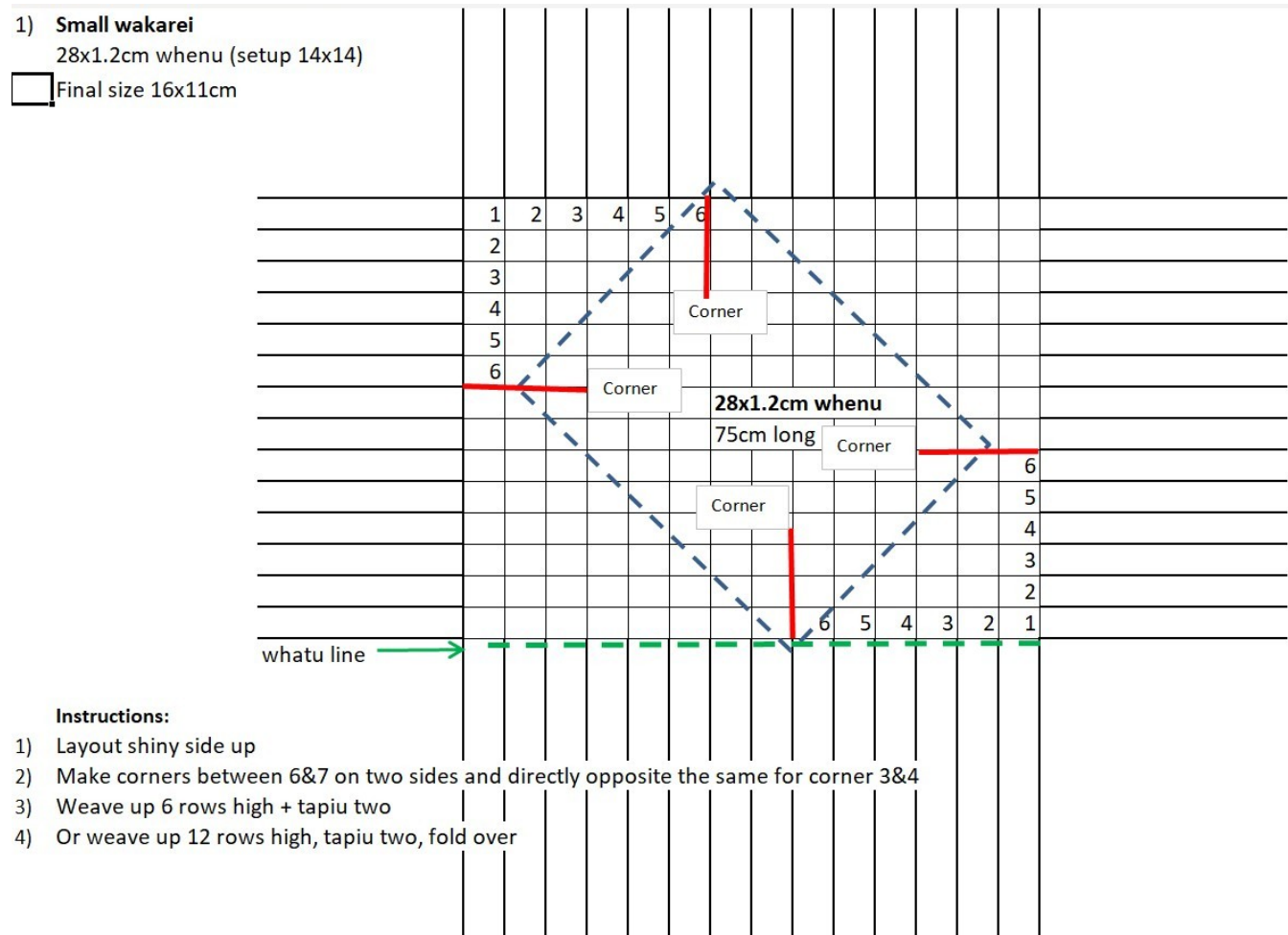
5. Weavers do not eat or drink while working. There are many complex connections between food and tapu, and the best work is done when attention is undivided. Food is always kept separate from the weaving area. This includes tea and coffee.

6. Be careful not to step over the work in progress, or pieces of harakeke. There is a tapu on work that is not completed and stepping over it changes the mana of that item. That also includes bundles of harakeke laying on the ground. It is a requirement that once started, a piece should be finished.
7. It is customary to give your first completed piece of any new item away. Give it to someone who will appreciate the time and effort you have put into it. It is considered an honour to receive such a gift.
8. Many weavers discourage children from playing with or around, or stepping over the harakeke being used. This attitude is changing as many of today's weavers feel that it is from childhood learning that a weaver will develop. The main thing is to treat the harakeke with respect.

Overview for weavers (step by step guide follows):

1) Small wakarei (16 x 11cm = 28 whenu @ 1.2cm x 75cm long)

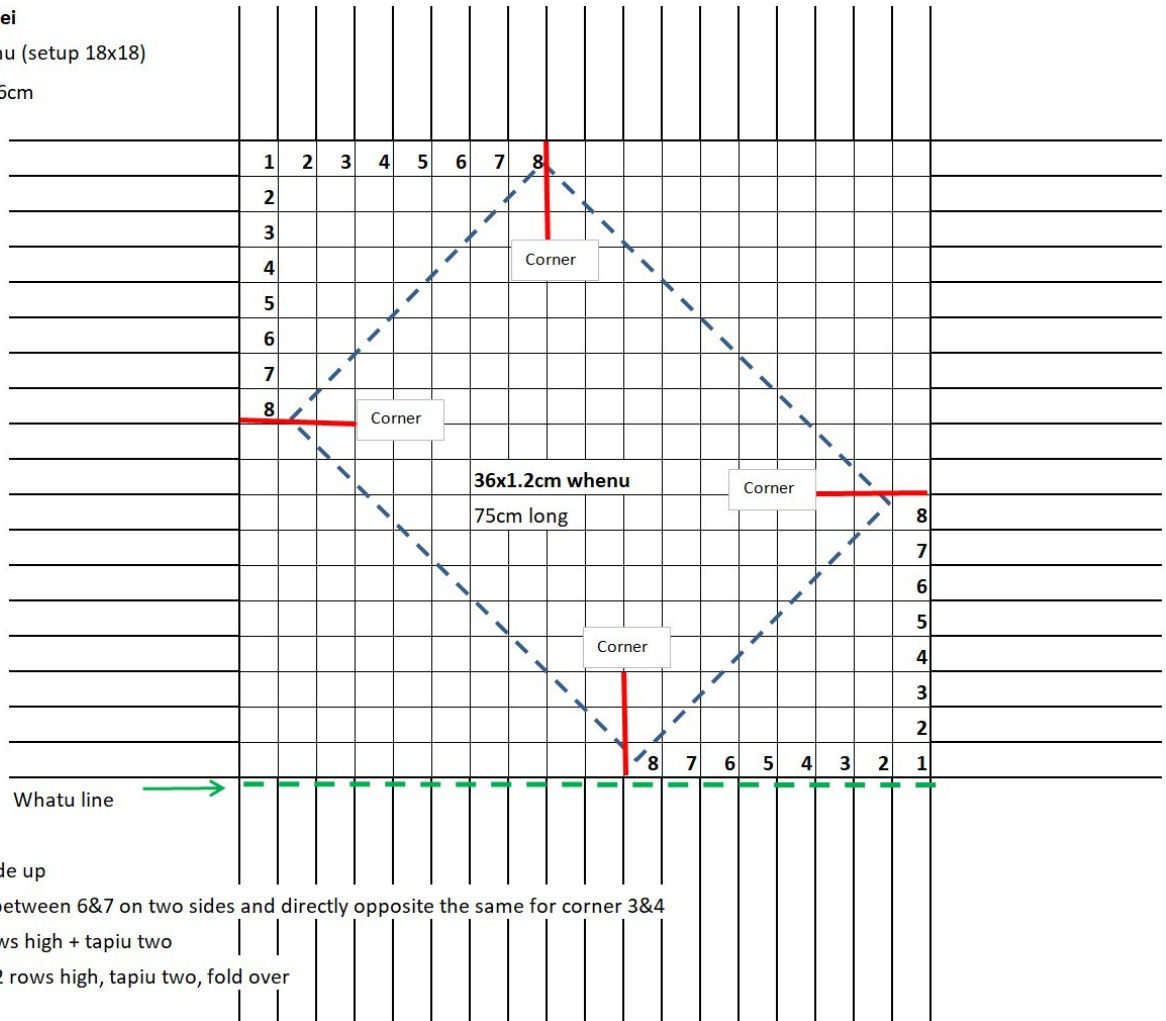
- Layout **14 x 14**, **shiny** side up (inside next to the baby).
- To create corners: count from the top left and turn corner between whenu 6&7, then do the same at the opposite bottom right corner, offset corners will make a rectangle shape.
 - (a) Weave up 4 rows high then either (1) fold & tuck top edge under two or (2) tapiu two/tapiki or (3) single lock & whiri,
 - (b) Or weave up 12 rows high, then either (1) fold & tuck edge under two or (2) tapiu two/tapiki, then fold over so shiny side is both inside and outside (you can only do this if your whenu are long enough).



2) **Medium wakarei** (20 x 16cm = 36 whenu @ 1.2cm x 75cm long)

- Layout **18x18**, **shiny** side up (inside next to the baby).
- Count from top left, create corners between 8&9 on two sides then do the same at the opposite bottom right corner, offset corners will make a rectangle shape.
 - (a) Weave up 6 rows high then either (1) fold & tuck top edge under two or (2) tapiu two/tapiki or (3) single lock & whiri,
 - (b) Or weave up 12 rows high, then either (1) fold & tuck under two or (2) tapiu two/tapiki, then fold over so shiny side is inside and outside (you can only do this if your whenu are long enough).

2) **Medium wakarei**
 36x1.2cm whenu (setup 18x18)
 Final size 20x16cm



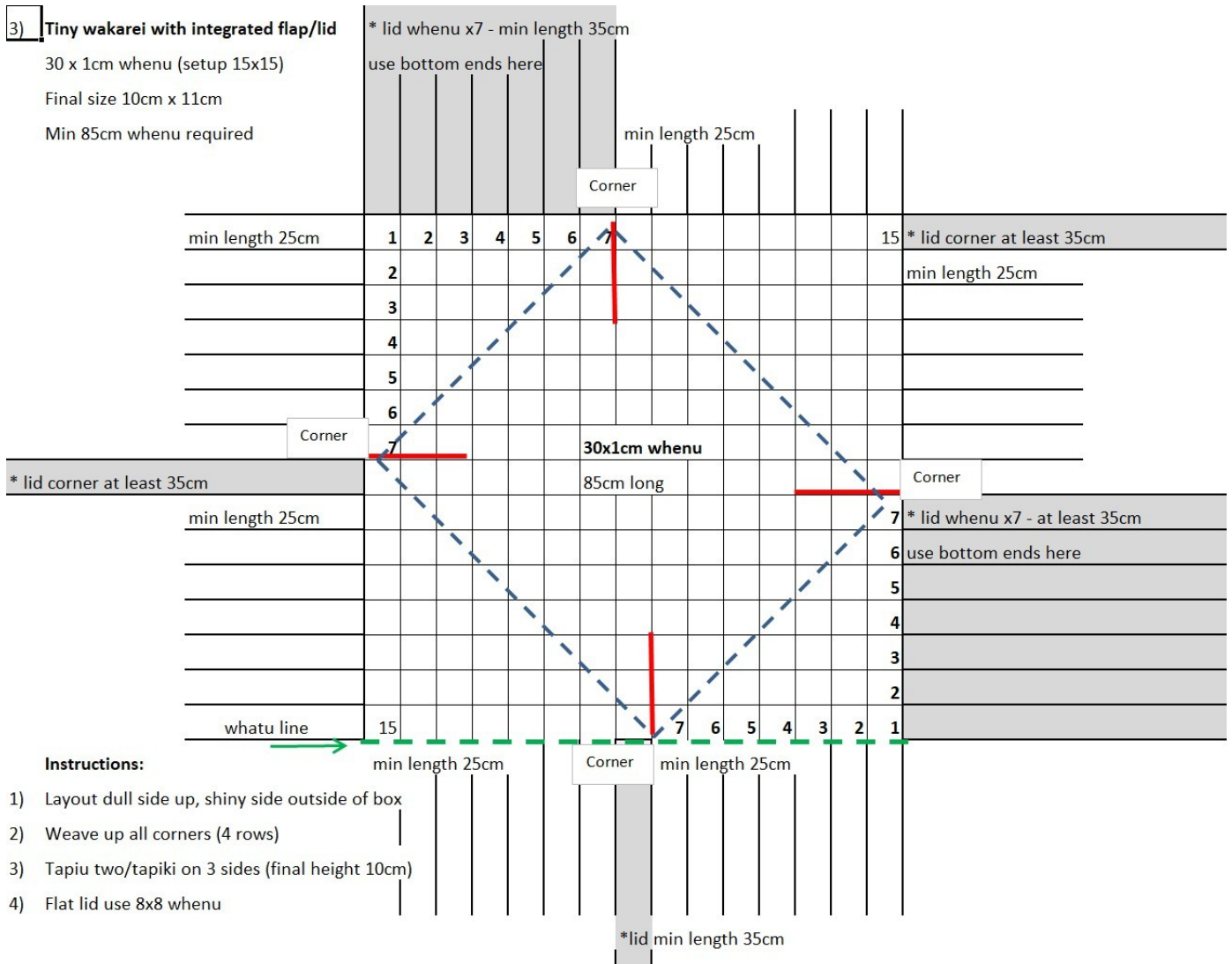
Instructions:

- 1) Layout shiny side up
- 2) Make corners between 6&7 on two sides and directly opposite the same for corner 3&4
- 3) Weave up 6 rows high + tapiu two
- 4) Or weave up 12 rows high, tapiu two, fold over



3) Tiny 15 x 15 wakarei with integrated lid (10cm x 10cm = 30 whenu @ 1.cm x 85cm long, for experienced weavers)

- Layout **15 x 15, dull side up**, follow length and positioning of whenu in diagram above.
- To create corners: count from the top left and turn corner between whenu 7&8 on both sides, then do the same at the opposite bottom right corner, offset corners will making a rectangle shape.
- Use block provided as a guide, weave up to top edge of block (10cm).
- Finish edge on 3 sides only (not where lid will be). Finish with either (1) fold & tuck top edge under two or (2) tapiu two/tapiki or (3) single lock & whiri.
- Create lid from 8x8 whenu left on 4th side, turn the edge of outside whenu to make straight edge. Finish lid with either (1) fold & tuck edge under two or (2) tapiu two/tapiki.
- The lid can be made slightly longer and securely tucked into to box to keep it closed.



4) Tiny 12 x 12 wakarei with integrated lid (10cm x 10cm = 24 whenu @ 1.2cm x 85cm long, for experienced weavers)

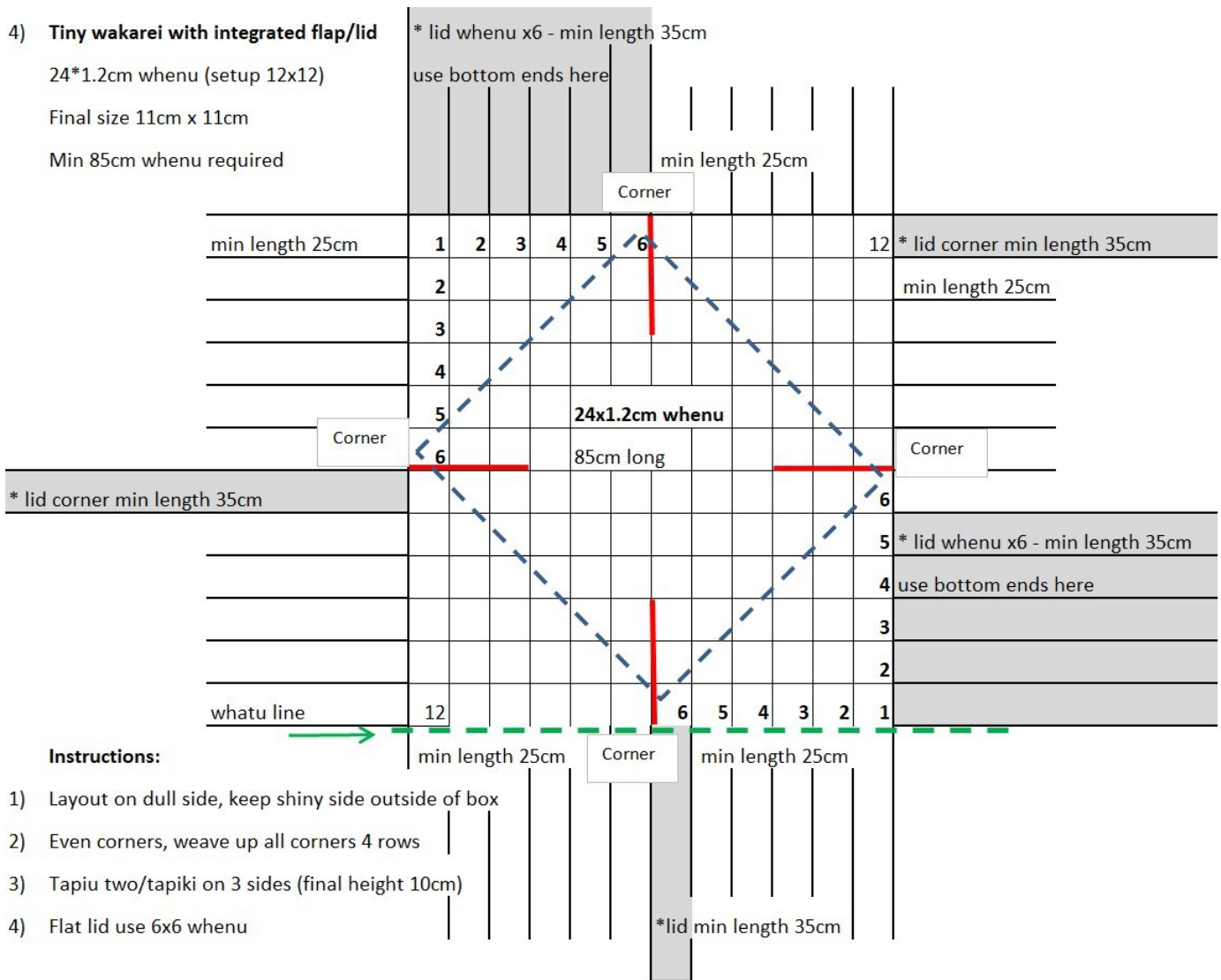
- Layout 12 x 12, **dull side up**, follow length and positioning of whenu in diagram above.
- To create corners: all corners are between 6&7, this will create a square box.
- Use block provided as a guide, weave up to top edge of block (10cm).
- Finish edge on 3 sides only (not where lid will be). Finish with either (1) fold & tuck top edge under two or (2) tapiu two/tapiki or (3) single lock & whiri.
- Create lid from 6x6 whenu left on 4th side, turn the edge of outside wheneu to make straight edge. Finish lid with either (1) fold & tuck edge under two or (2) tapiu two/tapiki, or 3) weave to a point and tuck edges.
- The lid can be made slightly longer and securely tucked into to box to keep it closed.

4) Tiny wakarei with integrated flap/lid

24*1.2cm whenu (setup 12x12)

Final size 11cm x 11cm

Min 85cm whenu required



Step by step guide:

1. Harvest & preparation

Traditional karakia (prayer) for kōrari

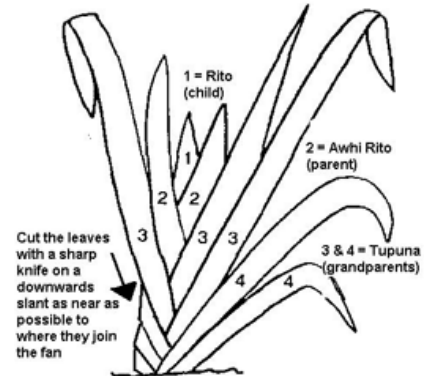
Te Harakeke, Te Kōrari - Flax

Ngā taonga whakarere iho - the treasure passed down to us

O te rangi. O te whenua. O ngā Tupuna - by the sky the land the ancestors

Homai he oranga mō mātou - gives us health

Tihei mauri ora - for our life force

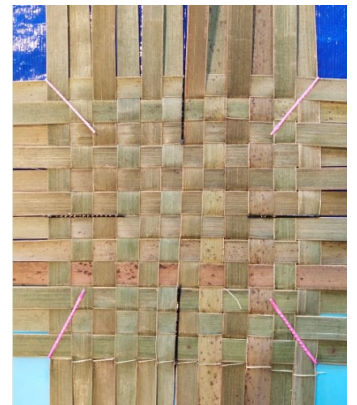


- **Karakia/acknowledgement:** It is usual to acknowledge the harakeke before you start to harvest.
- **Harvesting:** For quantities required see wakarei diagrams above. Take only outer leaves, leaving the middle 3 on the fan, the rito (baby leaf) & awhirito (parents). This ensures enough energy is left for the plant to regenerate. Clean around the bush and dispose of leftovers away from the bush, to ensure the bugs that damage harakeke do not find a home there.
- **Sizing:** Use a thumbnail, needle or tip of a knife or haehae (measuring tool) to pierce the leaves into even widths. For this project we use 1.2cm, do not use the edges or midrib. Use the whole length of the leaf, cut the strip at the bottom where the leaf joins together (as long as possible). Trim tips off ensure all whenu are the same length.
- **Softening (hāpine):** Draw the back of a knife firmly along the dull side of the harakeke, then flip over and do the same thing, but more gently on the front side. This reduces moisture, makes the harakeke supple and helps to stop it rolling up.
- **Boiling (optional):** Boiling the strands for 1-2 minutes makes them more durable and may help to remove the green chlorophyll, leaving it whiter when dried, but this step is not strictly necessary.

2. Weaving the base

Most weaving begins with a "simple weave" or **takitahi** (one over, one under).

- **Laying out:** Place half of your strands vertically (shiny side upwards), best use a thin piece of harakeke to whatu (stitch) them together side by side (about 1/3 of the way up) or at least lay a heavy weight on top, to stop them moving around.
- **Weaving in:** Using takitahi, weave the other half horizontally through the verticals to create a flat square or rectangle. Ensure all ends sticking out are aligned and symmetrical.
- **Tip:** Ensure your weave is tight, adjust tension and put 4 bobby pins in the corners to hold it.



3. Forming the four corners & weaving the walls

This is the "magic" step where a flat mat becomes a 3D container. Once the corners are set, continue the takitahi pattern upwards.

- **Find the corners:** Count the whenu from the top left point of weaving. Your corners might vary depending on the size of wakarei. Small will be between whenu no 6&7, both on the top and the left



side. Medium will count 8 from top left point, mark them with different coloured bobby pins. These baskets are rectangular so you need to do the same on the opposite side (see the layouts above).

- **Create the corners:** Take one whenu from either side of the pin and cross them over at a 90-degree angle & weave together. Repeat this with the next 2 whenu from either side, do this until you have used 4 whenu from either side, then peg them to hold the new woven corner in place.
- **Consistency:** Repeat for all four corners. Then fill in the gaps between the new corners to the next peak of weaving, the walls of the basket will naturally begin to rise. Keep the whenu at right angles and without gaps. If they are too loose, the basket will be "gappy", if too tight, it may be misshapen.
- **Tip:** Use lots of pegs to temporarily hold everything in place while working.

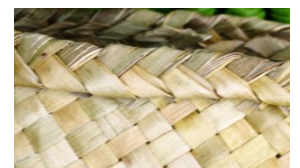
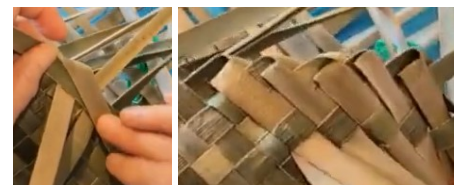


4. Finishing/lock off

- **Height:** Weave depending on what finish you would like the basket to have:
 - (a) The **fold-over finish (double walled)** will require double the height of the end basket height (12 rows of weaving). Then for the lock off choose option 1 or 2 below.
 - (b) A **single walled basket** requires 6 rows of weaving before lock off. Then for the lock off choose between options 1 to 4 below.
- **Weave up to your ara** (pathway or top edge) so you have an even line to begin your finish.
- **Can't find your ara?** Fold whenu back down in one direction on the outside where you want your ara to be and peg them in groups of 6 all the way around (choose either left or right ones, depending which are on the outside of the weaving). Then adjust the height of your weaving all the way along the top edge.
- **Tip:** peg, peg, peg.

Choose your lock off: To prevent the basket from unravelling you must lock off the top edge. Use either of these 4 lock off methods:

1. **The horizontal fold-down:** Fold the whenu pointing to the right back down through the basket wall to capture it under 2 rows of weaving, on the outside of the basket. First thread/weave in the strips facing to the right, then thread in the ones facing left. This gives a straight top edge.
2. **Tapiu two/Tapiki:** To do this lock off ensure your setup is 2 back, fold down the first whenu, do one weave, then add its partner on top of the first folded down whenu, making sure it goes under both rows of weaving. The last 3 whenu you will have to manually tuck in. Trim ends.
3. **Single lock off:** Do a single lock off and then finish off with a whiri (plait) around the top.
4. **Zig zag:** This finish folds the 2 partner whenu back down over each other into a zig zag up and down pattern. Again make sure each whenu is tucked under 2 weaves.



I hope you may find these guidelines helpful, it has been a challenge to put them together so please forgive any errors or omissions - as I would rather be weaving!

In the future I will try for other funding to run more guided workshops so we can weave these baskets together again in the future.

If you would like to donate to another hospital outside Whangarei, it is best to contact the hospital directly about their needs and delivery, or get in touch with me via Facebook or my website so I can point you in the right direction to gift your creations.

Today, there are many great online resources on Youtube or other channels, just search for weaving/raranga, harakake/NZ flax etc.

Thank you for being part of this kaupapa and I wish you fun and fulfillment on your weaving journey.

Ngā mihi nui,

Wendy x

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