

# HOW TO MAKE A LIME BARK CONTAINER



**By Beke Olbers**  
EXTRA Survival & Bushcraft

*Bark Craft*



**W**hen working with materials provided by nature, there is always this moment that makes me struggle with the fact that often I have to 'kill' a plant or tree for my project... and when working with bark that moment certainly is there because dead trees have dead bark, which is useless for this craft. You have to use the bark of a living tree to make a bark container. Luckily these bark containers last very long, almost a lifetime.

I always try to arrange a deal with the forestry commission to let me harvest bark from trees that will be logged anyway.

## HARVESTING THE BARK

These types of bark containers can be made from many different species. I used lime for this article. Other barks that work very good as well are elm, spruce, ash, cherry, willow, alder, cotton wood and more.

Harvesting bark from these tree species only works well in spring up to early summer when the sap flow is high. The only bark that can be harvested later in the year is willow and alder when growing in marshy areas.

Look for a tree that has a big patch of straight smooth bark, no side branches, no bend in the tree and not too big old wounds. You might even find a tree that offers more than one of these patches of bark.

**Before you cut into a tree, make double sure that it really has the right smooth patch of bark!**

Make a first cut at the lower part of 'your patch of bark' all around the tree trunk. (The bark on the picture is harvested with a stone axe, therefore the rough appearance.)

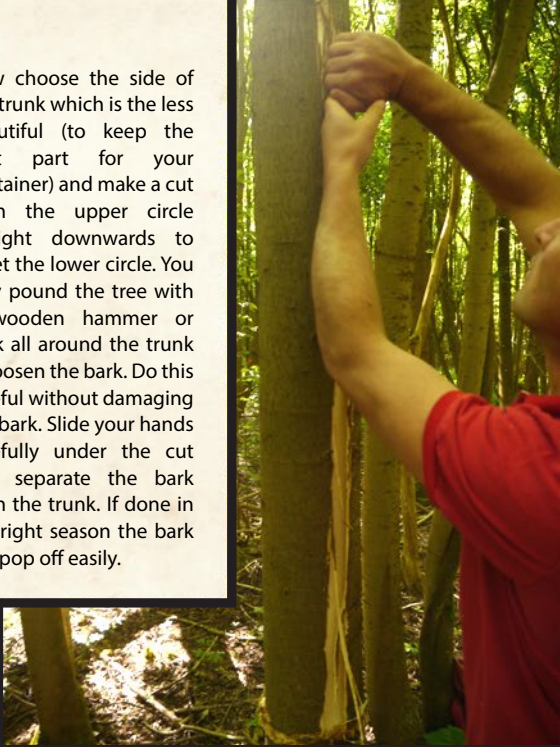
Then another cut all around the trunk at the upper part of the selected patch. (The orange stripe indicates that this tree will be logged next winter.)







Now choose the side of the trunk which is the less beautiful (to keep the best part for your container) and make a cut from the upper circle straight downwards to meet the lower circle. You may pound the tree with a wooden hammer or stick all around the trunk to loosen the bark. Do this careful without damaging the bark. Slide your hands carefully under the cut and separate the bark from the trunk. If done in the right season the bark will pop off easily.





A big piece of nice bark is waiting to become a container.

The bark you have will define the size and shape of your basket. If you have a short and wide piece you will get a low container with a wide rim. A long and slender piece (as you see on the picture) will make a high but narrow container.

Of course, you can add your creativity to this and shape the bark to the desired measurements, but the size of the tree will live on in this container.

## CRAFTING THE CONTAINER

Cut the sides of the bark into a nice straight edge, as you can see on the right side of the bark in the picture below.



Find about the centre of the bark and draw a big 'eye' from side to side on the outer bark. The width of the 'eye' will determine the width of your container. Too wide will be difficult to fold later on, too narrow and your container will be more like an envelope.

Plane or shave away the outer bark along the lines of the 'eye'. This works best with a small knife or spoonknife. Be careful not to cut too deep! The inner bark that is left has to be thick enough not to tear while bended. It is important to shave right up the to edges of the bark with that 'eye' in order to be able to bend it properly.



You may fix the container temporarily with lime bark strips. Now drill holes along the seams; I found the piercer of a pocket knife works perfect. A sharp pointy piece of flint stone works fine as well.





Drill holes all around the rim too.

The great thing about lime bark is that it can also be used as threading material. You may pull some of the bark from the already damaged tree or its branches. Separate the inner from the outer bark and cut into long thin strips.

Sew the sides of the container with lime bark strips. Any stitch will be fine. Try to pull the sides firmly together, they may even overlap a bit. When drying, the bark will shrink a lot. Tie off with a simple knot.







Split a willow branch lengthwise in two. The branch needs to be a bit longer than the outline of the rim.

Place one part of the split branch at the inside of the container, the other around the rim. And secure with an overhand stitch using lime bark.

The picture shows both containers made from the bark of the same tree. As well as the lime bark we were able to harvest from the 'left overs' for future projects.

One extra tip: these containers were made from fresh green bark that will shrink when drying. Therefore there will arise gaps along the seams. But this gives you the opportunity to make a container 'on the go'.

To make containers that will not shrink you have to dry the bark first. Then re-soak and work the container as described above.

There are endless possibilities to combine different barks, inside out, variations in stitching...



In the next issue I will show you how to make a traditional birch bark container called mocuck.



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