

Bark Craft



**MAKE YOUR
OWN ROUND
BIRCHBARK
CONTAINER**

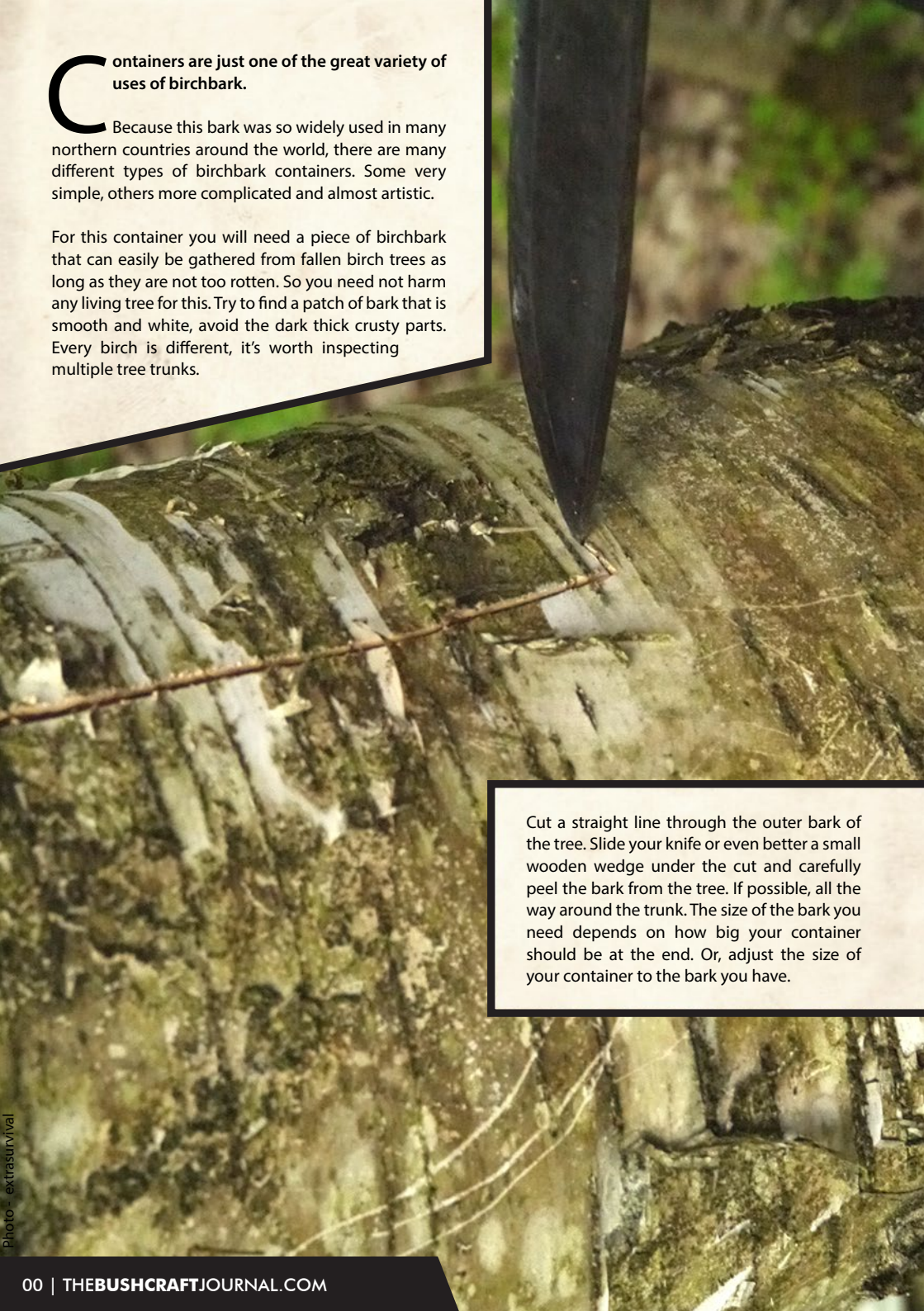


By Beke Olbers
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Containers are just one of the great variety of uses of birchbark.

Because this bark was so widely used in many northern countries around the world, there are many different types of birchbark containers. Some very simple, others more complicated and almost artistic.

For this container you will need a piece of birchbark that can easily be gathered from fallen birch trees as long as they are not too rotten. So you need not harm any living tree for this. Try to find a patch of bark that is smooth and white, avoid the dark thick crusty parts. Every birch is different, it's worth inspecting multiple tree trunks.



Cut a straight line through the outer bark of the tree. Slide your knife or even better a small wooden wedge under the cut and carefully peel the bark from the tree. If possible, all the way around the trunk. The size of the bark you need depends on how big your container should be at the end. Or, adjust the size of your container to the bark you have.

Soak the piece of bark in hot water for a few minutes. The bark will get softer and more pliable. This prevents tearing the bark.

Cut your birchbark into a rectangular piece (for instance 12 x 20 cm).

Roll the bark into a tube having the edges overlap about 2–3 cm. This will become the diameter of your container.

Due to the natural curling of the bark it will be easiest to roll it up with the outer bark facing inside. If you prefer the white outer bark on the outside you will have to 'force' it into place to get a nice tube. Do this while the bark is still hot.

Sometimes birch bark can be very thin and you will get a stronger container if you double the bark. Of course, you will need a longer piece of bark which you keep rolling until the bark doubles.



PUNCH TWO SMALL HOLES



TOP AND BOTTOM PEGGED



HAWTHORNS

Hold the bark in place and punch two small holes (an awl or big needle works fine) at the top of the overlapping part, as shown in the picture.

Make sure you support the back of the bark with your other finger while punching to prevent cracking the bark.

To keep the bark in place, insert a small wooden peg in each hole. I often use hawthorns for this.

Repeat the same at the bottom side of the container.

Punch more holes, two by two, between the upper and the lower two. The distance between the holes may be about 2–3 cm.

Now you can sew your container with whatever material you have. This could be normal thread, rootlets, lime-, elm- or willow-bark, etc. In the example I used spruce roots.

Carefully pull out the upper two pegs and immediately insert the threading material. You may have to re-open the holes as they tend to close after a while.

Leave the remaining two pegs in place until you reach them.

The stitching pattern is up to you, as long you pull the threading material tight. I used a cross stitch.

Cut two thin disks from dry wood, one slightly thicker for the lid. Draw the diameter of the container on the bottom disk and carve in to shape until it fits the bottom of your container.

For the next step you will need about 10 thick hawthorns or small wooden pegs. The base is now the right size, but the lid is still just a wooden disk.



SEW THE CONTAINER



MARK THE BOTTOM THEN CARVE TO SIZE

BOTTOM IS CARVED AND HAWTHORN PEGS PREPARED





HAWTHORN PEGS NAILED IN



HAWTHORNS TRIMMED FLUSH

Tap the bottom disk in place. It should stay there by itself, that is the right fit.

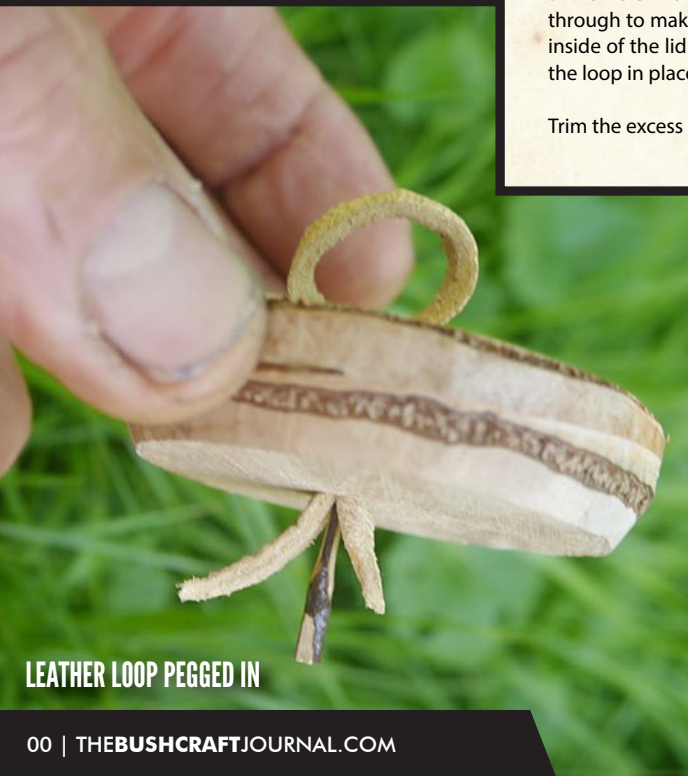
Now punch holes through the bark and into the wooden disk about 2–3 cm apart from each other. Tap a wooden peg or hawthorn in each hole as if they were nails.

Trim the excess bit of the pegs until flush with the surface.

The last step: carve the lid to size to make it fit perfectly. You can taper the inner edge to make it fit even better.

Drill a hole in the center of the lid and pull a leather strip through to make a pull loop. Tap a wooden peg from the inside of the lid between the two ends of leather to hold the loop in place.

Trim the excess parts of the wooden peg and the leather.



LEATHER LOOP PEGGED IN



LEATHER AND HAWTHORN TRIMMED



**NOW YOUR CONTAINER IS FINISHED
AND CAN STORE WHATEVER YOU LIKE!**

AND AGAIN, THIS IS QUITE AN ADDICTIVE TECHNIQUE. EACH AND EVERY CONTAINER YOU MAKE NEXT WILL BE MORE BEAUTIFUL, ANOTHER SIZE OR SHAPE, AND USEFUL FOR DIFFERENT GOODS.





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**IF YOU HAVE A GO AT MAKING A
BIRCH BARK CONTAINER YOURSELF
THEN SEND US YOUR PHOTOS!**

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**IN THE NEXT ISSUE I WILL
SHOW YOU HOW TO MAKE
A QUICK AND ON THE GO
LIME BARK CONTAINER.**