

HANAKAGO

For the fall container corner, I would like to visit *Hanakago*. *Hanakago* is the Japanese word for flower basket. Historically baskets have been woven for millenium and were utilitarian items. Then in the 16th century the famous tea master, Sen no Rikyu, was walking along the Katsura River and saw a fisherman's creel and decided to use it for *chabana*, tea flowers. After that *hanakago* have been used for *chabana* and *ikebana*. They were most commonly used in the 19th century and with decreasing frequency in the 20th century as ceramic vessels and glass vases became more poplular along with the *kenzan*. *Hanakago* are perfect for fall arrangements and are typically used from spring through fall.

Hanakago are made primarily from bamboo that is split into strips of varying widths and thicknesses and then woven into a wide variety of shapes. Other materials might include reeds, rattan for handle wrapping and decorative knotting and tree roots or vines like akebia and wisteria attached as a handle or incorporated into the body of the basket. This vine handled basket was my sensei's senseis basket which I acquired for \$15 when she retired.

Varying colors of bamboo are employed from light yellowish to brown, dark burgundy and even black. The bamboo may be dyed from plum to add rich color. In the summer ,the lighter colored baskets look nice with lush green materials. In the fall, the deep brown baskets impart an earthiness and are beautifully complemented by using berried and vine type materials.

Cultural note: Bamboo used in the ceiling construction of farmhouses was exposed over time to cooking fumes/soot which naturally turned the bamboo a darker color. Then pieces of which were salvaged and used either whole or split for plaiting.

Basket construction runs a spectrum from informal to formal based on the tightness and intricacy of the weave or plaiting. The most basic is twill plaiting where one strip is passed over and under one or more other strips. Hexagonal plaiting and chrysanthemum plaiting are also common methods of fabrication.



Baskets made with very thin strips that are woven tightly and in a regular symmetrical pattern are more formal. Those with wider more loose irregular plaiting have an informality and carefree feel. The formal baskets look great with high status materials like peonies, lilies and pine. The



informal baskets look nice with carefree feeling flowers like bellflowers, anemones, and grasses.

Hanakago are more difficult to use than ceramic vases and containers. They must incorporate some type of liner to hold water. Some baskets have copper liners specifically made for them. Or a piece of wide bamboo with a long segment between nodes may also be used to hold the water.



I have found many baskets at bazaars and sales and typically they come without a liner. I have used plastic water bottles with the top removed, clear glass cylinders or bamboo in varying widths to slide inside.

For flatter bottomed baskets I have used kenzan set in plant pot plastic liners. Another method is an *otoshi*, or cup kenzan that may simply be placed inside the basket.

When arranging in a basket with a handle, try not to block the handle. When using materials that are taller than the handle, try to have them

“cut” or cross the handle at its one third point and not directly in the middle. Also try to insert the majority of the materials in front of the handle. You can also use the handle to act like a “frame” by cutting some of the materials shorter than it. Use less materials in baskets since they are light.

In general, many classical Japanese materials work very well in *hanakago*. Look at the colors of the bamboo closely to find a complimentary or a matching colored material. In the deep brown baskets, I find that Dianthus pinks or *nadeshiko*, red or orange cockscombs or *keito* are effective. In a basket with more orange toned strips, blue or purple *kikyō*, Chinese bell flowers or monkshood, *torikabuto* contrast well. My all time favorite material for baskets though is *Miscanthus sinensis* or *susuki*. It is light and airy. The arch of the blade and flower echo the handle's curve which allows us to feel the wind lending a softness to the arrangement. Perhaps grasses work so effectively in baskets because bamboo in itself is a grass.

I also highly recommend Bamboo Baskets Japanese Art and Culture Interwoven with the Beauty of Ikebana by Maggie Oster ©1995.

To see more samples of *hanakago* with matching ikebana styles and suitable materials, please refer to the Ohara School publication, Kikyō No. 313.