

# Plaiting

Add a new dimension to your work with plaited leaves says Christina Curtis

Plaiting (and weaving) plant material became popular around the time of the World Show 'Floranza' in New Zealand in 1996. The skilful techniques seen there with Maori origins inspired floral artists everywhere to incorporate such work in their designs. Today plaited leaves are still just as intriguing and they add special interest to all arrangements made using them.

Although it is possible to plait a number of palms which are commercially available as cut foliage such as *Syagrus* sp. (Queen palm) and *Phoenix* sp. (date palm), *Howea forsteriana* (kentia palm) and more particularly *Chrysalidocarpus lutescens* (areca palm) give the best results.

The following steps (for a right-handed person) for a basic plait and the accompanying design use areca palm leaves which can be obtained from wholesalers of florists' foliage.

**1** Take a palm leaf with longish leaflets (at least 7 cm) at the tip. Ideally, there should be one central leaflet (A) and two others (B,C) i.e. one on each side of the stem when viewed from above. However, if the leaflets are shorter, neatly trim away the tip with scissors to give the required length of leaflet (this size is important to form the tip of the plait without it coming undone).



**2** Hold the leaf so that it naturally curves towards you with its underside uppermost. The leaf stalk may be held in position between legs or supported on the stomach or a table.

**3** Where the short leaflets have been trimmed away or there happen to be a pair at the leaf tip, the two leaflets must be 'faced up' with the undersides together and used as one unit (A) as shown in photo 2. In an untrimmed leaf with the ideal configuration mentioned in step 1, the central leaflet (A) is ready for use straightaway.



**4** Loop (A) over the first finger of the right hand held parallel to the ground as in photo 3 and cross the second leaflet on the left (B) tightly over (A) closely beneath the finger. Hold securely between the left thumb and first finger.



**5** Remove right finger maintaining the position of the left thumb and first finger. Use the right hand to cross the second leaflet on the right side of the leaf (C) across (B) and parallel to (A). Hold in the left hand as shown in Photo 4.

