

SOLID  
crafts



*from*

SISAL

*to basket*

HADITHI



*“Let’s rise by lifting others”*





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# Always wanted to know how a sisal leave can transform in a gorgeous basket? Teresia Mulinge shows you.

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**M**eet Teresia Mulinga, a member of the Kisimenyi basket weaver group, weaving one of her many baskets. Showing you the process starting from sisal and ending with a gorgeous basket.

These unique baskets are made out of sisal which is grown either on farms belonging to the basket weavers, or else purchased from sisal estates. Sisal is an exceptionally durable and strong material, and grows well in harsh Kenyan climates.

## **1. the sisal plant.**

The weaver ladies either grow sisal plants (Agave Sisalana, Mexican origin) on their farms or else buy sisal fibres from the sisal estates in Mwatate. Sisal is an exceptionally durable and strong material, and grows well in harsh Kenyan climates. No pesticides nor chemical fertilizers are needed in sisal agriculture.







## 2. Down to fibres

The sisal leaves are decorticated (process by which outer parts of the plant are removed) until only the fibres remain. These fibres are typically 0.5 to 1 m long.

Stiff sisal fibre is used to make a vast array of products, everything from twine, rope, dartboards, cat scratching posts, lumbar support belts, rugs, slippers, cloths, disc buffers... and of course baskets!

Though in Kenya traditionally *Sanseveria* and *baobab* fibres have been used for basket weaving, now the ladies rely on sisal because of its suitability and vast availability.





A hand holding a bundle of yellow sisal fibers against a background of green agave plants and a hilly landscape.

### 3. Dyeing & Drying

The sisal fibres are coloured by adding them to the desired dye and bringing them up to the boil. They are then left out in the shade to dry.

Traditionally ladies have used natural colorants like certain tree bark or soil to create earthen shades of black, brown, grey and pale pinks and yellows.

Textile dyes are now broadly being used in order to obtain bright colours.





The background image shows two women in a room with yellow walls. One woman is standing in the background, wearing a white headscarf. The other woman is sitting on a blue plastic chair in the foreground, wearing a red headscarf and a brown patterned top. She is holding a large bundle of light-colored sisal fibers. To the left, there is a purple plastic chair. In the foreground, a long green object, possibly a piece of sisal or a tool, lies on the floor. A white text box with a black border is overlaid on the image, containing the section title and two paragraphs of text.

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## 4. Rolling the Twine

Using sisal fibres, the ladies have to roll it to produce twine.

This requires amazing skill since it necessitates the women to roll, upon their bare legs, consistent amounts of sisal fibres into each other to obtain a good quality twine that has the same thickness all over.

This is probably the most time consuming element of the entire basket making process.







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## 5. Ready, Steady, Weave!

Finally only once the lady has enough twine in the colour she wants, can begin weaving her basket.

The weaving starts at the centre of the bottom of the basket.







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## 6. Halfway

Here you see Teresia Mulinga, a member of the Kisimenyi basket weaver group, weaving one of her many baskets. Though you may wonder how long it takes for her to weave a single basket, in fact this is not a simple question to answer.

Not even Teresia herself can provide a precise estimate because of the vast number of variables it depends upon, for example how thin you roll the twine, how complicated the design, and how much time Teresia has between her daily tasks as a mother, a farmer, a wife, a community member...







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## 7. Ready

Teresia shows off her work – she will make just a single basket in this beautiful design...next time she will try out a different one – but it will be equally as beautiful!





Solid helps people in the South to take their life in their own hands.

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