

Porcupine Quills

Quills can be harvested from a deceased Porcupine, or they could also be gathered by throwing a wool blanket over a live Porcupine. The quills would have been released into the blanket. A single Porcupine has approximately 30,000 quills on its body, varying in size depending on the location. The largest quills would be found near its tail.

From that point, quills would need to be washed, sorted, and dyed.

Originally quills would have been dyed with berries, roots, flowers, nuts, bark, or moss. Red, blue, and white quills were the most seen in Métis artwork pre-1850's.

During the 1850's chemical dyes became available, which offered a greater range of color options.

With the introduction of beadwork and embroidery, quillwork became less common to see as the other mediums were more readily available.

North Island Métis (NIMA) publishes a monthly newsletter.

Go to NIMA's website (www.nimetus.com/newsletters) to read current and past newsletters.

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NORTH ISLAND MÉTIS

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**NORTH ISLAND
MÉTIS**

**Métis
Quillwork**



Four Basic Quill Techniques:

Wrapping: This method involves flattening quills and wrapping them around an object such as hair or leather that bends.



<https://www.matotope.com/porcupine-quillwork/>

Sewing: This involves flattening a quill and bending it over and under stitches. This is used to create vines and stems.



<http://www.nativetech.org/quill/line.html>

Plaiting: This is the passing back and forth of a quill between two threads to decorate an item.



<https://www.matotope.com/porcupine-quillwork/>

Weaving: This involves weaving quills together, on a loom. It would create geometric shapes that could be used on gun cases and smaller items.



<https://frenchinwisconsin.couleetechnology.com/2013/04/16/quillwork-on-a-loom/>

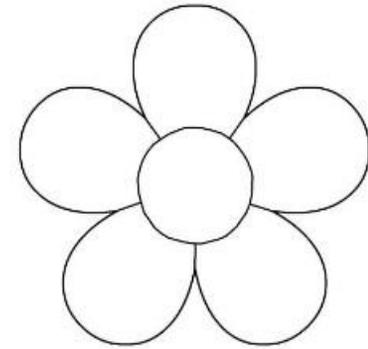
History of Quillwork

Métis women began quill work in the late 1700's and early 1800's.

By the early 1800's, Métis women began using Porcupine quills to decorate clothing, accessories, and household items. Floral designs were most common, however there were some geometric designs used.

When the trade routes were established with North Dakota, in the mid to late 1800's, quillwork items were highly desired items.

Originally quills would have been secured with sinew, but with the introduction of cotton thread this became the favored material.



Getting Started

- Thick felt or leather
- Paper
- Pen
- Porcupine Quills
- Size 10/11 beading needle
- Size D Nymo thread
- Scissors

You can use this Prairie Rose (five-petal flower) as a template to trace onto another piece of paper to get started.

Check out our YouTube page for a step-by-step tutorial.