



# Activity Guide: Natural string from everyday plants

by *Woven Willow*



## Activity Explanation

Learn how to make your own cordage from dandelion stems and daffodil leaves.



## What you will do during the activity

Discover the best time to harvest plants, which parts to use and how to prepare them. Learn the technique needed to bind your material together to make a strong natural string.



## How long it will take

Harvesting materials - 20-30 minutes,  
drying materials - 1-4 weeks,  
wetting materials - 10-20 minutes.  
Making the string - 30-60 minutes,  
depending on the length you make.

## You may also like to try

- Experiment with making different thicknesses of cordage.
- Experiment with different materials as the growing season progresses, such as Iris, Day Lily and Crocosmia leaves.
- Turn jute/garden string into rope, ideal for a strap on a handmade bag project.
- Create natural woven panels using bark and cordage.
- Make your own natural netted bag using an ancient looping technique.
- Check out Zed Outdoors on youtube for useful tutorials on how to make natural cordage.  
[youtube.com/watch?v=zd1aDm83m0w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zd1aDm83m0w)
- Check out @foragedfibres for more inspiration on plants that can be used to make cordage.  
[instagram.com/foragedfibres/](https://www.instagram.com/foragedfibres/)



### What you'll need

- Dandelion stems/Daffodil leaves - 40-50 stems/leaves makes approximately 50cm of string
- Newspaper
- String
- An old piece of cloth/towel
- Water sprayer
- Scissors



## Method

### 1. Harvesting your material

Search out the longest dandelion stems you can find (ones growing in amongst long grass are the best) and pick as close to the ground as possible. Gently pull daffodil leaves from the base to harvest as much of the leaf that you can.

**TIP** Pick the dandelion stems that have finished flowering and dispersing their seeds allowing them to play their part in a natural cycle and pick daffodil leaves only once they begin to yellow so that the bulb can flower again the following year.

### 2. Drying your material

You can dry your material in two ways:

*Method 1.* Spread your material out onto some newspaper or a cooling rack and leave to dry in a warm place like a sunny windowsill, near a warm radiator or an airing cupboard, turning them once a day.

*Method 2.* Place your material into bunches, tie with string at the tips and then hang them up outside where the wind and sun will reach them (revert to method 1 if experiencing persistent wet weather!).



Drying times will vary, depending on the temperature, weather and type of material, but should take roughly one week for dandelion stems and three to four weeks for daffodil leaves. Your material should be stiff to touch before it is ready for the next step.

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### 3. Preparing your material

The reason you dry your material first is so that the plant does all its shrinking before you use it, so that any cordage you make is strong and tight, but first you need to make it pliable again to work with. Spread your material out onto a dampened cloth and spray with water using a water sprayer. Roll up the cloth and leave for 10 to 15 minutes. It should now be ready to turn into cordage.

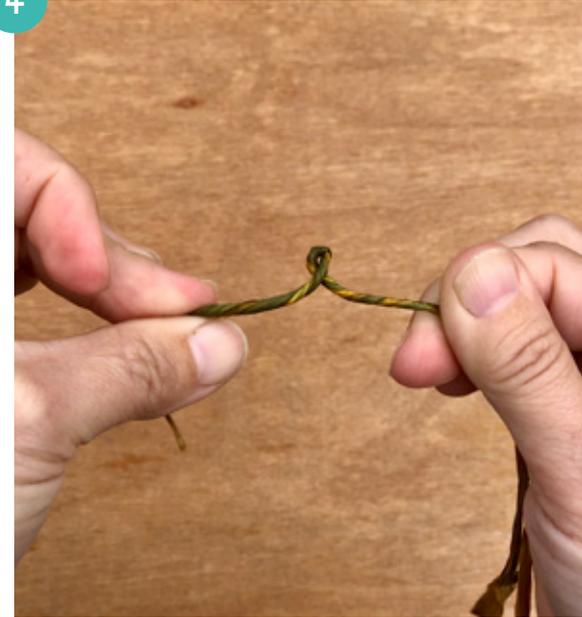
### 4. Setting up the cordage

The following is written for a right-handed method, please swap around for left-handed. Take three stems or leaves and create a bend in them so that one side is longer than the other, this will prevent you from having future joins in the same place, creating a weak point in your cordage. Now hold either side of the bend between your thumbs and fingers and twist in opposite directions to create a loop or 'eye'. You are now set up to begin making your cordage.

### 5. Beginning the twist

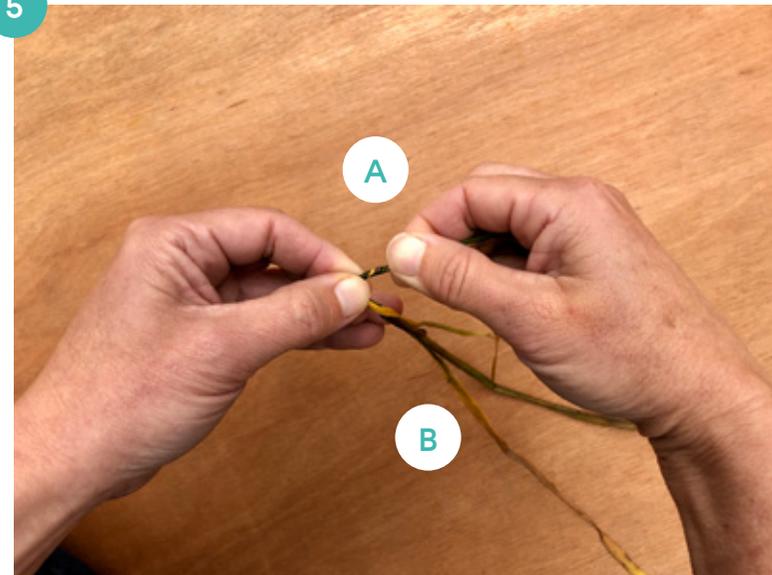
Hold the eye with your left hand and pick up the top strand A between your thumb and index finger on your right hand about 1cm along the length and twist it away from you with two strong twists.

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## 6. Swapping the strands

Keeping strand A twisted, hook your middle finger on your right hand under lower strand B and bring it up from the back to take the place of strand A. At the same time move strand A into the strand B position. Your hand will twist towards you as you make this movement.

**TIP** As you are twisting your right hand forward lift up your left thumb to allow the cordage to begin to twist together before placing it down again.

Repeat these steps moving your left hand along with the growing cordage so that it is always supporting the place where the two strands twist together.

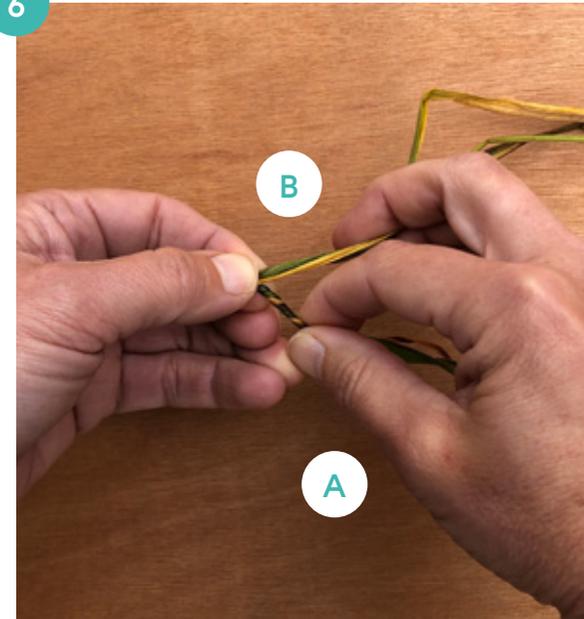
## 7. Adding a new piece

When you begin to run out of length you will need to add in a new piece. Allow roughly 4cm of overlap between the old and the new as they will be carried together for a couple of twists to create a strong join. New material is always added when the piece you are replacing is in the lower position. Lay the new piece on top of the existing strand, leaving a slight overhang and continue as before. As you add in new material, ends will be left protruding from the cordage, leave these as they are for now.

## 8. Finishing your cordage

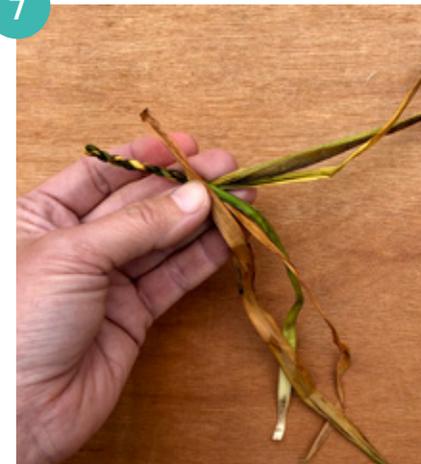
Once you have reached the length you require tie a knot in the end of your cordage and allow it to dry before you trim the ends neatly with a pair of scissors. It is now ready to use and time to get creative!

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## The Maker WovenWillow

Rachel Bower is a professional basketmaker based in Angus, north east Scotland. Making features strongly in her family history and was a prominent element throughout her childhood, instilling a passion for working with her hands from a young age.

She first worked with willow over 20 years ago when she made a simple round basket on a two-day workshop and was immediately drawn to the craft, fascinated by how a pile of sticks could be transformed into a strong and beautiful object by little more than a knife and a pair of secateurs.

Rachel has learnt from some of the leading basketmakers in the industry, becoming part of the rich community

committed to passing on age-old skills to a new generation. She is currently studying a level 3 City & Guilds in Crafts for Creative Industries, specialising in Basketry. Encouraged to experiment with material beyond willow, Rachel has discovered a wealth of plants in our everyday lives that are accessible to all and can be gathered and used with ease.

For further ideas and ways to use cordage follow Rachel @wovenwillowwork

[instagram.com/wovenwillowwork/](https://www.instagram.com/wovenwillowwork/)  
[facebook.com/WovenWillowWork/](https://www.facebook.com/WovenWillowWork/)



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