

# Calendar

## Heady Coils

### Lavender Basket-Weaving Class

One can just imagine that the smell of lavender permeates Nadine Spier — her clothes, her shoes, herself. Even as she drives down the freeway, her very vehicle must smell of it. Is that a good thing?

"Well, it's a soft fragrance," says Spier, a fiber artist who uses the herb fresh to weave baskets. "So it's not as if someone just broke a bottle of perfume in your car, and you want to roll down the windows. Fresh lavender is not like what you get in a cheap little bottle of synthetic lavender oil."

The fake stuff has been bad for lavender's public image, hasn't it? "Synthetics are obnoxious," Spier agrees.

#### LOCAL EVENTS

"I'm hypersensitive to perfumes; I can get a piercing headache from those scented candles. But real lavender isn't cloying or heavy. It's a light, sweet fragrance known for having properties that relax you. It's used by lots of holistic people. My husband and I make smudge bundles with it. When they're lit, they create a smoke that can cleanse an area of negative energy."

Coiling is the weaving method that Spier uses to make baskets of all kinds. She coils rows of fiber, then stitches them together with waxed linen thread. "The wax coating is nice to weave with," she says, "because it protects the thread from getting roughed up as you pull it through the plant fibers."

Beginning coilers do well with fresh lavender, according to Spier. "All the different textures hide a multitude of stitching sins." Coiling with pine needles, by contrast, is much more difficult. "Pine needles are very smooth, very refined. Blunders in pine-needle baskets show. With the lavender, most of the stitching disappears, because you've got all the leaves and blossoms sticking out all over the place."



Lavender basket



The Lavender Fields

To make just one lavender basket, Spier gathers an entire grocery bag full of plants. And she uses all the parts — stems, leaves, and blossoms — although they do get compressed during the weaving process. Compression is key, says Spier. "I urge my students to squeeze the materials as they're weaving. That way they will produce a rock-hard basket. My lavender baskets are not the slightest bit squishy." Besides, squeezing "is a pleasant thing to do, because you'll release even more of the scent."

Quick gratification is another reason why the fresh-lavender medium is good for beginners. Working with pine needles, for example, takes time, because the material is so delicate. With bulky lavender, the work goes more swiftly.

Everyone will leave Spier's class with a finished basket this weekend.

One of the best parts of the class comes in the first hour, says Spier. Students harvest their own plants as they wander the organic fields that are owned by Paul Bernhardt and Ellen Sullivan. The couple distills lavender oil at the ranch, and Spier's students can watch the process. "They have a huge variety of lavender plants,

including ones with blossoms that are white, yellow, and pale mint green."

The differences, says Spier, aren't only chromatic; they're also aromatic, at least to connoisseurs like Sullivan, who describes the scents as ranging from "highly camphorous to honey-sweet, with a note of mint in all."

What do students use their lavender baskets for? "Some use them as a place to put jewelry after taking it off in the evening. Some students cut off the blossom heads of their leftover material and fill their basket with them; the baskets are a natural vessel for potpourri. Others weave shallow baskets, so they can hang them on the wall."

Is there room for art in these classes? Or is weaving a lavender basket only a craft? "Because the results are rustic, I wouldn't call it fine art," says Spier. "My coiled pine-needle baskets are considered museum quality; the lavender baskets are just a fun thing. But if people can master this kind of coiling, they may want to pursue coiling with a more challenging material."

You can coil just about anything that grows, says Spier. "I've coiled rosemary, sage, jacaranda stems. I've coiled vines. I've coiled corn husks, after having collected them through the corn season until I had enough to

make a basket."

Thinking about all that activity, one wonders: does Spier worry about carpal tunnel syndrome? "I quit my job at an insurance company to weave full-time in 1996," she says. "No more fluorescent lights! No more time cards! Typing on the keyboard and using that darn mouse was a lot harder on me than weaving has been. I also had to handwrite forms in triplicate, pressing through the carbons, gripping a ballpoint pen. As for weaving, I used to be obsessive about it. Weaving is my passion and was from the very first basket I ever made. But I have learned to honor my body and know its limitations. I don't do weaving marathons anymore."

— Jeanne Schinto

**Fresh Lavender Basket-Weaving Class**  
**Saturday, October 26,**  
**(repeated Sunday, November 3,**  
**and Sunday, November 24; and**  
**Saturday, December 14)**  
**10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.**  
**The Lavender Fields**  
**12460 Keys Creek Road**  
**Valley Center**  
**Cost: \$60 (includes all materials)**  
**Info: 760-944-9369 or**  
**www.nadinespier.com**

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