

Norton, W.D.



W.D. Norton

White Oak Basket Making

W. D. Norton was born in Falkner, Mississippi on October 2, 1927 and moved to Hattiesburg in 1934. Later, he attended school in Oak Grove, Mississippi, and Mississippi Southern. For 37 years, Mr. Norton worked mainly as a train dispatcher at GM&O Railroad in Bogalusa, Louisiana. In 1985, he retired and devoted much of his time to hobbies such as growing roses, gardening, chair caning, and basket weaving. This basket weaving emerged after Mr. Norton observed basket makers at Mountain View, Arkansas. He began making baskets at his Bogalusa home and continues to craft baskets at his present home in Brandon, Mississippi today.

Mr. Norton began to work with reed baskets but eventually made the switch to white oak. To begin the process of making one of his baskets, he hand splits wood because it is stronger. Mr. Norton does not use purchased oak strips but rather locates and cuts the trees himself to ensure a quality product. The basket is started by splitting an oak log in half with a butcher knife and mallet, and then eventually it is split into eighths. Then, the weavers are split with a drawknife to get the desired width. Most split baskets are made free form with the basket maker's hands and eyes controlling the individual variations which distinguish his baskets from every other basket maker. The tools used in Mr. Norton's white oak basket-making process include a shave horse, butcher knife, draw knife, scissors, leather (used for leg protection), and hatchet.

Mr. W.D. Norton is a member of the Mississippi Craftsmen's Guild, and has demonstrated his skills at festivals in both Louisiana and Mississippi.