

Making a straw hackle

The first step in making a hackle is to source your straw.

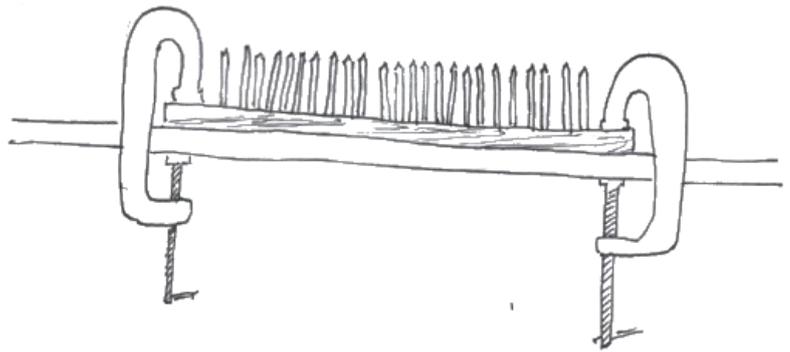
I bought some bundles (sheaves) of triticale from a thatcher. Triticale is a type of thatching straw rich in silica which makes it stronger and more malleable.

The chaff must be cleaned off the straw.

A comb can be constructed out of a 12" length of wooden baton and some 4" nails.

Pilot holes are drilled 5mm apart in a straight line down the centre of the baton.

This comb can then be attached to a surface with G-clamps to hold it in place.

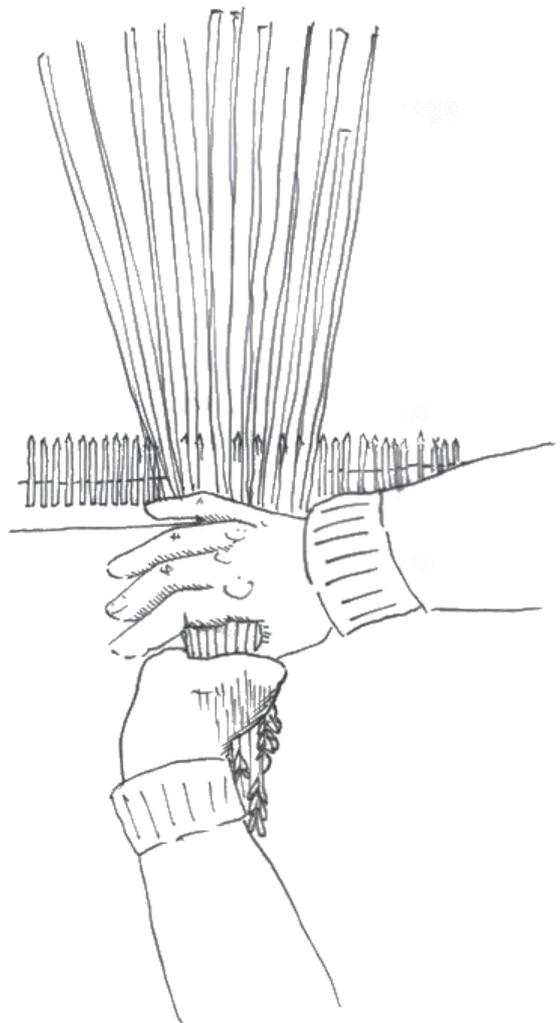


Collect a bundle of straw small enough to fit comfortably in your grip, holding the bundle by the grain end.

Lay the straw down over the comb, butt ends facing away from you, loosening your grip so that the stalks fall between the nails.

Tighten your grip on the bundle and pull through the comb. This should rid the bundle of most of the chaff.

Once you have combed about 1.5 bundles, you should have enough clean straw to start tying bundles together.

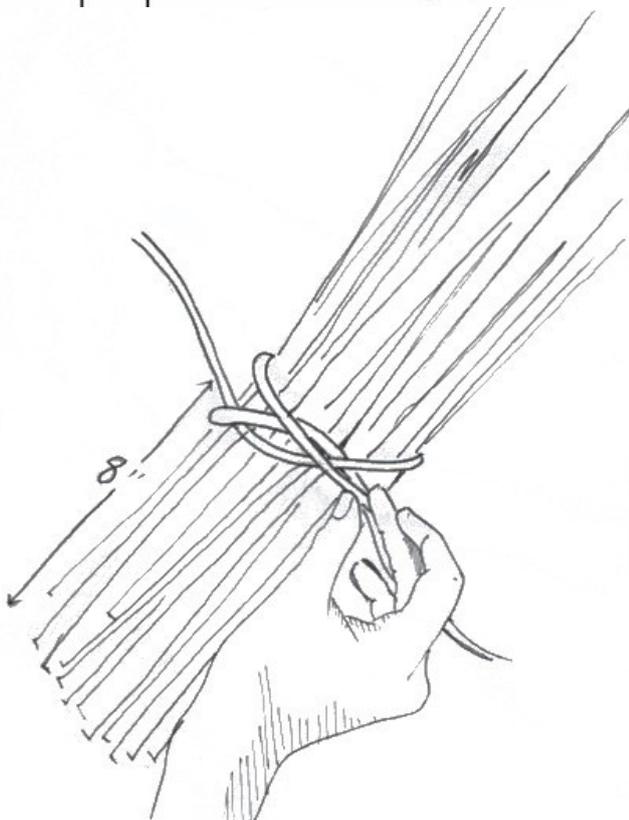
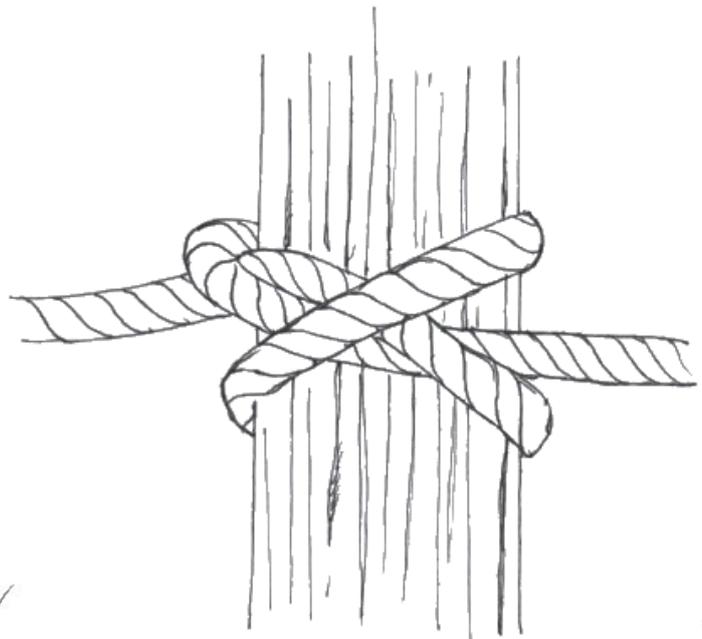
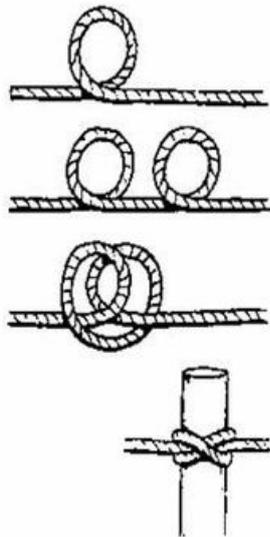
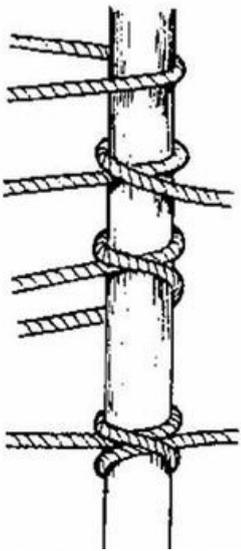


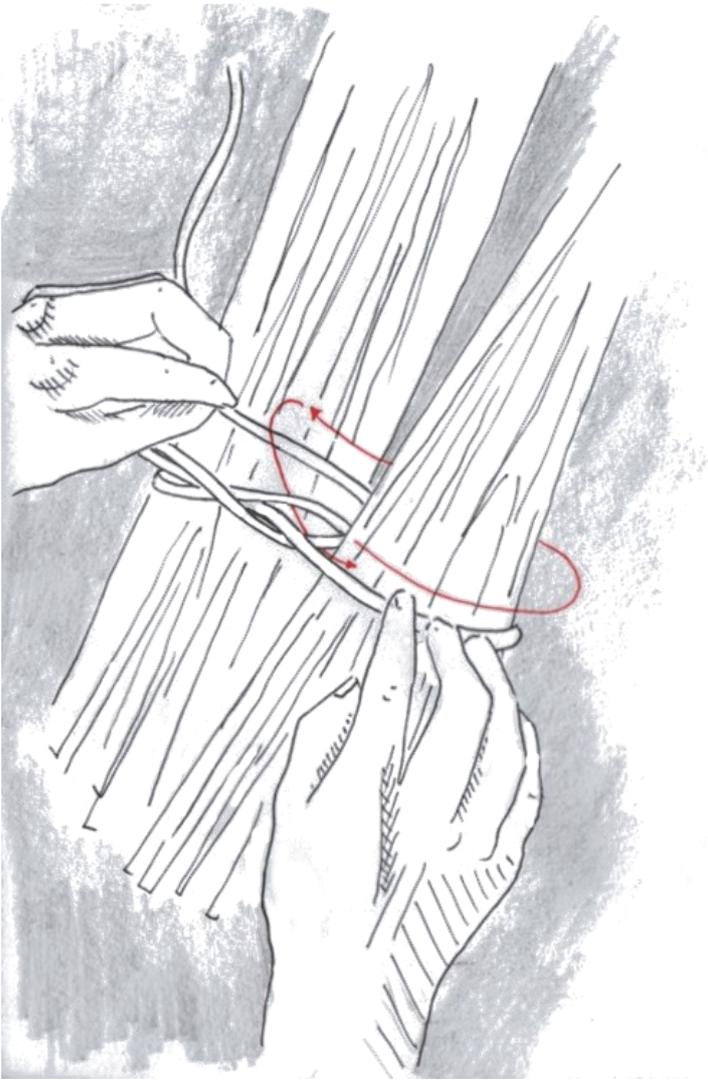
Measure a length of 5 arm spans of black bailor twine.

Gather a bundle big enough that your middle finger and thumb strain to touch when gripping the straw at the butt end. Tie a constrictor knot a hand span (~8") from the base. A constrictor knot can be tied by:

1. pass the working end (the long length) behind the bundle of straw from left to right.
2. Cross over the dead end (leave 2ft length) at the front, keeping the working end on top.
3. Pass the working end around the bundle again and tuck it under the top loop. (this is a clove hitch)
4. Tuck the working end around the loop of the dead end, which is under the top loop.
5. Pull ends to tighten but not all the way at this point.
6. The knot should look like a single knot with a loop crossing over the top.

This may be quite confusing... there are other descriptions online and these things will become more clear with practise!



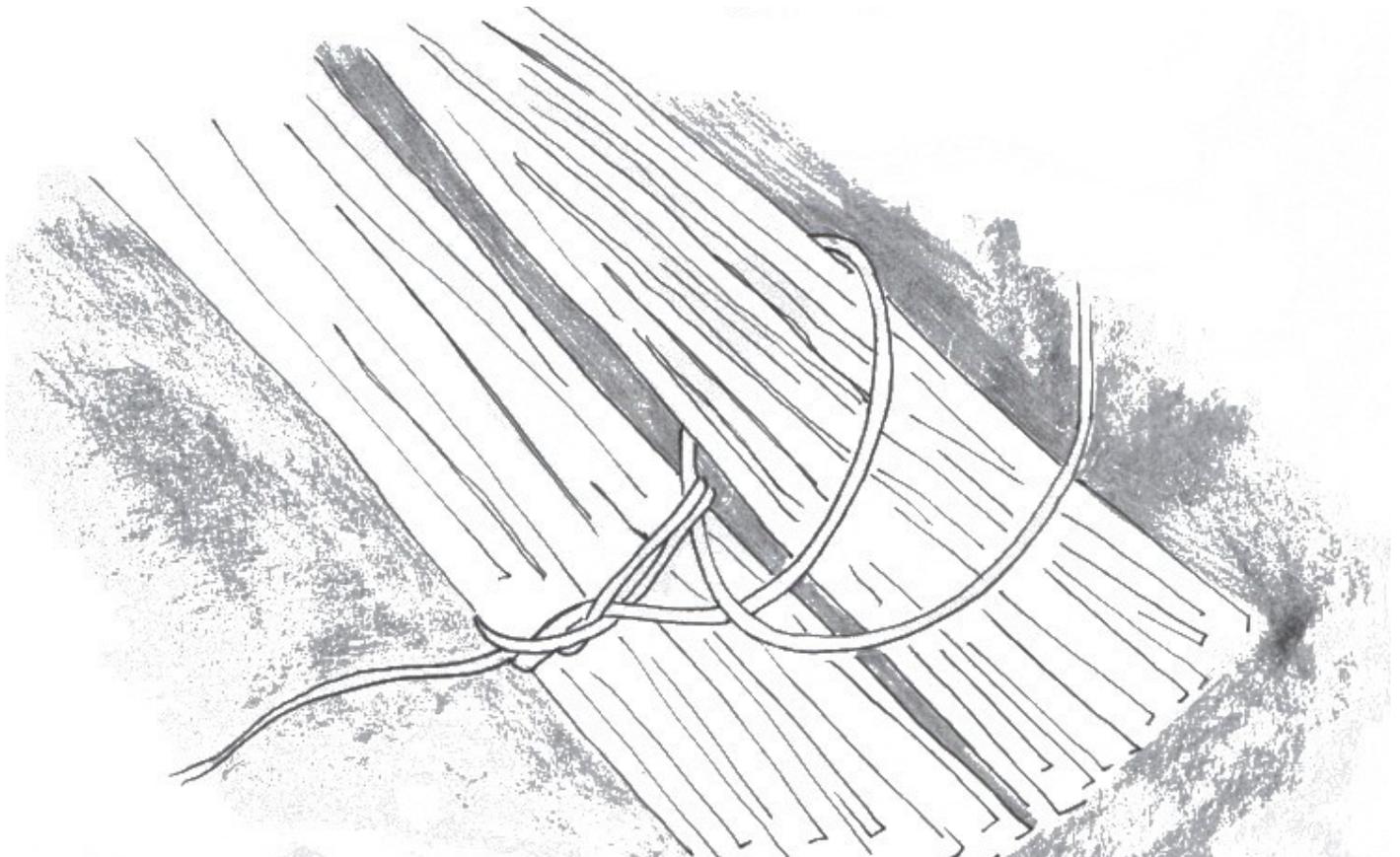


You now have your first bundle.
Gather another bundle of the same size
and lay it underneath the working string on
the right of the first bundle.

Pass the working end around the back of
the 2nd bundle and down through the loop
around the 1st bundle.

When pulling the length through, make
sure the working end is above the loop you
just made. This is clearly shown in the dia-
gram below.

This knot is repeated with each bundle you
add. Make sure that the knots run parallel
to the ends of the straw (8" above).

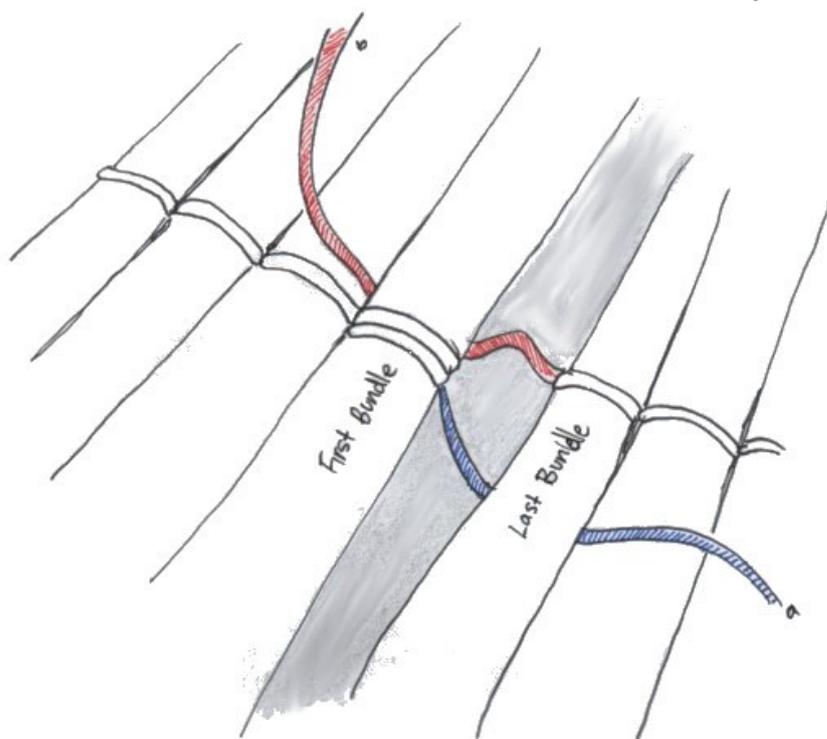


The knots are tightened as you proceed along the straw mat you are making. Each time you add a bundle, tighten the three knots before hand. The string crossing between bundles should be as tight as a guitar string and the start end of the straw mat should start to curl due to the tension.

Add bundles until the mat is roughly 65" long. On the last bundle, tie a clove hitch to keep the tension.

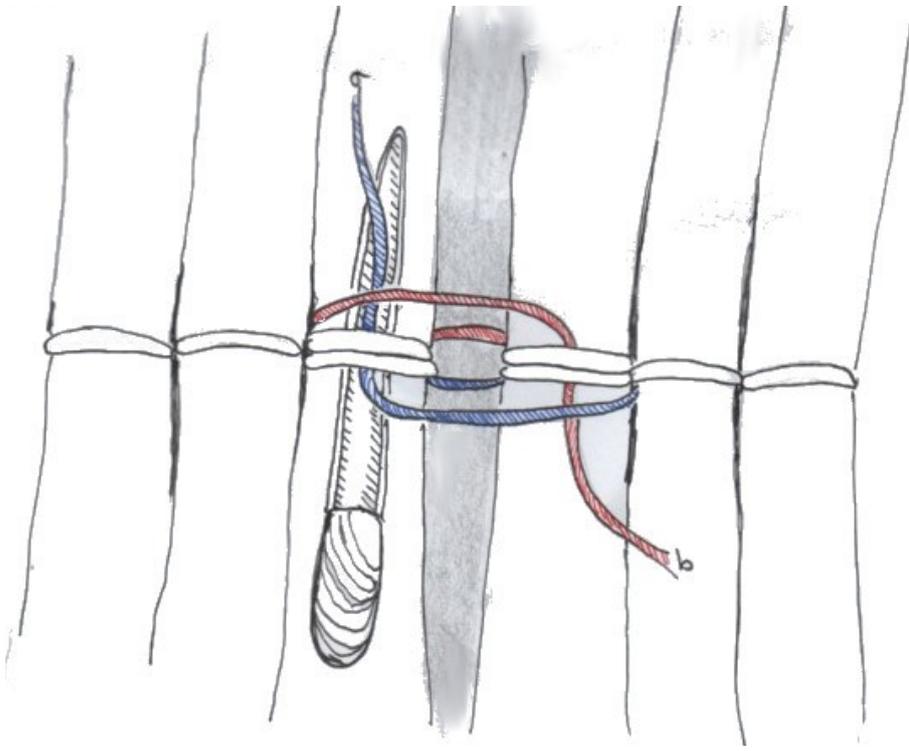
Take hold of the left hand side and flip the whole mat.

With a sharp pair of shears or scissors, snip off the very top layer of straw about a third the way down from the grain end. This allows the cone to be pulled in tighter.



Next bring the two ends of the mat to the centre to be tied together.

The strings from each end are threaded around the backs of the last bundles



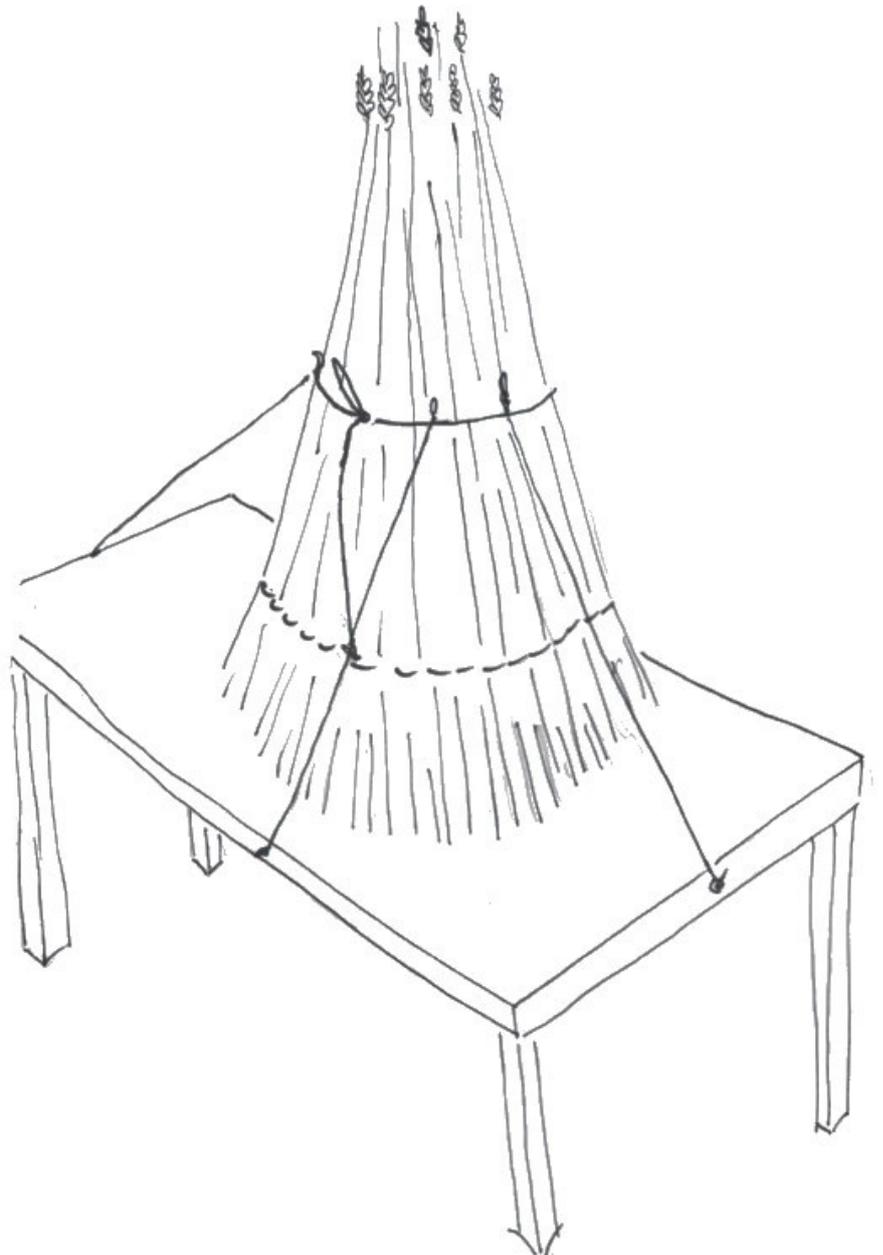
Using a fid (this can be made by cutting a length of pipe on the diagonal), feed the ends through the loops around the bundles and pull the ends tight.

Fasten the ends together with a double knot.

A loop of string around the grain end of the cone and attached to the bottom row of knots holds the cone in shape and acts as a handle for carrying the hackle to the water butt.

Soak the hackle upside-down for 1-2 minutes in the water butt with just the top ft submerged in water. This will soften the straw and make it easier to pull together.

Place the hackle over an up-turned bucket and tie the handle to the table to stop it from riding too high up the cone.

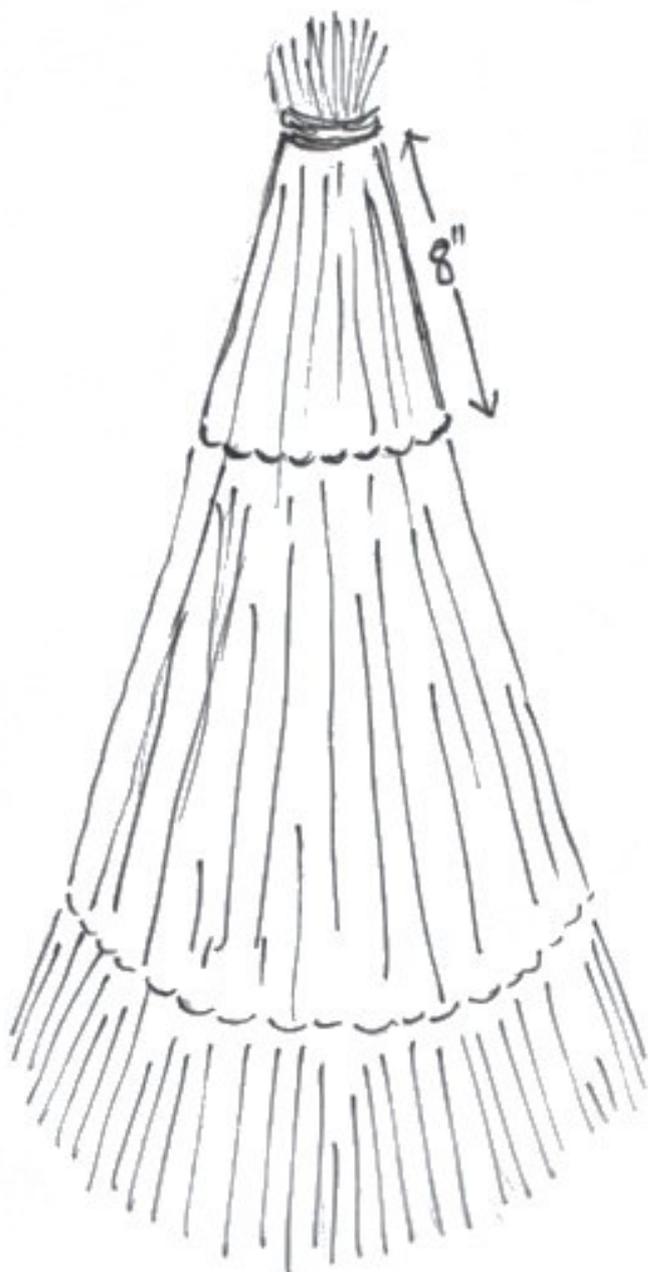
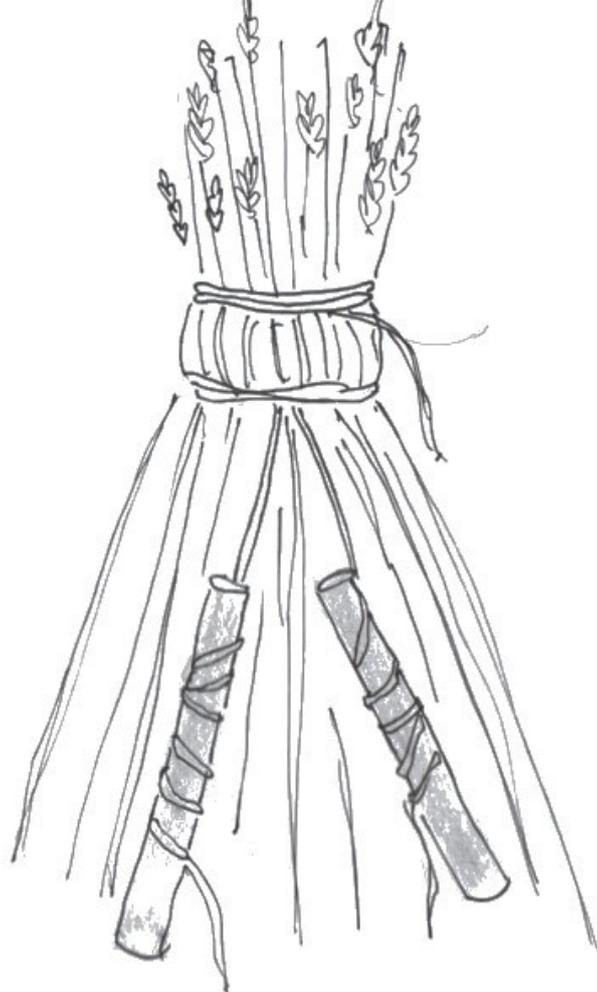


Tie three constrictor knots with three pieces of arm-length string a ft down from the top of the cone.

The knots should be an inch apart from each-other.

Using two dowels, tighten the three knots bit by bit ensuring that no knot is much tighter than the other. If the top knot is too tight then the lower two will rise up to the top...which you do not want.

The idea is to create a kink in the straw to prevent the knots from coming off the top. Therefore the knots must be pulled very tight!



The last step is to tie another row of knots 8" down from the top strings. This row is done in exactly the same way as the first row however now you are working on an up-right cone.

Tie a clove hitch as your first bundle, in line with the finishing knot on the bottom row.

The main difference here is that the bundle you grab must be in-between the original bundles. In other words made of half of one and half of the adjacent.

When threading the string through, the right hand must push through the straw on the right of the bundle and then the left picks up the string on the left. Make sure to pick up any loose strands at the back.

An up-turned flower pot is put over the top of the cone to keep the rain from dripping inside the hackle.