

Pleita: esparto braid



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1. What is esparto?

Esparto is a plant known and used by man to make all kinds of tools since ancient times. Its area of extension is rather small, although typical of the **Mediterranean coast**, it is found in countries such as **Spain**, areas of **Italy** and North African countries, **from Morocco to Egypt**.

It is an herb that grows spontaneously in **arid** and **stony** terrain, it is typical of areas such as Alicante, Almeria, Murcia or La Mancha. In our country the most producing provinces have been **Murcia**, **Albacete**, **Granada** and **Almería**, in this order.

It is a perennial herb with filiform leaves, with a stem of **sixty to seventy centimeters** in height. It was highly valued by the Romans precisely for its **high strength and durability**.



2. What is the pleita and its process?

The **pleita** is a braided esparto that will be used to make one type of object or another, depending on its branches, that is, a group of five six leaves of esparto that are braided together to spin the natural fiber.

Elaboration process

1. Harvest

In the month of **June** the esparto is collected. For its collection the “**palillo**” is used, a wooden rod of about ten fifteen centimeters in which the **bunch** of esparto leaves is rolled. The bunches are about fifteen centimeters wide.



In this picture we can see the “palillo” and a bunch of esparto

2. Cleaning

Those leaves are **removed** from the bunch that are **drier or shorter**, until the bunch is matched above and below.

Elaboration process

3. Dried out

This is done in the **sun**, which causes it to change its color and **turn yellow**; if, on the contrary, it dries in the shade, the esparto will remain green. This process can take about **twenty days**.

4. Cooking

The esparto is tied up in a stream where the water runs and is left up to **twenty-two days**. In this process the esparto becomes **white**. Then it will let **dry**.



Dried out



Cooking

5. Crushed

The esparto that has been cooked, once it is dry, is **mashed on a stone and with the mace**, hitting it to open and soften.

6. Braided Basketry

The beginning of the pleita is made with **three folded sheets**, to which three sheets are added transversely at a distance of the folded that are tied, turning the folded sheets and being visually **cross-shaped**.

Three more sheets are added at the same distance, thus leaving the central sheet with the following **cross ties**. From here, leaves are added until each branch is between five and six and they begin to **braid**.

Elaboration process



This picture shows the **crushing process** (number 5)

The **sewing process** with its respective **needle**



7. Sewn

To sew is used **esparto thread**, made with cooked esparto, and three branches of two or three leaves each.

The pleita is sewn in a **circular way** and ascended, being sewn **between the edges** of it.

8. Finish

It ends by **cutting** the pleita and performing a **stitch on it** so that it does not detrenze.

3. History of pleita and the use of esparto

Esparto has been used for thousands of years. The findings of more than **50 mummies in the Cave of the Bats in Albuñol** (Granada) in 1857, show a refined **craftsmanship of the esparto**, with baskets and dresses worked in a careful way. **Since the more than 6,000 years old of these remains, esparto work techniques have varied very little and the pleita has always been used.** Already in historical period, the Hispanic esparto was very appreciated for the **elaboration of ropes and rope** in the ships that crossed the **Mediterranean**.



Esparto sandals found in Albuñol

The main producing areas have been the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula, known as the **Spartarius Campus during the Roman Empire**. For the **Arabs of Al-Andalus**, the esparto, called in Arabic "**halfa**" continued to be a very important forest product, importance that it maintained throughout the Middle and Modern Age.

The decline of esparto came from the 50s and 60s of the 20th century, at which time the appearance of **plastics** and the importation of other fibers meant the plummeting **fall of the exploitation of esparto**.

4. Some of the products made with pleita

- **Pannier:** Piece of two bags joined together. Each bag is large and made with thirteen branch of pleita.
- **Capacho:** Circular piece of one meter in diameter and three in thickness. It is made with thirteen branch of pleita. It is used to grind olives in the press



Pannier



Capacho



Rope

- **Espuerta:** Basket that can be of different dimensions but that is characterized by being of large diameter and with low edges. It is made with thirteen branch of pleita.
- **Rope:** Five branch of pleita. It is used for sewing, are three-legged pleita. They are made with cooked and mashed esparto.
- **Cenacho:** Circular container with small side handles of pleita for storing objects at home.



Espuerta



Cenacho

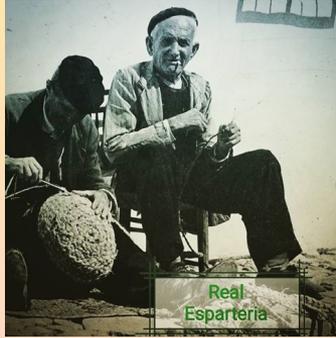
Some of the products made with pleita

- Animal heads
- Lamps
- Carafes
- Mantle of beach umbrellas
- Shoes



5. Location throughout Spain

Castilla - La Mancha



Malaga



Granada



Villarrobledo



Almeria



← This is a monument dedicated to the people who worked the esparto to survive in very hard times.

Cordoba



Toledo

