

Chapter 1

Getting Ready to Weave

Before starting this project we should say a few words about our raw material--lauhala. You will find a great deal of variation in the quality of the leaves of different trees. Some people feel that hala growing near the ocean produce better leaves for hats, but this hasn't been my experience. Be ready to try every tree available to you and judge it by the hats it produces. I have two trees that are across the street from each other. One is good for hats, the other has thicker lau that is better for baskets.

In choosing lau for weaving hats, you want leaves that are thin, have good color and are as long as possible. The thickness is fairly easy to judge. There should be no crinkling in the part of the leaf that you use. You should see the veining, but it should also be flexible and in some cases feel like thin leather. Color is more subjective. There should be a glossy richness to the leaf after it has been worked. Color can range from almost white to a rich reddish brown or even chocolate. As to length, the usable part of the leaf should be at least 18", but anything from 12" on can be used. You need a variety of lengths with at least a half dozen or so in the 30" to 36" range.

Before attempting hats, you should spend time getting to know lauhala. Make a variety of things from bracelets to baskets. Don't be in a hurry to start a hat. When you are very comfortable with lauhala weaving, move on to hats. But a warning is in order--you might find it addictive.



1.01. Start preparing the leaves by washing them. One way is to wear cotton gloves and work over a bucket of water. Dip your hands into the water and wipe the leaves. Don't try to force them open or they might crack. Place them in a large plastic bag for a few hours to soften.



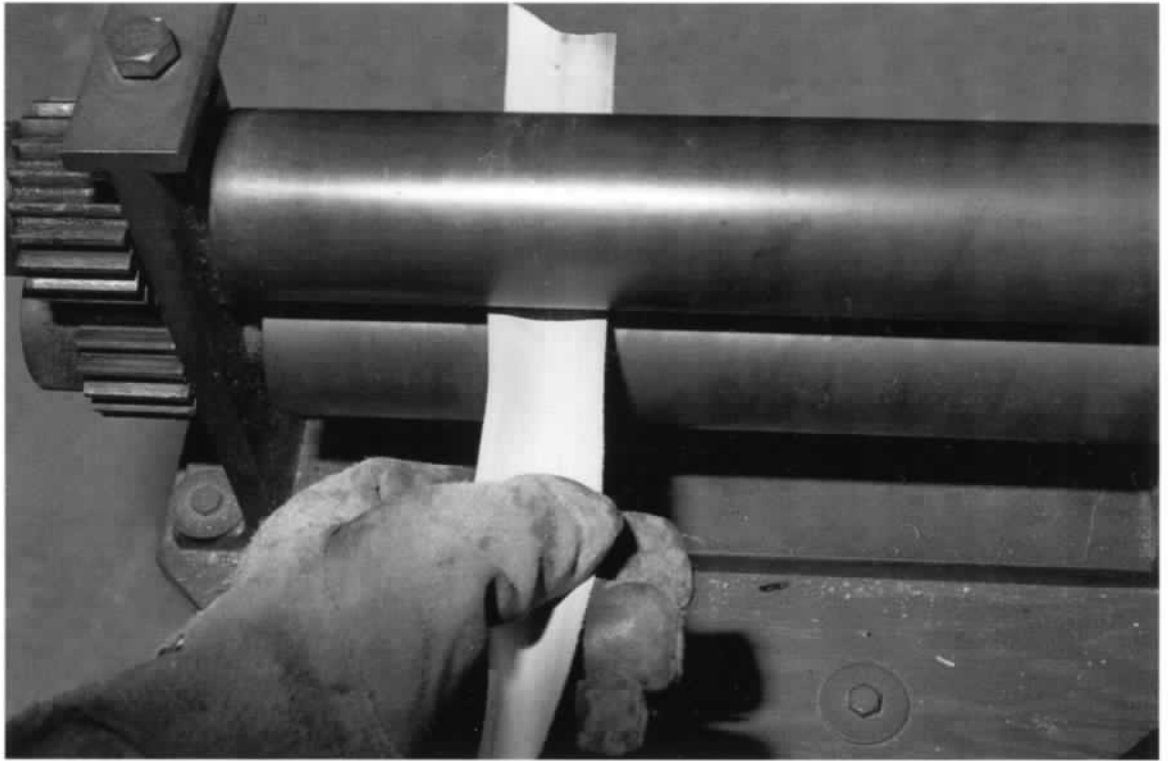
1.02. When the leaves are soft remove the thorns (kūkū). One way is to use a needle tool. Push the tool through the leaf about 1/4" from the edge to start the process.



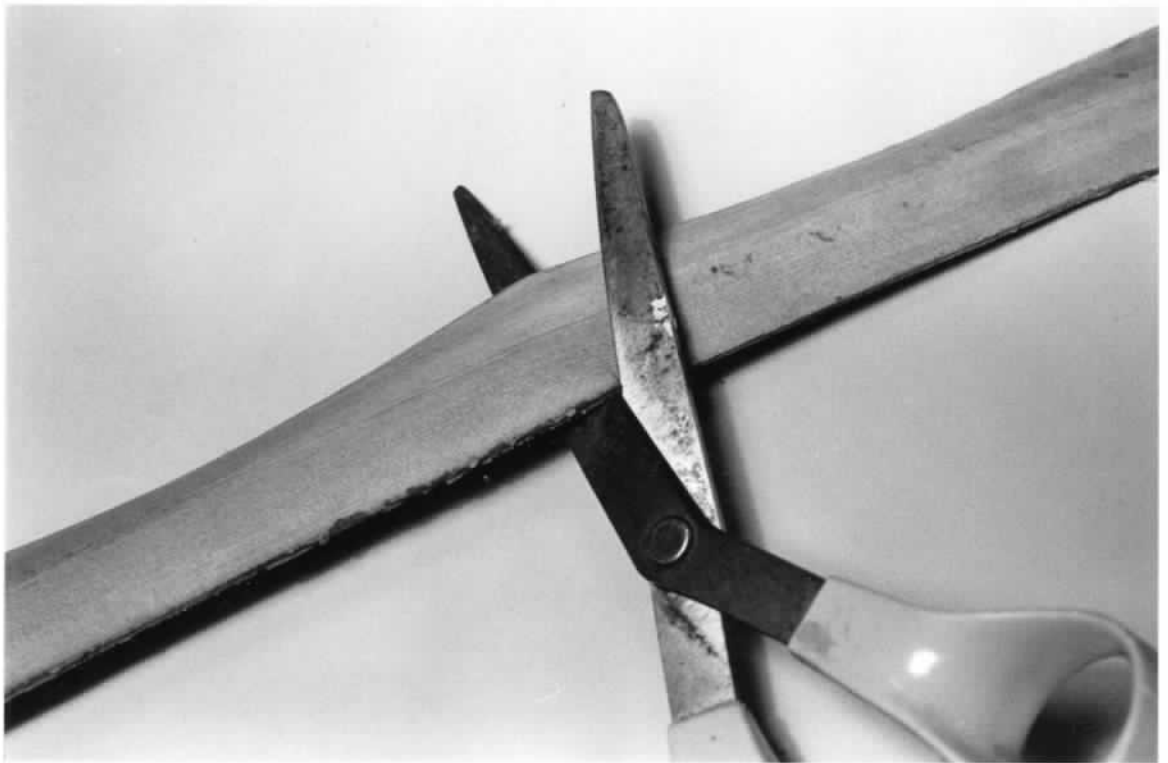
1.03. Then pull the thorny edge between your thumb and forefinger. Hold your hand still and pull the leaf. Gloves are nice at this point.



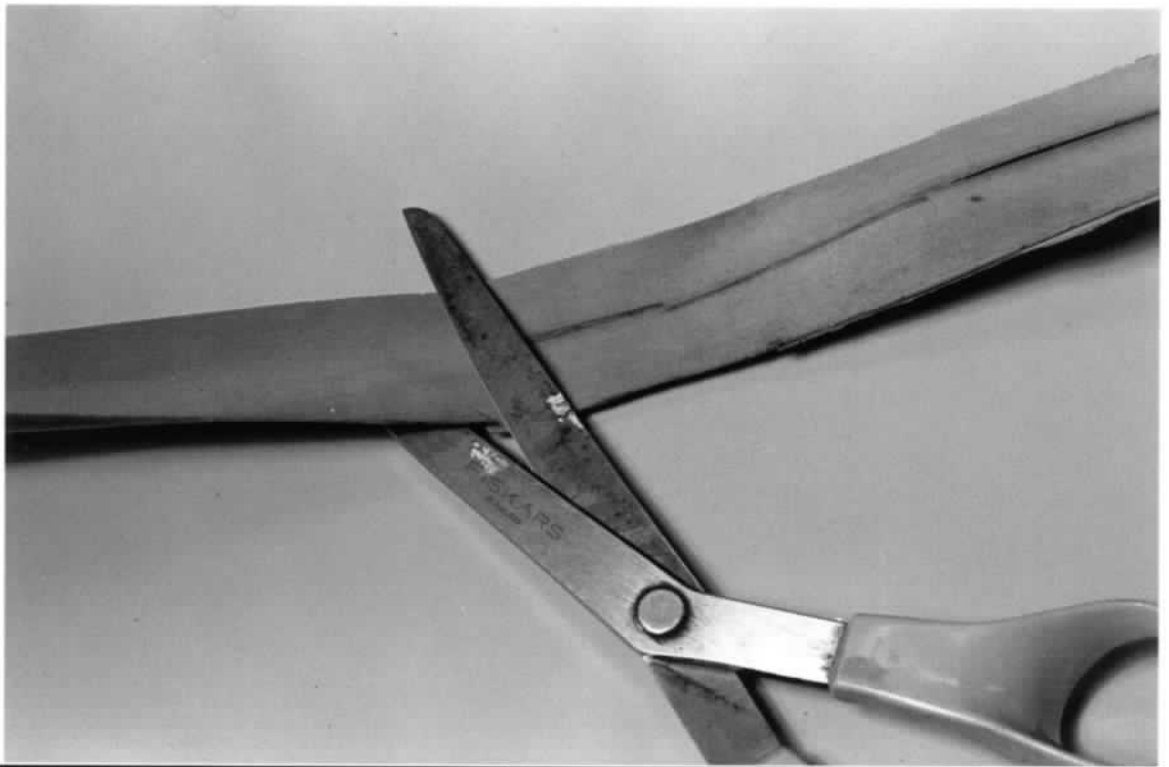
1.04. Remove the midrib (kua) by running the needle tool along both sides of the rib as shown.



1.05. Flatten the strips in a roller. Some people use a pasta roller or a piece of bamboo.



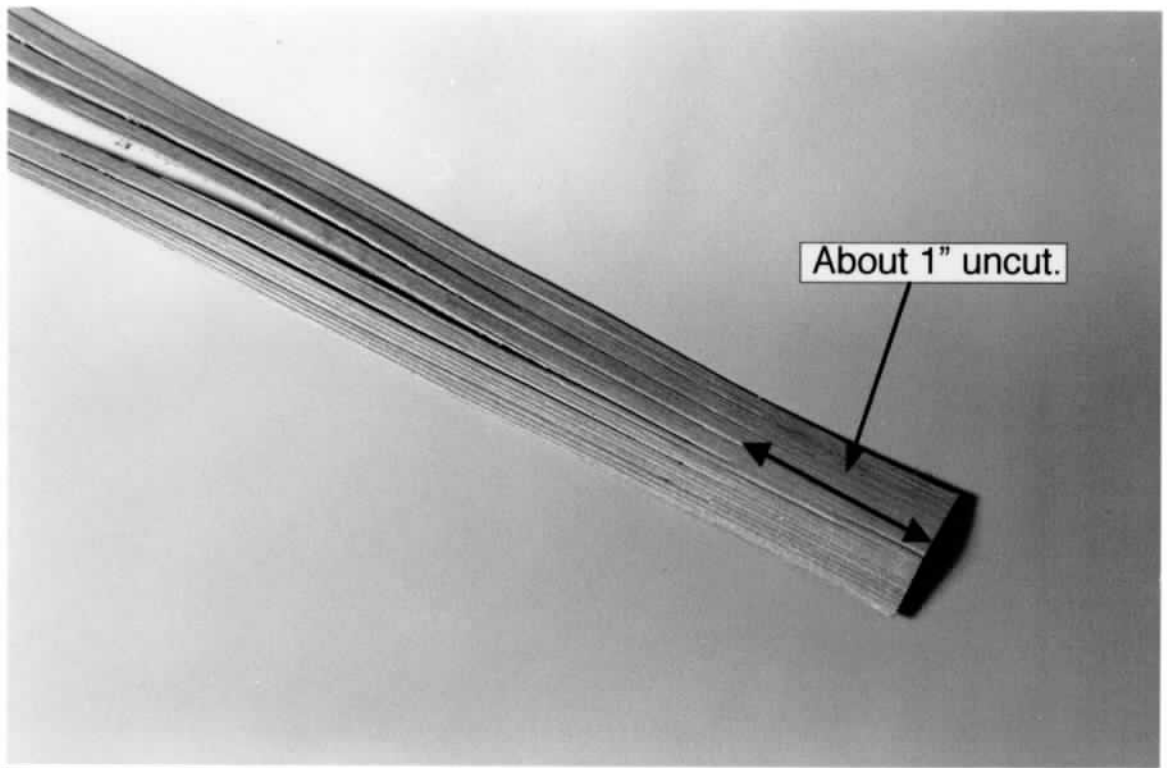
1.06. Cut off the thick, crinkly end of each strip. If you slide your thumb and forefinger along the leaf, bending it slightly, cut it where it starts to feel stiff.



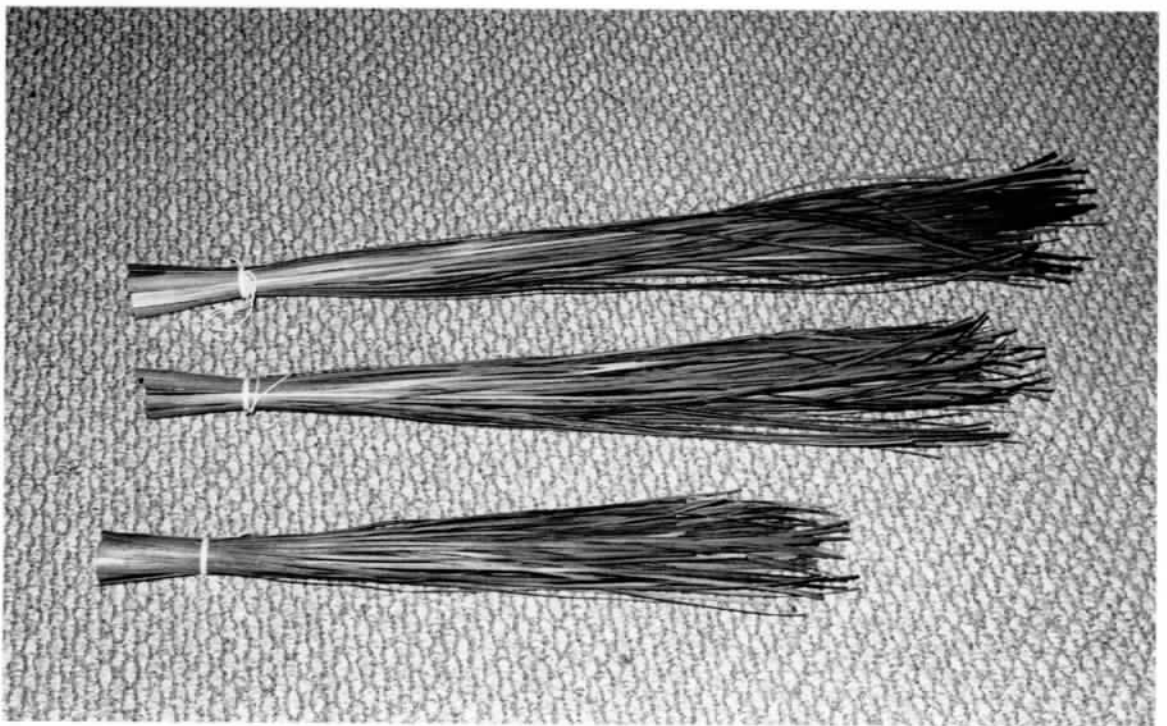
1.07. Remove the ends of the strips that are split, ragged or too thin to be useful.



1.08. Strip (koe) the leaves into 1/8" strands with 1" uncut at the base end. This stripper (koe) cuts seven strands (mau'u).



1.09. Finished strip. Note that the base is still connected for about one inch. Notice also that the waste leaf ('ōpala) has been removed from the outside edges of the leaf.



1.10. Sort the strips by length--short (18" or less), medium (18 - 24"), long (24"+). Tie them in bundles as shown. Your leaves may vary, so these aren't hard and fast numbers.