The gifts of the willow tree

Willow is a very versatile tree. Here are some of the things you can do with it:

1. Charcoal for drawing: You can make great charcoal for drawing.
2. Paper: Paper can be made from the inside bark of the branches.
3. Ink: From boiling of the willow bark.
4. Baskets: you can make strong and beautiful baskets from willow.
5. Fabric dye: willow gives us a rich rusty brown natural dye.
6. Fences: willow can be woven into fences to make enclosures for animals.

Making charcoal

Charcoal is one of the oldest materials for drawing. It goes back to when prehistoric people drew with charcoal on the walls of the caves they sheltered in.

Materials

An old biscuit tin with a tight fitting lid.
An exacto knife.
Clippers.
Long thin straight branches of trimmed willow.

Process

Cut the willow branches into roughly 10cm lengths to fit the tin you have.
Peel the bark from the cuttings and save it for making paper, ink and dye.

Peeling the bark off the willow sticks is really satisfying.

First run the very sharp knife down the length of the stick. Get your finger nail under the edge of the cut bark and firmly pull it away from the stick.
Then carefully peel the bark off the stick.

Bundle the peeled willow sticks according to thickness and tie with some thin wire. The wire keeps the sticks straight. Otherwise, they tend to curl up.

Now the tin is ready to put into the bonfire for a couple of hours

- Everyone loves a bonfire, roasting marshmallows, singing and story telling.
- You can make a party out of the burning of the tin with sticks in it.
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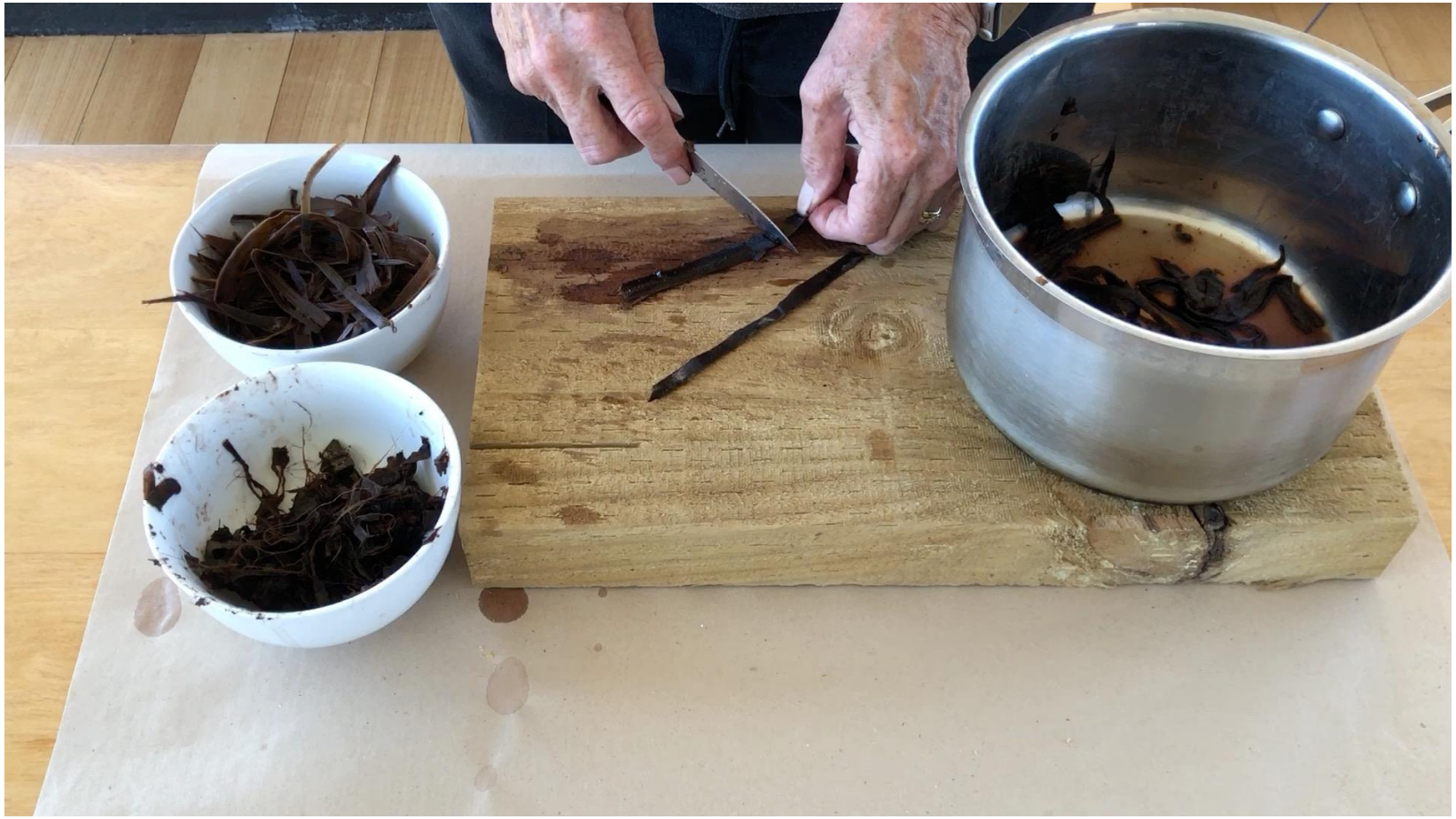
Nothing is wasted. You can use the bark of the willow to make paper.
First boil the stripped bark for about an hour with some alum.
Next scrape off the soft outer bark and save the tough bark strips.

The discarded boiling water can be further distilled to make a dark brown ink or fabric dye.



Put the bark strips in a pot of water and cook for half an hour.

Put the strips of cleaned bark in a blender and run it on high for several minutes.

When the bark is reduced to fibers, take them out, wrap in a cloth and pound with a hammer.

Wrap the boiled bark fiber in a cloth.
With a wooden mallet beat the strips of bark to break them down.

It is worth spending time doing this.

When the bark has been pounded until the fibers have separated, put the fibers in a large container of cold water.

Add three table spoons of powdered starch. Stir well.

Try to coax the fibers apart and stir until they are all suspended in the water.

Now you can take your decal and shake it under the water and pull up with a thin layer of fiber on the mesh.

Let the water drain from the decal. Then tip the sheet of fiber onto a bed of towels and sheer curtain fabric to drain and dry.

When damp, the fibers will peal off the curtain. You can use this sheet of damp willow paper to mold into a bowl or mask.

Willow grows quickly . If you plant some willow shoots they will soon grow into a living den.

- https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/special/children/building-living-willow-structures.htm

Follow this YouTube for instructions to make a simple willow basket.

- https://youtu.be/tnJIRZTBti4?si=jMnCOENJ4K8uZAJy