

Upon arrival in New Zealand, Māori women at first used the harakeke (flax) in a very similar way to plants from their homes in Polynesia. Leaves were used to construct baskets, containers and mats. Soon however, the women learned to harvest the strong fibres from the leaves that they called muka. They obtained this by scraping the green flesh away from the fibres with a sharp shell. The muka was then pounded until it was soft so that it could be woven, twisted and plaited to create fishing nets, traps, ropes and even footwear. Māori had discovered quite quickly that their traditional clothing from the islands did not keep out the cold! Māori used the muka of the Harakeke (flax) plant and wove them with feathers and dog skin to create warm clothing - essential in the new cooler climate they now called home.

The harakeke plant proved to be very versatile with many different uses for Māori. The nectar from the flowers made a sweet drink, if they could get it before the hungry tui. The roots of the plant could be crushed to make soothing coverings for skin infections and also to produce a juice that would disinfect wounds. The sticky gum from around the base of the leaves were used to ease a warrior's pain, heal wounds and treat burns. The leaves themselves were so strong that they were often used as bandages or to secure broken bones.

Flax however was not just a useful plant. For Māori it was a way of passing on their culture from one generation to another. Harakeke fibres were woven together and often dyed with vibrant colours from nature such as berries, swamp mud and bark to create woven tukutuku panels. These panels lined whare, telling stories from the past and affirming important beliefs of the tribe.



Adapting to new environments

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Questions (look in the text for highlight clues!)

- 1) Where had Māori arrived from?
- 2) What objects did Māori women make when they first arrived in New Zealand?
- 3) What was a reason behind Tukutuku panels?
 - a) Keeping buildings warm inside.
 - b) Passing on stories to future generations.
 - c) Decoration inside buildings.
- 4) What is muka and why was it so important?
- 5) What were two (2) ways that Māori used harakeke in order to help them catch food?
 - 1)
 - 2)
- 6) How did Māori make sure that their clothing was warm enough for NZ's climate?
 - a) They wore multiple layers.
 - b) They lived mostly in the North Island.
 - c) They wove in feathers and dog skin to their traditional clothing.
- 7) What animal, other than man, do we know enjoys harakeke nectar?
- 8) How could harakeke be used to help warriors recovering with wounds from battle?
- 9) What natural ingredients were used to colour flax muka for tukutuku panels?

Word Salad

Find the meaning of these words and put each of these words into a sentence.

- 1) ease
- 2) woven
- 3) affirm

Describing Verb Words (Adverbs)

For each sentence find the word that describes an action word.

- 1) The chief proudly showed the tribe's tukutuku panels.
- 2) The weavers wove furiously.
- 3) The harakeke gum was applied evenly over the wound.