



## mazinibaganjigan (birchbark biting)

Birchbark biting started with First Nations women who took paper thin pieces of birchbark and used different parts of their teeth to create intricate and beautiful patterns. This type of art has been practiced for nearly ten thousand years. Ojibwe and Cree used this artform long before paper, to create a stencil for quill and beadwork. Pieces of birch bark were separated, folded, then bitten, producing a symmetrical design when unfolded. Wood ash could be rubbed into the bitten part, then placed onto a hide that was to receive the quill or beadwork. The bark could also be used as a pattern by sewing through the bark onto the hide, the same way paper is used today.

Birchbark can be collected from paper birch trees during the time of year when the wild roses start to bloom and the dragonflies come out (beginning of July). A vertical cut is made into the birch tree and then the bark can easily be removed. Removing bark from a birch tree does not kill the tree if it is collected properly. The tree will have a scar for a couple of years and then return to its white and papery appearance. Birchbark can be used to build canoes, homes, baskets, etc.

Fun fact: you can boil water in a birchbark basket!



