



Spanish Moss

What is it?

Spanish Moss, scientific name *Tillandsia usneoides*, is a non-parasitic plant found on trees in coastal regions ranging from the Southeastern United States to Argentina. Also known as Tree Hair and Spanish Beard, the scientific term for a non-parasitic plant like Spanish Moss is epiphyte. Epiphytes are plants that grow on other plants but derive their moisture and nutrients from the air.



The plant has no roots and the flowers are tiny and difficult to see. The plant propagates (spreads) by seed and vegetatively by having seed/fragments blown in the wind until they come in contact with tree bark.

Spanish Moss is capable of holding up to 10 times its weight in water. By holding moisture the moss actually creates a cooler environment in the canopy and reduces water content in the soil around the tree.



Spanish Moss turns green when it is saturated with water.

Home for Critters

Spanish Moss is home to many different types of creatures including ticks, mites, millipedes, spiders, rat snakes, and even bats. In fact one species of jumping spiders, *Pelegrina tillandsiae*, is only found in Spanish Moss. Please be careful if you decide to handle Spanish Moss as you could disturb its inhabitants and end up with some unwelcome memories.

Uses

It was noted by Francis Moore, one of the more famous Frederica colonist, in 1736 that the Native Americans used dried moss for wadding in black powder muskets and as tinder for starting fires. The moss could also be spun into rope, used to stuff pillows, mattresses, furniture, and as a binding agent in *bousillage* style construction.

The moss was often woven into baskets, horse blankets, and primitive clothing. A more modern use of Spanish Moss was in the early 20th century, when Henry Ford used it to stuff the seats of the Model T Fords.



A carbine sling made of woven moss and leather.
Made by Dawn Klug, Floral City, FL.

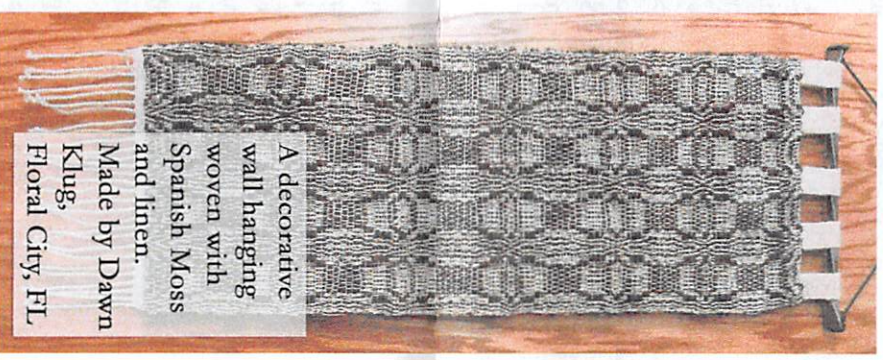
Processing

In order to be made ready for use, the moss needed to be processed; this process is described by William Bartram, a British naturalist, in 1774. The moss is soaked in water and then exposed to the sun, drying it out, and removing its inhabitants. When the moss is fully dried it resembles horse-hair, the dried moss is then cleaned and ready for use. The whole process can take between 3 to 9 months.



Modern Uses

Today Spanish Moss is used in decorative crafts and in floral arrangements. Since florists prefer the natural grey fuzzy outer covering, methods like microwaving are used to remove any pests.



A decorative wall hanging woven with Spanish Moss and linen.
Made by Dawn Klug,
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