

Cypress Knees

By Jean Stene

One of the places we lived when we were first married was Texas. I saw the tall cypress trees and they had these strange looking growths coming up close to their trunks.

As I am a curious person I started looking for information as to what they were and what purpose they were for. I was told they were called cypress knees. As they grew in swampy places I thought they were roots. Then I found out that they were growths that fed oxygen to the root. They only have one tap root. It is as tall as the tree. If a tree is ten feet tall, the root is ten feet long. The same with a hundred-foot-tall tree: the root is a hundred feet deep. They say because they have these deep roots they're very hard to blow over in the hurricanes.

Then I saw all these art pieces made of the cypress knees so decided to try my hand at making something. I chose to make a lamp. Little did I know what it took to get the bark off.

This is what I found out:

1. Put on some wading boots to cut a knee or a group of knees.
2. Rinse and scrub the cypress knees in clean water.
3. Fill a very large stock pot. Put the pot on a burner, preferably outside.
4. Place the knee, base end up, into the pot.
5. Put a brick or heavy object on top to keep it submerged. Be sure the water covers it.
6. Put a lid on and bring to a boil.
7. Boil for 30 minutes or more until the bark has loosened.
8. Rinse the knee in cold water.
9. Drill several holes in the bottom and set it in the sun to dry. It will turn a beautiful, smooth, honey-tan color.

Yes, I did all this. I made my knee into a lamp. I hope my picture will come out so you can see what the base looked like. I have lost the lamp shade.

This was a fun project while Fred, my husband, was out in the field surveying. This was before children, then that became my project.