

# “The plants are the masters and we are just the tools.”



## JULIA PARKER

*of the Coast Miwok and Kashaya Pomo, is a prolific artist, teacher, and storyteller. She taught visitors about the traditions of Yosemite's Native people for 57 years as an Interpretive Park Ranger.*

**When we do our basketry, first we have to learn about the plants,** where they come from, and how to prepare them and how to gather them at certain times of the year. The plants are the masters and we are just the tools. Because they were here way before us, you know.

I use baskets for cooking, boiling acorn mush, or carrying an infant. The acorn, to most California, people was their main food. Yosemite Valley has everything here that a weaver could want. The plants today are not as strong as they used to be because what you have to do is you have to find your little patch and you have to garden. You have to move the soil around so that the roots can stretch out and grow. Each woman has their special gathering place. Gathering places have always been very territorial. The Yosemite women would have used the El Portal area because this is where the home of the red bud is. If I were up north, I would hesitate in collecting there unless I got permission from some of my relatives or friends who collect there.

There's always the rule you only take with permission. And when you do take from the earth you take with a please and you give back with a thank you.