



Women were encouraged to take on agricultural work during the war. Here, members of the Glasgow Battalion, Women's Volunteer Reserve, are lifting potatoes on their plot of land and gathering them in 'spale' baskets made of split wood.
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The home front

Baskets had many uses on the home front during the First World War. Large hampers and skips were needed to move supplies to the ports for transporting to the front lines. They were also used in hospitals, especially for laundry. Baskets were particularly important in ensuring the supply of food at home.

At the start of the war, Britain imported around half of its food. Following naval blockades by Germany in 1915, there was a drive to increase domestic production. Allotments, school playing fields and country house kitchen gardens were allocated to growing vegetables. When conscription was introduced in 1916 thousands more men left for the front lines, leading to shortages of agricultural labour. Women were encouraged to work on farms by enlisting with the Women's Land Army, and children gathered hedgerow fruit for jam and sphagnum moss for dressings.

Huge numbers of baskets were in demand in the countryside for planting and harvesting fruit and vegetables, and for transporting the produce to towns and cities. In fishing, baskets were used on the boats to store baited lines and gear, to hold the catch, and to take the catch to market.

Some baskets were found across the country and had many purposes, while others were particular to certain regions and crops. The 'kibsey' was used in Kent for harvesting cherries and plums. The 'flat', a shallow oblong basket with a lid, was used for watercress and cucumbers. Many baskets also served as a standard measure for their contents, such as the 'bushel basket', commonly used for potatoes and apples, and the 'quarter cran', a measure for herring.



The Cornish 'broccoli crate' was specific to the south west. They were worn on the back for harvesting cauliflower in the fields, and also used to send the crop to market by train. Moon's workers made crates and hampers throughout the war years.
Courtesy of Richard Moon.



The baskets needed in the greatest quantities were those for packing and transporting produce to market. The baskets were returnable and needed to be of standard sizes which stacked well when empty. They were often painted with the initials of the farmer, as seen here.
Courtesy of Susan Pittman.



Not all baskets were made from willow. 'Chip' punnets, made from wood veneer, were used for harvesting strawberries and other soft fruits.
Courtesy of Bellis Brothers.



Watercress was an important addition to the winter diet. It was packed into willow 'half-flats' for sending by train to cities such as London, Liverpool and Manchester.
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