

From flax to fabric. The traditional linen process

The **flaxseed/liñaza** is cultivated at the end of April, or in May. From seed planting, it is ready to be harvested in about a hundred days. The plant is not cut, but **uprooted/arrigado**.

Then the flax undergoes the removal of seeds or **threshing/ripado** with a **ripple/ripo**. Flax **stalks/marrucos** are then immersed in stagnant or slowly-moving waters, like ponds, bogs and streams for some weeks. This process is called **water retting/embriar** and it produces the highest quality fibers.

The retted stalks, called straw, are dried mechanically or in natural air, and are then usually stored for anywhere from a few weeks to months in order to allow curing to take place. After curing, the woody stalks that still cling to the bast fibers are further broken, a process called **scutching/mazar o liño**, using a **break/tascón** and later on a **scutching sword/espada**.

The small pieces of leftover bark that remain after scutching are called **shive/casca**, and are sometimes used as a filler in thermoplastic composites.

The separated bast fibers are next **heckled/anciñado**, or combed with **heckling combs/rastros** through a bed of nails that splits and polishes the fibers, and removes the shorter tow fibers from the mix. These **tow fibers/estopa** can then be spun into a coarse yarn from which low-quality linen products are made. The longer fibers are then ready for **spinning/fiar**.

Two tools are used for spinning, the **distaff or rock/roca** and the **spindle/fuso**, from which the fibers are hung. Flax is always spun very finely-especially the longest of the fibers-resulting in a thin **yarn/fío**, then winding the yarn onto a **bobbin/mazaroca**. The yarn is often slightly dampened during spinning, which helps prevent fly-away strands from escaping the twist and creates an especially-smooth yarn.

Bleaching/branqueo is the next step. The resulting yarn is typically finished by boiling for several hours in soapy water, sometimes with oakwood ashes, which gives it a nice shine. Yarns are then wound onto **spools/novelos** by using a **winder/sarillo**. The resulting spools can already be used by the **weaver/tecelá**. Linen yarn is generally woven into sheets-a process in which multiple threads are interlaced both horizontally and vertically on a **loom/tear**.



Flax seed



Flax stalks



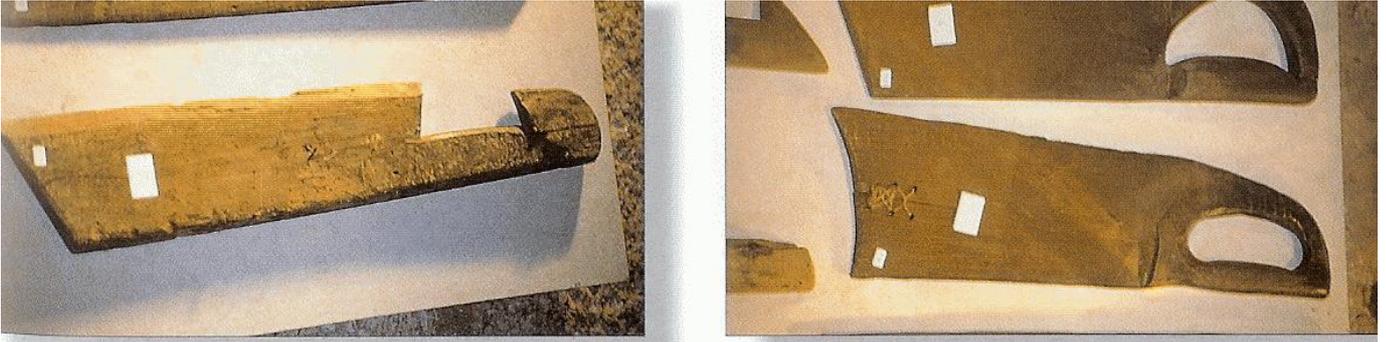
ripple



Water retting



Scutchi



Scutching swords



Heckling comb



Distaff and spindle

*Alí tedes a Marica,
rapaza traballadora,
dezasete mazarocas,
unhas nove eran de liño,
as outros oito de estopa.*

Valentín Lamas Carvajal (1849-1906)



Winder