

## Box — Yaasiik

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CAQINKA YAASIIMEN LLIITAANKA. – I PUT MY STUFF IN BOXES.

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Bentwood box, Karluk One Collection, courtesy of Koniag, Inc. Photo by Chris Arend

In classical Alutiiq society, craftsmen fashioned wooden boxes in many shapes and sizes to hold food, water, and objects. Hunters carried small rectangular boxes packed with supplies in their kayaks. Women cooked traditional dishes by dropping hot stones into oval wooden containers filled with food and left large bentwood buckets by the household doorway to collect urine for processing skins.

All of these vessels were made by bending wood with steam, a technique perfected by Native artists from the Northwest Coast to the high Arctic. Carvers began by creating the vessel's rim. They cut a thin wooden plank to shape and carefully smoothed it. Then they gradually bent the prepared plank with steam, a process that could take several days. The Alutiiq method for bending is not recorded. However, Tlingit artists steamed wood in pits packed with hot rocks and seaweed. People poured hot water into these pits to create steam. Once shaped, a craftsman lashed the ends of his rim together with spruce root or baleen or pegged it closed with small wooden dowels. To the rim, the carver fitted a flat wooden base, which was also pegged into place. Some vessels were finished with a wooden lid or a woven handle and then brightly painted.