

# HANA-BASAMI

*Ikebana* scissors, called *hasami* or *hana-basami*, are the one important tool you must have for arranging *ikebana*. You use your *hasami* so often that you probably don't give them much thought, but let's look more closely at this important *ikebana* tool.

## Types of hana basami

Basically, *hasami* are made of iron, with a steel blade. Steel is an especially hard iron alloy whose properties vary depending on the proportion of nickel, chrome, or carbon used. Varieties of *hasami* at a Japanese shop might include *hai-su* (stainless; especially hard), or *hai-kabon* (more carbon, rust resistant). *Shiro-uchi* are *hasami* with the natural, silvery-white color of the iron remaining. *Kuro-uchi* are *hasami* with a black finish which results when silk cloth is used to oxidize the still-hot surface of the metal; with use, the black oxidation gradually wears away to reveal the elegant natural color of the metal underneath. Some *hasami* have notched blades which enable wire to be cut with out damaging the important main cutting edge.

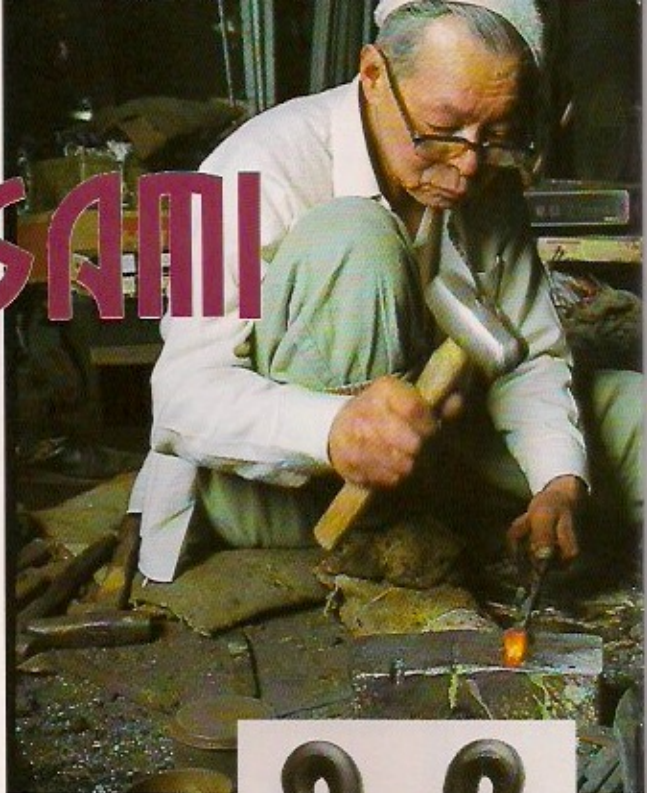
*Hasami* range in length from 4 *sun* (4.8 in.) to about 6 *sun* (7.2 in.), with 5.5 *sun* (about 6.6 in.) as a standard. For someone with small hands, 5 *sun* is often best, while 4 *sun* is a good size for a child or if lightweight *hasami* are important.

## Choosing hasami

The best way to choose *hasami* is to start with a size that seems best for your hand, then to try several different pairs of that size to see which fits your hand best. Handmade *hasami* vary slightly from pair to pair, and it is especially important to try many different pairs to determine which one fits your hand exactly.

## Styles of hasami

*Hasami* used in Ikenobo are a style called *Ikenobo-basami*, a design accounting for about 90% of the *hasami* made in Japan. A second style, called *koryu-basami*, has elongated handles which curve back toward the blades to form complete ovals. How these two designs developed historically is not clear, but since the *hasami* in the Shoso-in temple collection of ancient objects do not have oval handles, it would appear that the design similar to *Ikenobo-basami*, without ovals, is oldest.



## Warabi handles

The ends of the handles of *Ikenobo-basami* are drawn back in a tight, slender loop to form a rather charming figure. This design is called *warabi* in Japanese since it resembles the unfolding young shoot of a bracken-fern (*warabi*). To turn back the ends of stout lengths of iron 180° is not easy technically. But when the *hasami* are used, this portion performs the important function of absorbing the sudden shock of the two handles coming together. If you examine the point where the ends of the handles of your *hasami* meet, you will see that the original rounded inner surfaces have become worn and flattened. Indeed, the *warabi* handles are not only for visual design, but also for absorbing considerable shock.

## The process of making hasami

Perhaps because Kyoto is home to Ikenobo, the city has many shops making traditional, handmade *hasami*. We visited one of these shops, named Yasushige. The workroom was filled with the crackling sound of fired coke and the sound of a bellows moved continuously by the left foot of one of the workers. It was an atmosphere for concentrating fully on the tasks at hand. First, a



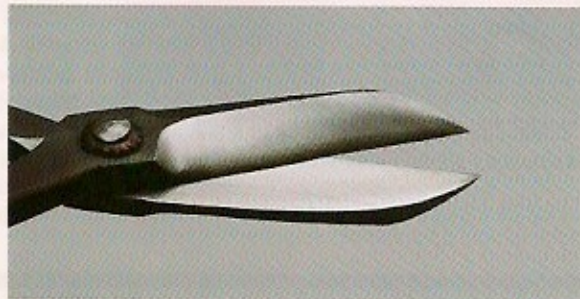




red-hot piece of iron is shaped by pounding with a mallet. When the basic shape is complete, steel is attached to the portion which will become the blade. Steel, in a small piece 2-3 mm thick, is pounded onto the hot iron with the mallet a bit at a time, over and over until it is completely fixed to the iron. After repeated heating and shaping with the mallet, and when the metal is close to the desired shape, the end of the handle is curved back sharply into the *warabi* form. After further firing and sharpening, the two handles are joined into completed *hasami* with an iron pin. An experienced craftsman can make about 5 pairs in one day.

### The blade edge

The production of large numbers of *hasami* takes place in factories located primarily in Sakai City (Osaka Prefecture), Sanjo City (Niigata Prefecture), and Miki City (Hyogo Prefecture). Although fewer and fewer *hasami* are hand-made using traditional methods, there is still steady demand from those who appreciate the cutting quality found only in hand-made *hasami*. According to Mr. Yasushige, "With use, your hand



becomes accustomed to hand-made *hasami*, and you become familiar with the characteristics of the pair you are using. The cutting quality actually improves with time, and this is one of the differences between hand-made *hasami* and those mass-produced by machine."

The blade face is sharpened not on a perfect slant, but, rather, rounded slightly in a curve which is often compared to the shape of a clam shell. This curved blade face makes it possible to cut with greater force. To make blades curved in this way is a skill requiring years of experience, the blades with such fine cutting action that with use your hand becomes accustomed to them.

### Care of hasami

Finally, let's discuss how to care for your *hasami* so that they provide years of use. First, plant stains are carefully removed from the blades with scouring rush or some other scouring agent. After a dip in hot water that forces out any moisture that has been absorbed by the metal, the *hasami* should be thoroughly dried with a clean cloth. Usually, this is the only care required. If the blades have become too loose, the joint can be hammered lightly. A light, bicycle-type oil can be used to lubricate the joint occasionally. Shops selling hand-made *hasami* will also sharpen *hasami* if needed. If necessary, a new surface can be added to worn blades, and the joint pin replaced. Mr. Yasushige says that he is most happy when *hasami* made long ago are returned again and again for sharpening, so that they can provide even longer years of use. He is also happy to see *hasami* so well-cared-for that he can tell to which professor they belong. The *hasami* used by Headmaster Sen'ei Ikenobo in his youth have been sharpened by Mr. Yasushige many, many times and are still used and carefully cared for by the Headmaster.

If you carefully use and care for your *hasami*, they are not just anyone's *hasami*, but indeed your own. You come to treasure them as the one pair in the world to call yours.