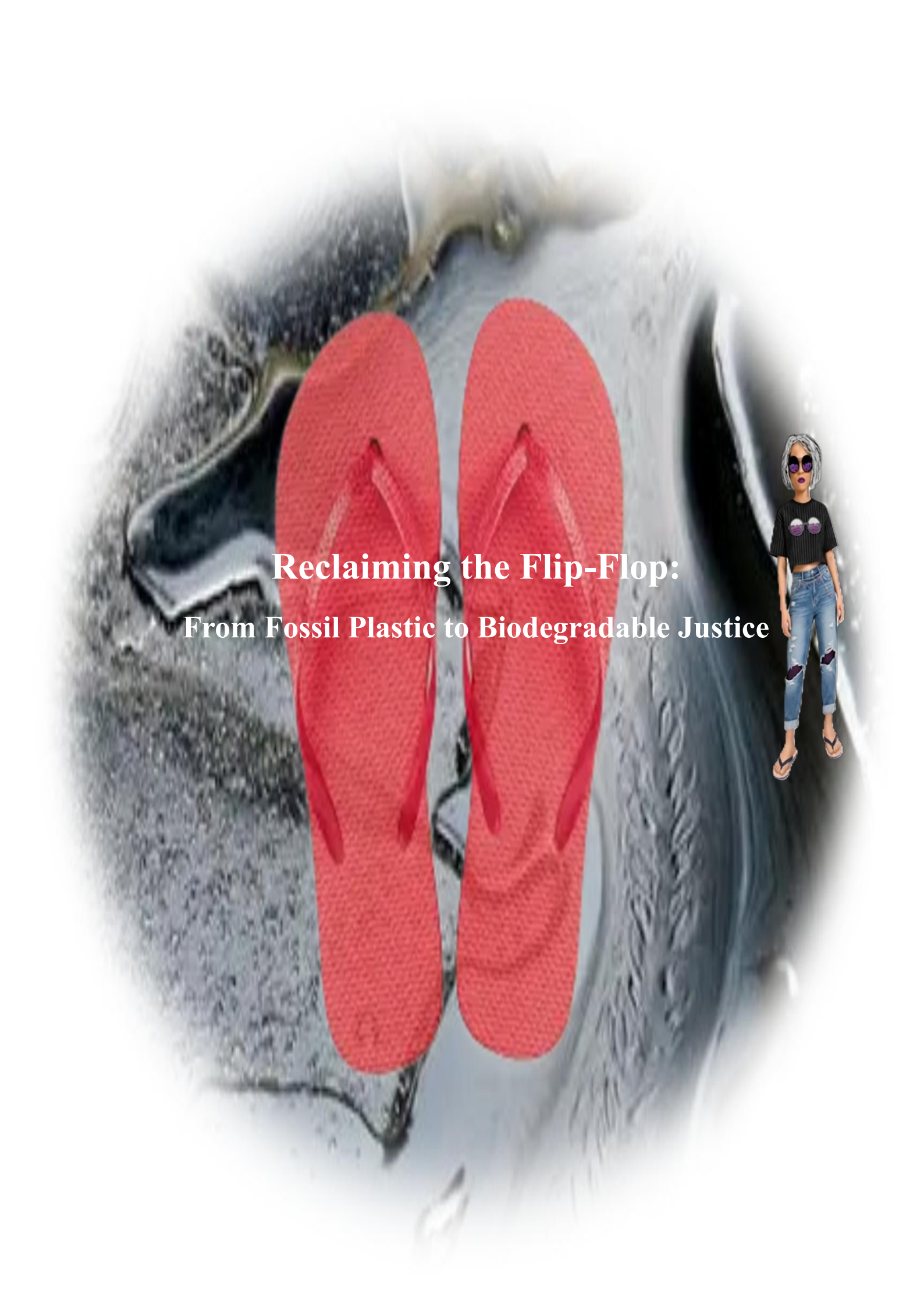


Reclaiming the Flip-Flop:

From Fossil Plastic to Biodegradable Justice

From Fossil Plastic to Fast Fashion:

The Flip-Flop Supply Chain

THE FOSSIL TO FASHION SUPPLY CHAIN

Oil Extraction → Middle East Fields

Plastic Production → Petrochemical Plants

Mass Manufacturing → Asian & African Factories

Waste & Pollution → Plastic in Oceans & Landfills

Fast Fashion High-End & Cheap Brands

BILLIONS OF PLASTIC FLIP-FLOPS ENDING UP IN OUR WORLD'S BEACHES, LAND & SEA.

RECLAIMING THE BIODEGRADABLE ALTERNATIVE

A JUST & SUSTAINABLE PATH FORWARD

Natural Materials → Straw, Hemp, Cork & Leather

Ethical Workshops → Fair Wages & Repairs

Biodegradable Sandals → Plant-Based & Repairable

Healthy Planet People & Nature in Balance

FROM PETROCCHEMICAL POLLUTION TO SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

The flip-flop is one of the most ubiquitous footwear designs on the planet, worn by billions across continents, climates, and cultures. Yet its current form—cheap, disposable, and petroleum-based—bears little resemblance to its ancient origins. What began as a biodegradable, locally crafted sandal has been transformed by fossil-fuel capitalism into a global pollutant. To reclaim the flip-flop is to reclaim history, dignity, and ecological sanity.

Ancient Footwear and Cultural Memory

Long before the rise of plastic, thong-style sandals were crafted from straw, papyrus, leather, and wood. In ancient Egypt, murals dating back to 4000 BCE depict sandals woven from palm leaves and papyrus, worn by farmers and pharaohs alike. In Greece and Rome, leather soleae and crepida were worn indoors and outdoors, signalling status and practicality. But it was in Japan that the zōri—a straw-based thong sandal—became a cultural staple, worn with kimono and passed down through generations. These sandals were not only biodegradable, but regionally sourced, made by hand, and embedded in ritual and daily life.

The Fossil-Fuel Takeover

The transformation of the flip-flop began in the aftermath of World War II, when American soldiers stationed in Japan brought zōri home. By the 1950s, rubber and plastic versions flooded the U.S. market, marketed as casual, carefree beachwear. What followed was a global explosion in production, driven by petrochemical supply chains and mass manufacturing.

Today's flip-flops are made from EVA (ethylene-vinyl acetate), PVC (polyvinyl chloride), and polyurethane—all petroleum-derived plastics. Their journey begins in oilfields across the Middle East, where migrant workers extract crude oil under precarious conditions. That oil is refined into plastic pellets in industrial hubs like South Korea, then shipped to factories in Vietnam, China, and Sub-Saharan Africa. These factories often operate with minimal labour protections, surrounded by piles of plastic waste and toxic runoff.

The final product—colourful, lightweight, and cheap—is sold in supermarkets, fashion chains, and luxury boutiques. But the environmental cost is staggering.

Pollution, Microplastics, and Toxic Waste

Over three billion pairs of flip-flops are produced annually. Most are discarded after a single season, ending up in landfills, waterways, and beaches. In coastal regions of Kenya, Indonesia, and the Philippines, flip-flops wash ashore in droves, forming plastic reefs and choking marine ecosystems.

As they degrade, they release microplastics into the ocean, which are ingested by fish, birds, and eventually humans. The plasticisers used to soften straps leach toxins into soil and water, contributing to endocrine disruption and long-term health risks. Recycling is virtually impossible: the mixed polymers and chemical additives make flip-flops non-recyclable, non-compostable, and non-repairable.

Fashion's Complicity and the Illusion of Choice

Luxury fashion has not escaped this toxic footprint. Brands like The Row and Louis Vuitton sell flip-flops for hundreds of pounds, often made from the same EVA base as £20 versions. The illusion of choice—between fast fashion and high fashion—obscures a shared reliance on fossil-fuel plastics. Even "eco" versions often use bio-based blends that still contain petroleum-derived components, greenwashed for marketing appeal.

The flip-flop, once a symbol of barefoot freedom, has become a vector of petrochemical dependency.

Reclaiming the Original Flip-Flop

To reclaim the flip-flop is to reject the fossil-fuel supply chain and revive its ancient, biodegradable form. Straw, hemp, cork, and leather offer viable alternatives—materials that decompose, nourish soil, and honour regional craft. Transparent labelling must become standard, allowing consumers to understand what they're wearing and where it comes from. PVC and EVA should be banned from mass footwear, replaced by plant-based polymers and repairable designs.

This is not nostalgia—it is justice. The flip-flop is not trivial. It is the most sold shoe globally, worn by farmers, students, elders, and children. Its redesign is a chance to center dignity, sustainability, and cultural memory.

A Justice-Centered Path Forward

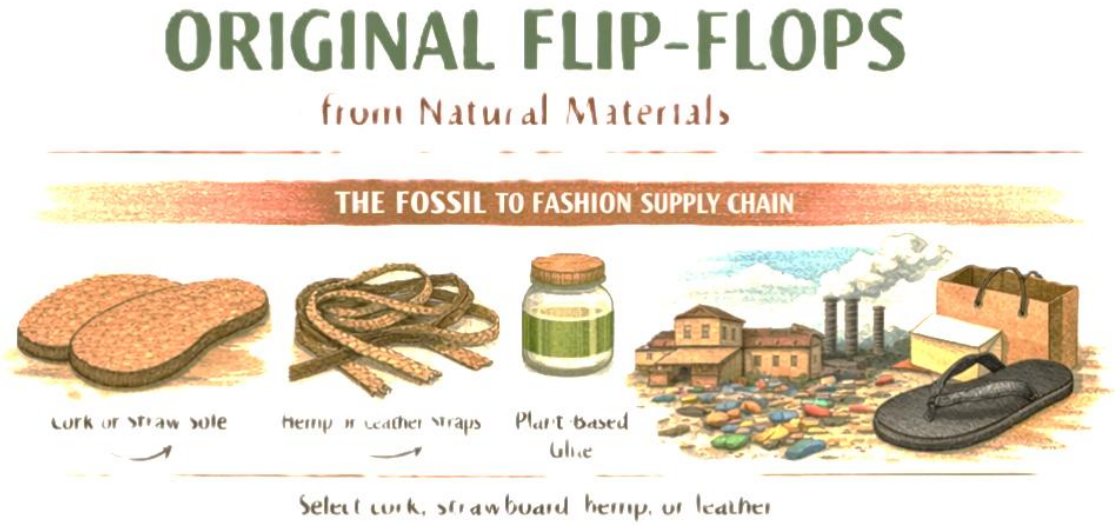
Reclaiming the flip-flop means reclaiming agency. It means refusing the petrochemical logic that treats shoes as disposable and workers as invisible. It means honouring the barefoot aspirations of the global south with design that is sustainable, dignified, and regionally rooted.

Let the flip-flop walk us back—not to the past, but to a future where fashion serves life, not landfill.

How to Make Original Flip-Flops from Natural Materials

Introduction

This guide walks you through the process of crafting biodegradable flip-flops using cork, strawboard, hemp, or leather—reviving ancestral sandal-making traditions while rejecting fossil-fuel plastics. Whether you're hosting a workshop or making your own pair at home, these steps honour sustainability, repairability, and regional craft.

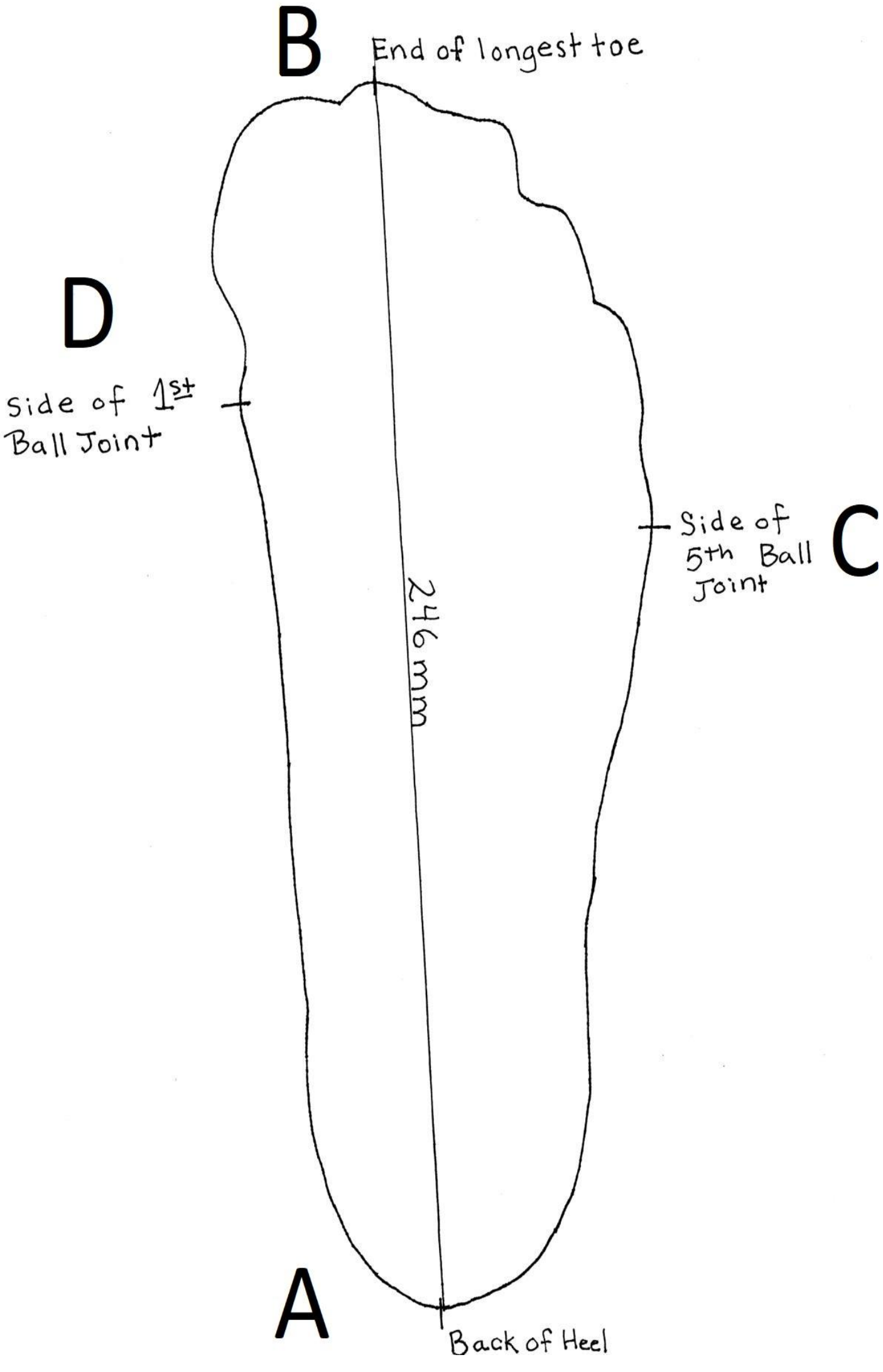


Choosing Your Materials

Begin by selecting your materials. For the sole, cork sheets or compressed strawboard offer durability and biodegradability. For straps, choose braided hemp cord, leather strips, or woven jute. You'll also need plant-based glue or natural rubber cement, a sharp awl or hole punch, scissors, needle and thread, and optionally a wooden last for shaping.

Tracing and Cutting the Sole

Place your foot on the sole material and trace its outline with a pencil. Cut out two identical shapes using scissors. These will form the base of your flip-flops. Ensure the edges are smooth and symmetrical for comfort and balance.


B
End of longest toe
D
Side of 1st Ball Joint
Side of 5th Ball Joint
C
246 mm
A
Back of Heel

Layering and Shaping the Sole

To increase durability, stack two or three sole layers. Apply glue between each layer and press them together firmly. Once dry, use sandpaper to smooth the edges and shape the sole to your foot's contour. This step ensures both comfort and longevity.

Marking and Punching Strap Holes

With your foot placed on the sole, mark three points: one between the big toe and second toe, and two on either side of the foot near the arch. Use an awl or hole punch to create holes at these points. Reinforce the underside with a small leather patch if needed.

Attaching and Securing Straps

Thread the strap through the front hole and knot it underneath the sole. Pull each side strap through its respective hole and knot or stitch securely. Adjust the tension so the sandal fits snugly without pressure. Stitching the side straps adds strength and stability.

Step 6: Finishing, Testing, and Decorating

Try on your flip-flops to test fit and comfort. Trim any excess strap and reinforce weak points. You may decorate the straps with natural beads, embroidery, or shells. This final step personalizes your sandals and celebrates the craft.

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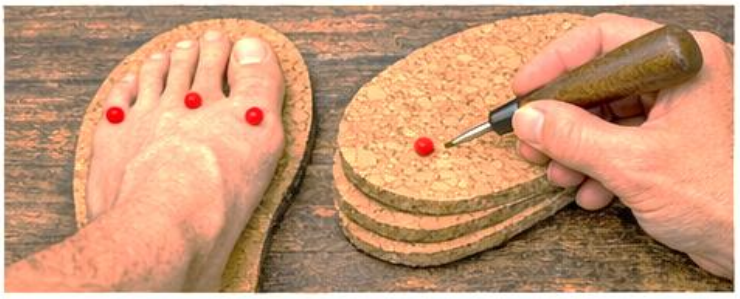
Crafting Natural Flip-Flops:
A Visual Guide

1. 1. TRACE & CUT SOLES

Select cork, strawboard, hemp, or leather.

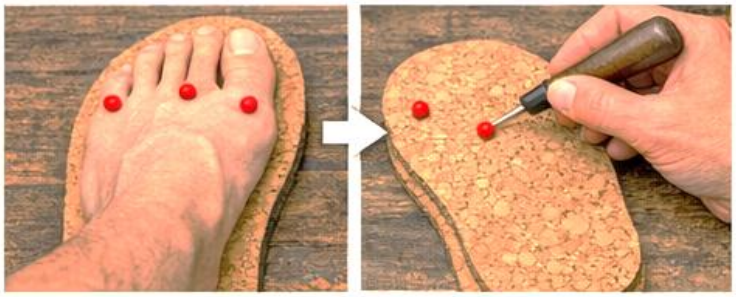
2. 2. LAYER & SHAPE

3. MARK STRAP POINTS



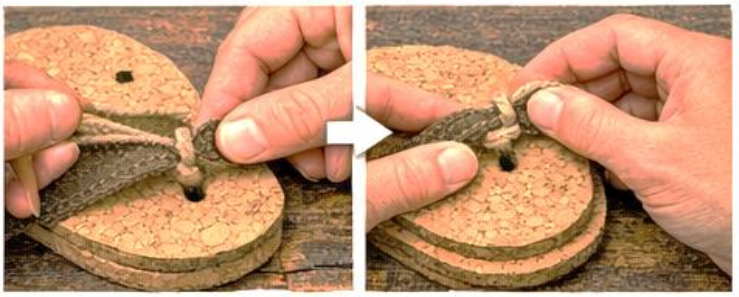
Cut & stack 2–3 layers for durability.

3. 3.MARK STRAP POINTS



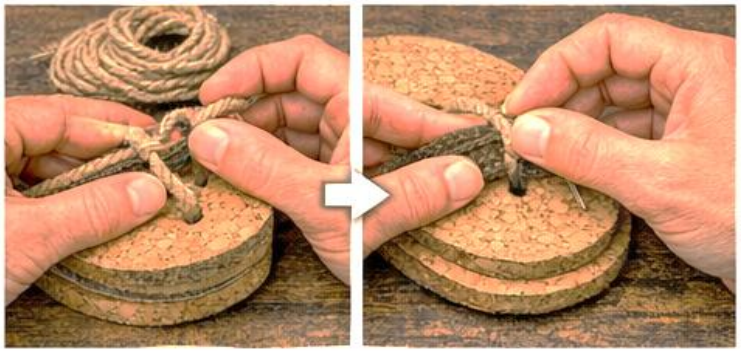
Trace & Cut Shapes

4. 4. ATTACH THE STRAPS



Mark & Strap Points

5. 5. SECURE & STITCH



Tie & Fix Hemp or Leather Straps

6. 6. FINISH & DECORATE

Check fit and add natural touches.

FROM PETROCHEMICAL POLLUTION TO SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

Conclusion

By making your own flip-flops from natural materials, you reject petrochemical waste and revive a tradition rooted in dignity and sustainability. These sandals are not just footwear—they're a statement of ecological awareness and ancestral respect. Wear them proudly, repair them often, and share the craft.

Loveitstitchitkeepit.com

Don't Dump it, Swap it. ®

Ethical Sourcing Tips for Natural Flip-Flop Materials

1. Prioritise materials with transparent, non-extractive origins

- Choose suppliers who publish **farm-level or forest-level sourcing information**, not just country-of-origin labels.
- Look for cooperatives, smallholder networks, or community-managed forests where revenue stays local.

2. Choose cork from certified regenerative harvesters

- Seek cork producers using **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)** or **Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)** standards.
- Prioritise cork harvested by hand from **long-rotation cork oak landscapes** (Portugal, Spain, North Africa), where bark removal supports biodiversity and fire resilience.

3. Source hemp from low-input, chemical-free growers

- Look for hemp grown without synthetic fertilisers or pesticides—hemp rarely needs them.
- Prefer farms that use **dew retting** rather than chemical retting, reducing water and chemical use.
- When possible, choose hemp from regions with **fair labour protections** (EU, UK, Canada).

4. Use strawboard or plant fibreboard made from agricultural byproducts

- Choose suppliers who use **waste straw** (wheat, rice, barley) rather than virgin timber.
- Avoid boards bound with formaldehyde-based resins; choose **bio-resin or mechanical-pressed** alternatives.

5. If using leather, choose traceable, vegetable-tanned sources

- Avoid chrome-tanned leather entirely—it's toxic and non-biodegradable.
- Look for vegetable-tanned leather from **small tanneries** using tannins from bark, leaves, or fruit.
- Prioritise hides that are **byproducts of local food systems**, not industrial cattle expansion.

6. Support small-scale craft economies

- When possible, buy materials from **local craft suppliers**, not global distributors.
- This reduces transport emissions and strengthens community-based economies.

7. Ask suppliers for documentation

– where your materials are grown or harvested,
– whether they are chemically treated,

8. Avoid greenwashed “eco” labels

- Terms like “natural,” “eco,” or “sustainable” are meaningless without evidence.
- Prioritise **process transparency** over marketing language.

9. Choose materials that can return to the earth

- Ensure every component—adhesives, threads, finishes—can biodegrade or be repaired.
- Avoid synthetic glues; choose **plant-based adhesives** or mechanical fastening where possible.

Ethical Material Suppliers

CORK SUPPLIERS

Suberise Cork Leather — Portugal

A supplier of **ethically harvested cork leather** from Portuguese cork oak forests. They emphasise regenerative harvesting cycles (7–10 years), biodiversity protection, and low-impact processing.
Use for: Cork footbeds, straps, midsoles.

Villani Leonello — Italy

Italian producer of **premium cork fabrics** for shoes and accessories. They harvest cork bark without harming trees and avoid harmful chemicals in processing.
Use for: High-quality cork uppers, decorative layers, flexible footbeds.

EthicaLiving (Cork Division) — Portugal

Works only with cork suppliers who are "passionate about their trade," ensuring responsible and sustainable sourcing from Portuguese cork oak forests.
Use for: Cork fabric alternatives to leather.

HEMP & PLANT FIBRE SUPPLIERS

The Hemp Shop Fabrics — UK

A UK-based supplier offering **hemp fabrics and blends**, including natural-coloured and dyed options. Hemp is thermo-dynamic, strong, and low-input.
Use for: Straps, woven uppers, lining.

Merchant & Mills — UK

Sells a range of **hemp, linen, and cellulosic fibres**, including deadstock. Known for high-quality, ethically sourced textiles.
Use for: Straps, bindings, soft components.

Wild Linens — UK / Europe

Supplies **OEKO-TEX certified European linen**, consciously sourced with sustainability at the centre.
Use for: Straps, linings, woven uppers.

STRAWBOARD / PLANT FIBREBOARD SUPPLIERS

EthicaLiving (Paper Leather / SnapPap) — North Europe

Their cellulose-based "paper leather" is made from **cellulose sourced from sustainably managed North European forests**. It's renewable, recyclable, and plastic-free.
Use for: Structural layers, midsoles, decorative components.

TRACEABLE VEGETABLE-TANNED LEATHER SUPPLIERS

Bridge of Weir Leather — UK & Ireland

A fully traceable leather supplier sourcing **98% of hides locally from the UK and Ireland**, all byproducts of the food industry. They maintain high animal welfare standards and offer natural tanning options.
Use for: Vegetable-tanned straps, heel tabs, reinforcement pieces.

EthicaLiving (Coconut Leather / Malai) — India

Supplies **Malai**, a bacterial cellulose bio-composite made from coconut water. It is renewable and compostable within 6–9 months.
Use for: Vegan leather straps, decorative elements.