THE VIRGINIA TRIBES made pottery from river clay, baskets from honeysuckle, and clothing from deerskin. Enslaved Africans grew and crafted gourds and wood into useful items, just as they had in their homelands. The English and subsequent European settlers brought their own craft traditions to Virginia, including glass-blowing—one of the first industries of Jamestown.

Today, as in earlier times, even the most utilitarian Virginia craft is decorative. Often the decorations have religious or ritual significance. Designs on pottery and regalia (clothing worn for special events like dances) symbolize nature and Virginia tribal culture. The decorative and ritual traditions of new immigrants further enrich the crafts of the commonwealth.

(Above) A Guatemalan group from Northern Virginia creates an alfombra, or carpet, out of sawdust, rice, and black beans—a Good Friday tradition. Photo by Dorey Butts, Smithsonian Institution

(Top right) West African potter, Fatou Wade, prepares clay. Photo by Abdoulaye Camara

(Bottom right) Mildred Gentle Rain Moore and her daughter Debra Littlewing Moore demonstrate traditional Pamunkey pottery at a program at the National Museum of the American Indian. Photo by Katherine Fogden, courtesy Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian