

Here are some facts about Viking shields.

- The Vikings used round shields made of wood.
- Most Viking shields measured between 80cm and 90cm in diameter, but they could be as large as 95cm or as small as 70cm. Shields were often custom made to be the perfect size for the warrior who was going to be using it.
- Nearly all of the Viking shields to have survived to this day were made from single planks of wood butted together, but written evidence states that the shields were constructed from two layers of linden wood. The written evidence also suggests that the shields were strengthened with iron bands.
- The archaeological evidence tells us that shields were also made from pine wood, spruce wood or the wood from fir tree.
- Viking shields weren't strapped to the arm, they were gripped in the hand at the centre behind a boss made of iron. This meant that the angle of the shield could easily be changed.
- The metal boss, attached to the wooden part of the shield by nails, protected the hand.
- Viking shields were rimmed with leather or rawhide. This stopped the shield from splitting if it was hit by a blade on its edge. Some shields may have had iron rims, but there isn't much archaeological evidence to support this.
- Shields were often slung over the shoulder with leather straps when the warrior wasn't fighting, or when he wanted to use two hands to wield his weapon.
- It is thought that the fronts of some Viking shields were covered with leather. This made the shields heavier, but was a simple way of making the shields stronger and less likely to split in battle. As an alternative to leather, some Viking shields were probably covered in linen.
- All Viking shields would have been coated in oil to make them waterproof, preventing them soaking up water and becoming heavier.
- It is thought that a leather covered Viking shield weighed between 7kg and 10kg.
- Viking shields were very effective at defending Viking warriors. They were used to deflect attacks, push attacks offline and spread the shock of a blow.
- The Viking shield protected most of a warrior's body, leaving only the head and legs exposed. As a result, many Viking warrior remains show evidence of wounds to the head and legs.
- The Vikings also used their shields as weapons. The shield could be used to bind the opponents weapon or to 'punch' the opponent.
- Shields were painted. Red and white shields were common, but other colours, such as black and yellow, were used too.
- Inside a Viking longhouse, shields were hung on the walls as decorations.
- The shield was also used as a makeshift stretcher to carry the wounded from the field of battle.
- It is thought that nearly all Viking warriors entered battle with a shield. Helmets and armour were also worn, but they were very expensive. For many Viking soldiers, the shield was their one and only means of defense.

Heraldry



While Vikings didn't use heraldry as such, in the way that the later French or Anglo-Norman English did, they did use colour (mostly red, yellow and black) and some pattern on their shields.

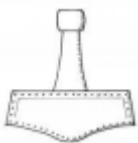
Images and symbols that we would recognise as Viking influenced also started to appear on shields across Northern Europe in the 12th and 13th Centuries.



The drakkar or Viking dragonship



A furison or firesteel used with a flint to strike sparks to start a fire.



War hammer, Thor hammer or mjolnir



Three interlaced triangles associated with Odin and the Valkyries – possibly intended to represent a slain warrior's soul.