Chapter Five



Rug Making

Introduction to a Rug Making Project

Making rugs enables you to learn to express your creativity in a constructive way while developing a skill that is relaxing and fun. You will also have the opportunity to learn more about the history of rugs, when and where they originated, and how skills have passed through the ages.

You may want to experiment with different techniques as well as different materials to make rugs for your home. Visit with others within your community who make rugs to learn about the projects they have made and what suggestions they have for a beginner. Locate resources in your local Extension office, the Internet, library and yarn shops as well as on the Internet. Most importantly, have fun!









Project Evaluation

Rugs will be evaluated on:

Overall Appearance

- Clean and neat
- Lies flat
- Color and design are appropriate for a rug
- Blocked and finished

Materials

- Suitable for intended use
- Durable
- Fabrics of harmonizing nature

Design

- Use of texture, colors and materials
- Shape and weight in proportion to size

Workmanship

- Compatibility with the ethnic group where the craft originated (if applicable)
- Method and stitches, both well done and even
- Quality or mastery of techniques
- Durable and secure edges

There are other techniques for making rugs besides latch hook and braiding that are covered in this manual. Your research may help you find other types of heritage rugs to make. Rugs can be woven on a loom using heavier yarns than blankets. Rush weaving was used to make mats and chair seats as well as to finish mattresses. Rug tufting is a newer method first introduced with the development of the tufting gun in the 1960s-70s. Whatever method you choose for making rugs, they will provide enjoyment in your own living space or as gifts for friends and family.

History of Rug Making

Rugmaking is an ancient craft shrouded in mystery. As our ancestors moved indoors, the desire to create a warmer, more comfortable atmosphere emerged. Early house dwellers used animal skins to cover stone floors and crude wall hangings to keep wind from coming in between the stones in their walls. Eventually, dyes were made from plants and berries to add the beauty of color to early rugs.

The Near East was the center of rug making during the time of the prophets. The basic method of producing these ancient rugs was used for many centuries and some of the knots used to tie tufts of wool into a woven backing are still in use today. The best-known knots are the even Ghiordes (Turkish) Knot, which is symmetrical, and the one-sided Sehna (Persian) Knot, which is asymmetrical and allows for finer detail in the rug.

As early as 6000 B.C., rush fabrics were plaited, or braided like basket work, one of the most ancient of arts. Rush is a stiff marsh plant. The plaited mats became popular, and in medieval times in the Near East, they were dyed and commanded high prices. Even today in South India, floor and sleeping mats are plaited from rush in beautiful colors. They also are found in Mexico and South America. In the United States, plaited mats made of cornhusks are made and still used.

Rug making was a country housewife's work and pride in parts of the world where bare floors would have meant a dull environment. The nomadic people of the Steppes, groups including the Scythians, Huns, and Mongols, who moved herds across the vast Eurasian grasslands made rugs for their tents which now bring high prices as antiques. The pioneering families of Africa, America and Australia made rugs for their cabins and huts. This part of history is proudly displayed in museums around the world.

Early American settlers first followed the English designs, but when they had difficulty in obtaining materials from Europe, they created their own style to suit their needs and surroundings. Bundles of clean, usable cloth, salvaged from old clothes, were transformed into warm lap robes, rugs and coverlets. The rugs often were sturdy and withstood constant use for a hundred years or more, passing from one generation to the next virtually unaltered.

The people who made rugs did not think of themselves as artists, but they created designs and color effects like a professional artist using whatever ideas and materials were available. While women originally made rugs to cover bare floors, later rug makers created pieces specifically to sell. (Family histories in cloth and wool have been beautifully pieced into rugs.)

Hooked Rugs Basics

Materials

Yarns

For latch hooking, yarns like acrylic or wool are often pre-cut into consistent lengths (3-5 inches), with acrylic being budget-friendly. Acrylic yarn holds up well to regular use and is resistant to mold and mildew. It is machine washable and holds color well. The smooth feel can be slightly stiff, but is plush when hooked. The more expensive wool yarn offers a classic, bulkier feel. It is durable and wears well over time, but it can pill or fray more easily than acrylic. Wool requires more care, like hand washing, to avoid shrinkage. It is a soft and luxurious natural fiber.

Alternatively, even old fabric strips work for a rustic look. Worsted weight may also be used in double strands or in single strands to accent designs. Rug-or bulky-weight yarns are preferred for rugs because they are durable and resilient. Lighter weight yarns may be used in rugs that will be used as wall hangings since they will not be walked on.

Yarn for latch hooking may be purchased in packages of pre-cut pieces. Yarn may also be purchased in skeins and cut into desired lengths of 3 to 5 inches. When cutting yarn, make a large supply to avoid stopping frequently to cut more strands.

Small amounts of old yarn and fabric may be washed and worked into designs to create character in latch hooking. Latch hook kits are available which include a patterned canvas and precut yarn.



Canvas

A latch hook is worked on canvas, also referred to as rug net. The best materials are durable, gridded canvas (like burlap, monks cloth, or carpet warp) as a base. The canvas should have durable fibers that form a series of open spaces or squares. Canvas made with doubleweight strands is preferred because it is stronger than single-stranded canvas. The ideal canvas has 16 square spaces to the square inch. Canvas widths vary from 14 to 45 inches. Very large projects may require that two or more pieces of canvas be joined together.

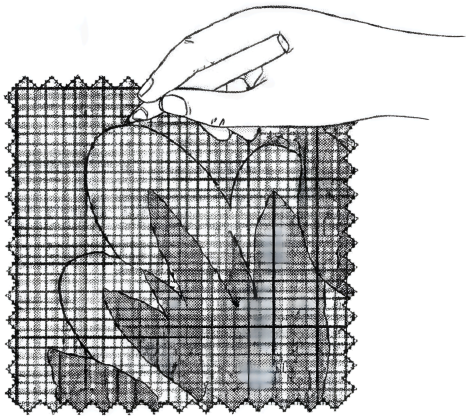
It is important that the selvage edges (closely woven and smooth) are used as the right and left sides of the work, rather than as the top and bottom. If the canvas piece is cut from a large roll, the selvage edges will be smooth, while the top and bottom edges will be rough and uneven. Canvas size for a project is determined by adding four inches beyond the design on all sides. This edge will be folded under for finishing.

Transferring a Design

To transfer a design, use waterproof felt-tip pens or waterproof non-staining ink. Water-proof ink will not run onto the yarn or discolor it. If tracing an intricate pattern, find the exact center strand, vertically and horizontally, on the canvas. Mark this point with a straight line to correspond and mark the design center to match them up. Looking through the spaces in the canvas, carefully trace the pattern outline onto the net.

If you draw a curved line on the netting, when it is hooked it will make steps diagonally on the canvas. It is sometimes easier to follow the line if you draw it as a series of steps. When the outline has been traced, darken it if necessary. Compare the net to the design to see if they look the same.

The canvas can be shaded with the appropriate colors. Acrylic paints work well, especially when the design is intricate. Acrylics are used with water but are waterproof when dry. Permanent felt-tip markers may also be used. Allow the canvas to dry completely before hooking.



Hooks

The hook end of the latch hook has a hinged bar or latch that closes over the point of the hood, enabling the yarn to slip smoothly into place. The hook handle may be plastic or wood and is rounded to fit the hand. A straight or bent-shank hook can be used.



Making a Latch Hooked Rug

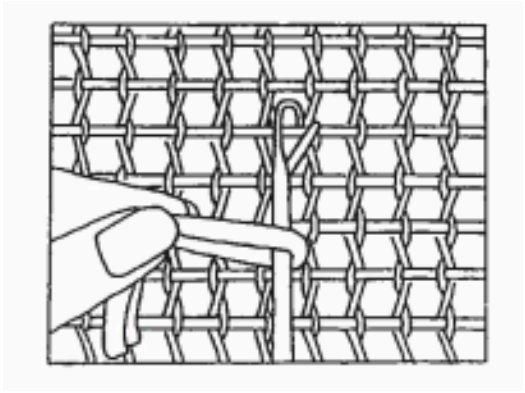
After determining the size of canvas and amount of yam needed or purchasing a kit, prepare the canvas backing, leaving at least four inches on all sides for the hem. To prevent the edges from fraying, cover them with masking tape.

Work from left to right through every hole across the canvas, beginning in the lower left corner. If you are left-handed, start in the lower right corner and work from right to left. Check your progress by looking at the back of the canvas to see if you missed any holes. Always work complete horizontal rows, changing the color of yarn as the design indicates. Do not try to work one color at a time on the entire rug, because it is difficult to fill in the small areas as the work nears completion.

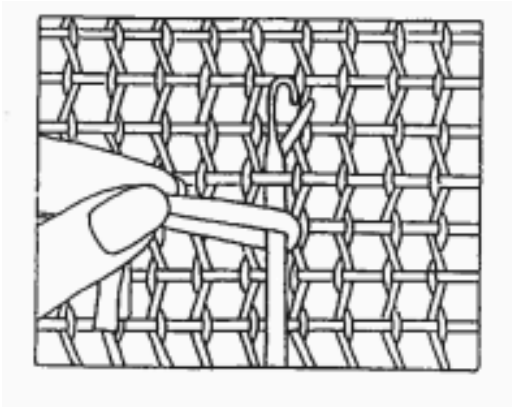
While there is more than one method to do latch hooking, the Four-Step Method is suggested, as follows.

Four-Step Method

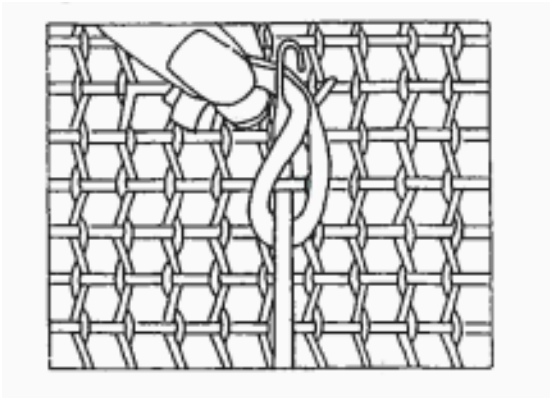
1. Fold yarn exactly in half and loop it around the shank of the hook.



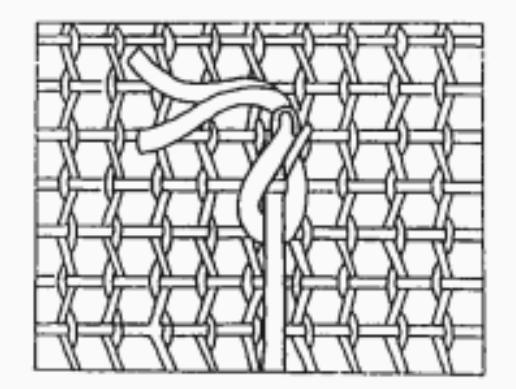
2. Push the hook under the lower thread of the first square with the latch open.



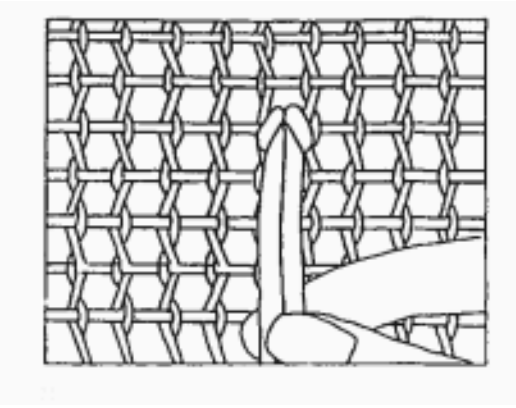
3. Twist the hook slightly to the right. Place the cut ends of the yarn into the open hook and let the latch close.



4. Pull the hook through the loop of yarn wound around the shank and push the hook forward to release it.



4. Pull the ends of the yarn tightly to make the knot firm.



Finishing

Because latch hooked rugs are not worked on a frame, the rug can pull out of shape and may need to be straightened before finishing. The rug may need to be blocked to bring it back into the correct shape. Cover a board that is six to eight inches larger than the rug with towels. Lay the rug face down on the towels. Thoroughly moisten the back of the rug, but be sure not to get it soaking wet. Nail or staple the rug to the board, with the edges straight and the canvas stretched tightly. Leave the rug on the board until it is completely dry.

After blocking and drying, the rug is ready to bind and finish. The hooked rug can be finished in several ways, with binding or backing suggested for beginners

For binding, a heavy needle and strong thread are needed in addition to rug binding. Select a rug binding tape one to two inches wide, long enough to go around all sides of the rug, plus about six inches.

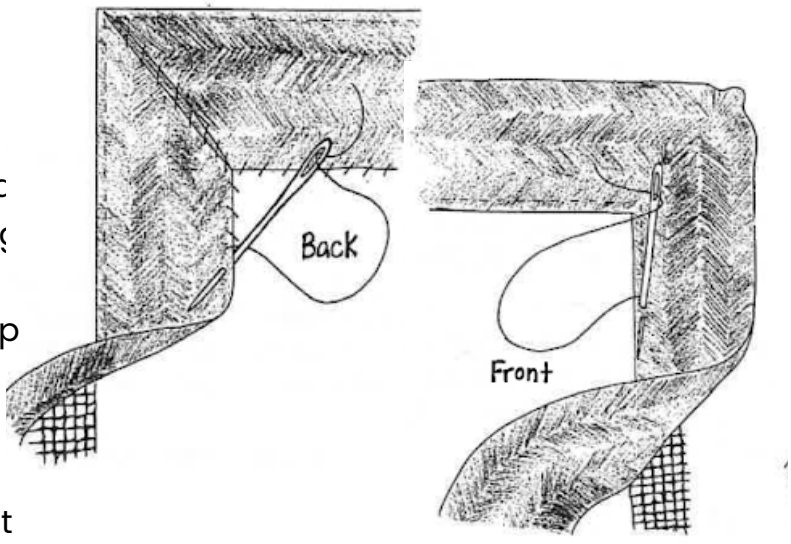
Fold in the selvage edges on the left and right sides of the rug, leaving a one-inch border of canvas. Fold in top and bottom edges in the same manner. The edges mc be hand stitched under for easier handlin

Place the rug on a flat surface right side up with the one-inch wide edges extended out. Beginning in the middle of one side, hand stitch the binding type to the edges, working from the outside of the rug so that the stitches will be hidden when finished.

Stitch as closely as possible to the hooked knots. Stitch all the binding in place around the rug in one piece, overlapping one to two inches where the ends meet.

Turn the rug top side down, and fold in the sewn binding to touch the back of the rug. The binding should cover the canvas allowance completely. Hand stitch the binding to the canvas backing. When reaching a corner, miter it by folding the center of the binding corner in toward the rug. Fold down the flap that is sticking up and sew in place.

The rug may also be finished with a backing made from a durable non slippery fabric, such as burlap. Backing may be used in addition to the binding or without a binding. Cut the backing fabric one inch wider than the rug on all sides. Press the edges under to fit the rug and hand sew in place, using a heavy needle and strong thread.



Braided Rug Basics

Materials

Note: Because of the difficulty in finding resources on how to make braided rugs, instructions are included in this section.

The most economical materials are fabrics from recycled clothing and household goods. Other fabric may be purchased depending upon the intended use of the braided rug, the resources available, and the experience of the braider. The amount of material needed depends on the desired size of the rug. Durable carpet thread is recommended for the most pleasing effect and extensive use.

Wool is preferred by many rug braiders but is not as readily available in recycled clothing as it once was. Men's and women's suits, military uniforms and wool blankets are good sources. Heavy cotton fabric also makes durable long-wearing rugs. While any type of fabric went into Colonial rugs, it is not recommended to mix fabrics because the rug will wear unevenly. A rule of thumb to determine the correct weight of fabric is to weigh it and select those that weigh 14 to 16 ounces per yard.

When old materials are used, remove all seams, buttons, worn areas and other trim. Wash the material in warm sudsy water and rinse in clear warm water. Hang in fresh air, if possible, to remove wrinkles and avoid pressing.

Equipment

A blunt-pointed needle is necessary to form the braids into rugs. This was the only tool used in Colonial times, but today, numerous gadgets are available to help produce an attractive rug in less time.

During the Civil War period, the sewing bird made braiding easier and faster. It was made of metal and about the size of a small bird. It had a velvet pincushion on its back, a spring in its beak to hold the braid, and a clamp on its feet which could be attached to a table. The bird, or its updated version, is still available and used today.



Image Credit: https://missmustardseed.com/the-victorian-sewing-bird/

Other Equipment Useful for Rug Braiding

- Medium-sized scissors
- Heavy lacing or carpet thread
- Thimble
- Braid holder
- Small pointed pliers
- Clip-type clothespins
- Metal cones (braid-aids)
- Color guide
- Medium safety pins
- Blunt straight or curved carpet needles
- Tape measure or guide of Vari-folder tool

A braid-aid is a metal, cone or flat shape and is used to fold under raw edges and turn strips of material into tubular strands.



It can be useful for individuals with weak hands or wrists and for beginners. There is a newer Redi-Braid, a plastic holder that turns under raw edges and unwinds the rolls without tangling. You can also find Veri-Folders made by Braid-Aid.



Image Credit: https://www.ebay.com/itm/164126962154

A braid holder is a clamp that holds the braid taut on a table or arm chair. It reels to keep the strands from tangling. It is made of wood, metal or a combination of both. There also is an upright model that stands on the floor and can be used from an easy chair.

You can make a measuring guide cardboard to aid in marking the width of the strips.

Making a Braided Rug

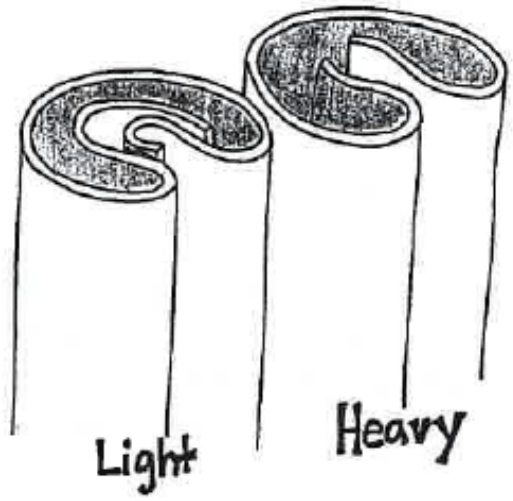
Rug braiding is not an exact craft because there is more than one way to do it. In talking to ten different braiders, one may hear ten different ideas on the proper method. A firm and evenly braided rug is preferred over a loosely braided irregular one. It not only looks neater and more appealing but lasts longer.

Preparing Fabric

A multicolored undesigned rug is traditional and is the easiest and most economical to make. You will need about one pound of heavy, tightly-woven fabric per square foot of the finished size of the rug. Collect a variety of colors: bright, dull, neutral, in patterned and solid colors. Fabrics may be used or new, or a combination of both. Pre-wash all fabrics prior to working. For used fabrics, remove linings, buttons, etc., and cut apart along the seams.

To fold fabric for rug braiding, cut or tear your fabric into long strips, then fold the raw edges inward towards the center and fold the whole strip in half lengthwise, creating a flat, neat band where raw edges are hidden. To determine the correct width, tear a test strip about one to two inches wide. The folded strip should form a plump, round cable used for braiding. If the strip is wide and flat, try forming a narrower strip.

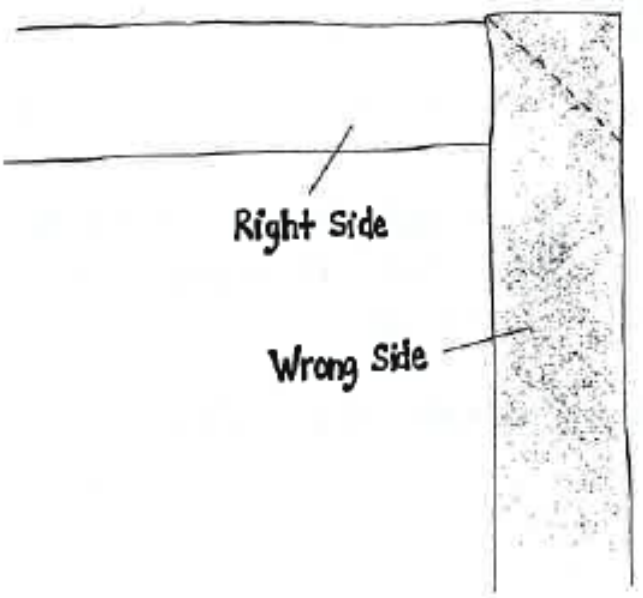
Once the correct width has been determined, use the cable it forms as a model. Quality depends upon the plumpness and uniformity of the cables.

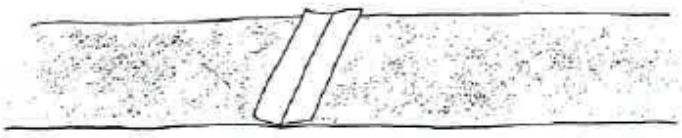


Fabrics that are lighter in weight will need to be torn into proportionately wider strips and their edges overlapped to form cables of the proper thickness. Fold strips so that edges meet and then in half again to form the cable.

When tearing the strips, start each rip with scissors, then tear the rest of the way along the fabric grain with your hands. Weave a test braid with a few strips before tearing all the fabric to be sure that the final strips make a firm and full braid.

To join the strips, place them at 90 degree angles with right sides together. Stitch on a diagonal with matching thread, then cut off outer corners.



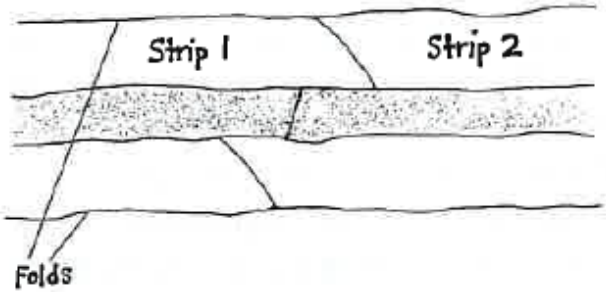


The joined pieces open into straight strips.

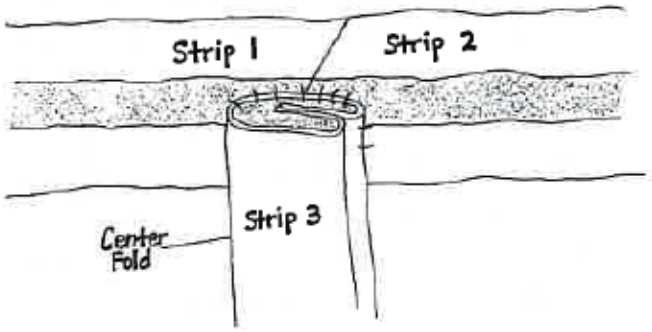
After the strips are torn and joined, wind them into five-inch rolls. Tie the rolls with string until ready to use to keep them from unwinding.

Braiding

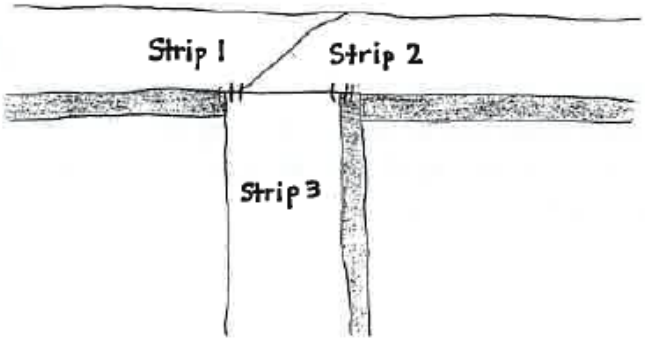
When ready to begin braiding, use the bias seam method to join the ends of the two different-colored strips. Fold edges inward so that they meet at the center of the strip.



Fold a third strip into a cable. With the center fold to the left, place the third strip on the center of the seamline of the first two attached strips to form a "T" and stitch in place.

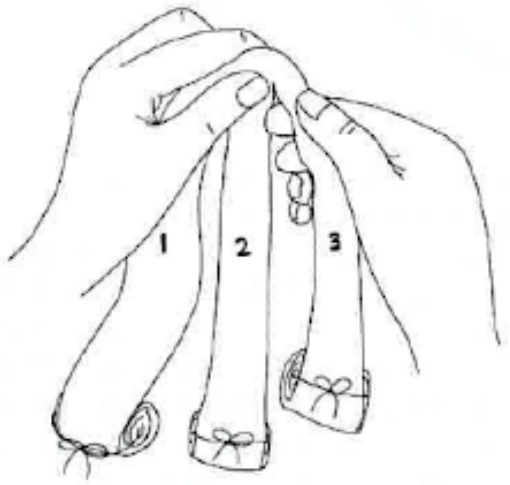


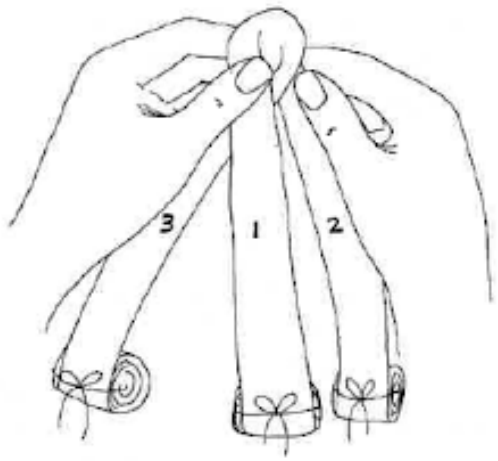
Fold the crossbar strip in half lengthwise to enclose the end of the third strip and stitch at inner comers of the "T".



Fold the right arm of the crossbar down and to the left, so that it lies between the other two strips and its center fold faces left. If braid-aids are used, they may be placed on the three strips at this point.

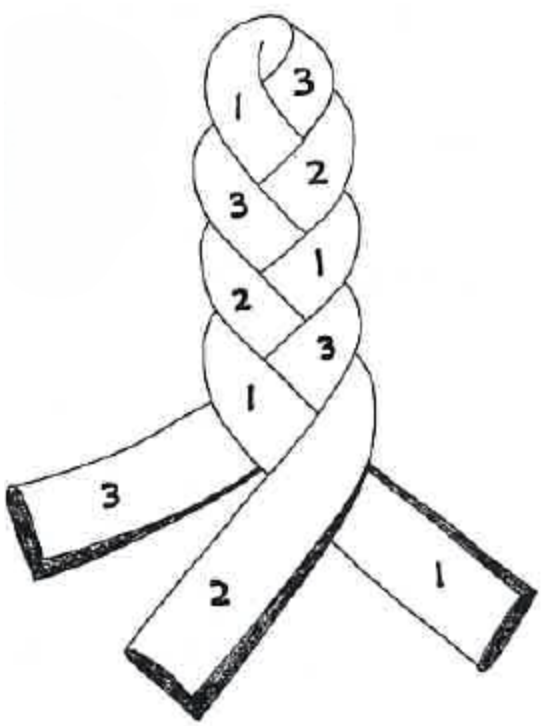
Hold the start of the braid in the left hand, keeping the center folds facing left. Fold the righthand strip to make a cable. Note that strips are folded as they are braided. Bring the right-hand cable (3) over the center cable (2), twisting it so that the center fold stays to the left. Push the cable snugly against the one above.





Shift the already-braided cables to the right hand and use the right little finger to help fold edges inward on the left strip, forming more cable.

Bring the left-hand cable over the one in the center, twisting it to keep the center fold on the left. Continue bringing cables over, pushing each against the completed braid.



Additional strips may be added as needed during the braiding process.

The above braiding instructions are for right-handed people. If lefthanded individuals find the directions awkward, the directional instructions may be reversed. Keep the center folds to the right and lace from left to right around the rug.

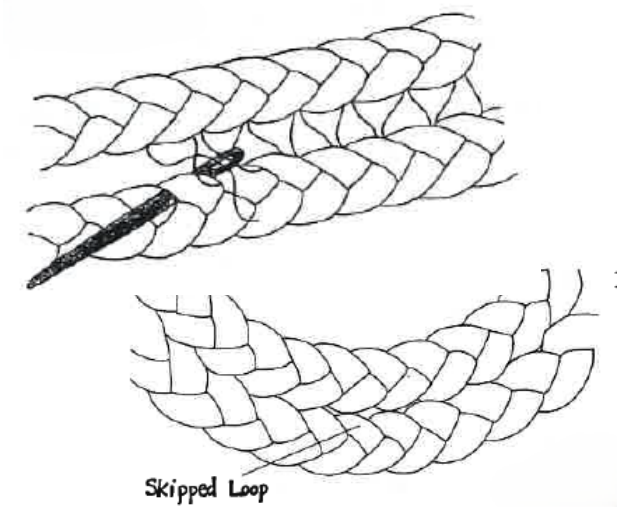
Size

The length of the middle cable of the rug determines the finished size of the rug. Once the desired size is decided, subtract the width from the length to decide how long to make the center braid. For example, if the finished size is to be four feet by six feet, subtract four from six to determine that the middle cable should be two feet long.

Lacing the Braids

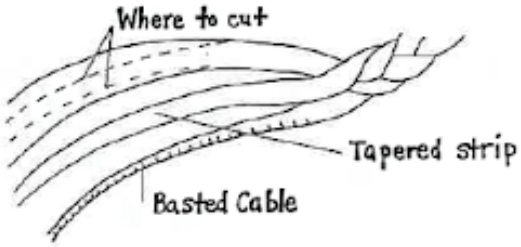
Together Lacing may be started after several strips are braided together. Additional braids can be added at any point to increase the size of the finished rug.

Always lace on what will be the back of the rug, because the lacing will create a slightly flattened look. Join the braids by lacing with heavy carpet thread using a blunt or curved carpet needle, whichever is most comfortable. Insert the needle under the braid loop and draw the thread between the loops and out the top of the braid. Work back and forth between the loose braid and the core of the rug, lacing through each loop and pulling each stitch down into the crevice of the braid.



An occasional loop on the braid being laced must be skipped because each successive round is longer than the preceding one. When a loop of the braid being added falls opposite another braid loop instead of in a notch between two loops, do not lace the outer loop. Skip it and lace the next loop instead. Skip only on shoulders where the rug curves and only one loop at a time. Mark the skips with pins to avoid skipping at the same point in following rounds. If the rug edge ripples, too many skips have been made. If the rug edge turns up, not enough skips were made.

The final step is to taper the last braid around a shoulder. Start by cutting off strips so they are 1 1/2 times as long as the distance around the shoulder. Use scissors to taper the strips along each side. The strips should be barely wide enough to fold at their ends, widening gradually to full width at the top of the shoulder. Fold and baste tapered strips into cables, then braid and lace. Pull braid ends through loops on the rug edge, sew into place and trim the excess.





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