

Bag of the Month

February: colorful shoulder bags

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Are you looking for a great way to use up small amounts of gorgeous yarns that are too beautiful to throw away? Weaving the fabrics for these small purses, about eight inches wide by seven inches tall, is easy and fun. Any loom can be used! I usually like to weave at least two similar bags at the same time, side by side. Sewing these bags, which use small amounts of cotton lining fabrics, can be done by the most inexperienced sewer. Searching for interesting, exotic lining fabrics and unusual buttons for bags gives me lots of reasons to visit local fabric stores.

I have been weaving these small bags and selling them at a local gallery very successfully for several years. They are attractive, eye-catching, and easy to weave and sew!

Designing a bag

To prepare the weft for your bag, choose yarns in a range of suitable colors (you can work from the colors in a lining fabric or from the colors in an outfit you'd like to match). Consider including metallic, fuzzy, and/or bouclé yarns for additional textural interest. Wind off small amounts of the selected yarns and lightly twist them together to see their combined effects. Try several different groupings, adding and taking away yarns just to see what happens (they can affect each other in surprising ways). The final bundle should make a yarn about ¼" in diameter.

The warp can be any smooth, strong yarn that coordinates with the selected weft yarns. Lighter hues will tend to wash out the weft colors; darker hues will tend to intensify them.



Barbara Nielsen of Lewistown, Pennsylvania, enjoys the challenge of finding ways to use interesting fibers, colors, and fabrics for weaving.



The handwoven fabric for these bags is sturdy enough to be used for any bag style, from clutch to tote. Use leftover yarns from garment fabrics for unique coordinating bags.



STEPS FOR WEAVING AND SEWING THE BAGS

Step 1 Wind a warp of 72 ends for one bag across warp width (to weave two bags side by side, wind 144 total ends) of 3/2, 5/2, or 10/2 pearl cotton (or use any strong, smooth yarn in a color that coordinates with your bundled weft yarns). Allow about 30" warp length per bag plus loom waste. A warp 1½ yd long will weave one bag (or two or more bags side by side).



A knitted I-cord makes an ideal bag handle.

Step 2 Use your preferred method to warp a 2-shaft, 4-shaft, or rigid heddle loom (with an 8-dent rigid heddle) for plain weave. (For complete warping steps, see Resources at handwovenmaga.com.) Sley 1/dent in an 8-dent reed for 8 ends per inch and beam the warp with firm, even tension.


Step 3 Now the fun begins! Gather your favorite yarns together to bundle as the weft yarn. I usually bundle a group of 6 or 7 yarns about the thickness of JaggerSpun 8/2 Maine Line wool or Harrisville Shetland wool on a stick shuttle. You can bundle any combination of cottons, wools, synthetics, or metallics with smooth, fuzzy, or bouclé textures (I often add gold or silver embroidery thread for extra interest). Aim for a diameter that produces about 5 picks per inch (about ¼" diameter) in firm plain weave (sample with your selected yarns to determine the bundled-weft thickness that you like). To weave two purses at a time, use a separate stick shuttle for the weft for each purse.

Step 4 Weave plain weave in scrap yarn to spread the warp. Then begin weaving with your bundled weft. If you are weaving two bags side by side, determine the center of the warp and turn the two shuttles back to opposite edges from that point. After a few picks, overcast the first few bundled-weft picks with a strong thread (such as the warp yarn) to keep the weaving from coming apart before it is sewn on the sewing machine. Weave each bag length for about 22". (The final rectangle of fabric I use for my bags is usually 9" by 22", but you can make your bags any size you like. Because of the thickness of the weft, allow about 20 percent warp take-up to be sure you have enough warp yarn for desired bag size.) At the end of each bag fabric length, overcast the last few picks to secure the raw edge before removing the fabric from the loom.

Step 5 Using a zigzag stitch, machine sew across each end to lock the threads in place, removing the overcast

threads as you go. Cut a piece of the lining fabric 8" × 20" for the bag lining and one 7½" × 10¼" for the inside pocket. Fold the inside pocket piece in half right sides together and sew edges leaving a turning space. Turn, press and sew pocket on lining piece 7" from the top being sure open edge faces up. *Note:* If you are using Velcro or a snap to close the inside pocket, add these before sewing the pocket to the lining. Sew the lining piece to each side edge of the woven piece, right sides together, with a ⅜" seam allowance. Be sure to leave both ends open for turning. Turn and steam press.

Step 6 Fold in and handsew top and bottom edges of the bag neatly. On the top flap edge, attach a small length of twisted cord of your yarns in the middle for a button loop as you sew that edge. Fold the purse into thirds as you would fold a letter and handsew bag sides together. (The top fold is the flap.) Buy a commercial cord for the handle or knit an I-cord about 55" long from your yarns. The handle can also be made by plying a cord from a bundle of weft yarns (as you would ply a fringe) but a knitted I-cord is stronger.

Step 7 Handsew the handle/cord to both sides of the folded bag so that it runs up from the bottom of both sides along your handsewn side seams. Sew a button on the front under the button loop. 

PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

Weave structure for bag fabric

Plain weave.

Equipment

2-shaft or 4-shaft loom or rigid heddle loom with an 8-dent rigid heddle, 9" weaving width (or multiple of 9"); 8-dent reed; 1 or more stick shuttles.

Yarns

Warp: 10/2 pearl cotton (4,200 yd/lb), 5/2 pearl cotton (2,100 yd/lb), or 3/2 pearl cotton (1,260 yd/lb), 108 yd (or

more if you weave more than one bag side by side or along warp length).

Weft: Assortment of bundled weft yarns that produce about 5 picks per inch, about 35 yd of each yarn for each bag.

Yarn sources

Pearl cottons are available from most weaving retailers, yarns suitable for weft from weaving, knitting, and fabric shops.

Warp order and length

72 ends (for one bag) 1½ yd long (allows 6"

for take-up, 26" for loom waste; add about 30" for each additional bag-fabric length).

Warp and weft spacing

Warp: 8 epi (1/dent in an 8-dent reed).

Width in the reed: 9".

Weft: 5 ppi. Woven length (measured under tension on the loom): 22" per bag.

Finished dimensions

Amounts produce fabric rectangles 8" × 20" each for bags about 8" × 7" with a shoulder strap about 40" long.