

Bag of the Month

June: shopping tote from recycled plastic bags

ANNE MCKENZIE

For some time I've been making shopping totes from recycled plastic bags or from used plastic tablecloths. It is rewarding to take my handwoven totes to the grocery store, especially now that we are all being encouraged to bring our own bags. These totes are sturdy and washable, and it's always fun to see what sort of pattern the plastic strips create!

Finding recycled plastic bags to use for making shopping totes may become harder to do as more stores reward us for bringing our own bags. You can look for other sources for plastic bags (ask at your local recycling center). Old plastic tablecloths are also a great option.

Design considerations

There are several variables that can affect the specific design of your bag, including the thickness and color(s) of the plastic itself. For warp, I use either 8/4 cotton/polyester rug warp (as for the yellow bag shown here) or 8/2 polyester (as for the black-and-white bag on page 2). I usually sett the 8/4 cotton/poly at 10 ends per inch and the 8/2 at 12 ends per inch.

Depending on the colors in your plastic strips, you can also use color in the warp (a single color, alternating colors, or colors arranged in stripes). Both 8/4 cotton/poly and 8/2 polyester are available in a wide range of colors.

Almost any heavy yarn (or bundle of yarns) can be used for the handles. I weave this yarn into the bag as part of the weft and either braid or macramé the section that extends as the handle.



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STEPS FOR WEAVING AND SEWING THE SHOPPING TOTES

Step 1 Wind a warp of 200 ends 8/4 cotton/polyester rug warp or 224 ends 8/2 polyester 2 yd long for one bag (add 1 yd to warp length for each additional bag). Use your preferred method to warp the loom for plain weave. (For complete warping steps, see Resources at handwovenmagazine.com.)

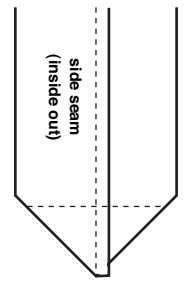
Step 2 Cut off any handles and cut open the bottom of each plastic bag so that the bag becomes a tube. Place the tube so that the openings are at the sides and fold over the top edge of the tube two times, leaving about 3" below the fold. With rotary cutter or scissors, cut through only the folded section 1½" from one edge (and parallel to it) and then continue making parallel cuts each 1½" apart. Unfold the sections and make slanted cuts through the uncut area to create one continuous strip. Repeat for each bag (about 7–10 bags per tote).

Step 3 Wind the strips on a stick shuttle. Weave a 1" header in plain weave using the same yarn as in the warp. Weave 5" plain weave with the strips. To start the first handle: Place each of 3 strands of a very thick or bundled yarn each 2 yd long in three successive plain-weave sheds so that they each extend 1" from the same edge (and about 51" from the other). Weave 5" plain weave with strips. Now braid or macramé the three 51" strands to form a handle the length you like (about 10" long for the yellow bag, 20" for the

1. Cutting the weft strips



2. Making box corners



black-and-white bag). Weave the 3 strands back into the bag using the next 3 plain-weave sheds (allow the extra length to extend from the opposite edge). Weave 9½", insert strands for second handle, weave 5", finish the second handle, weave 5", and end with a 1" header as at the beginning.

Step 4 Remove the fabric from the loom. Machine zigzag inside the headings about ⅝" from the first plastic strips.

Step 5 Trim, fold under, and overlap folded edges so that the headings don't show and topstitch to make a tube. Cover with seam binding if desired. With the tube inside out, sew the bottom seam with a ½" seam allowance. For a box-shaped bottom as for the black-and-white bag, with the bag still inside out, fold to form a triangle at the bottom of each corner (centering the side seam in one of them) and stitch across the hypotenuse; see Figure 2.

PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

Weave structure for totes

Plain weave.

Equipment

2-shaft or 4-shaft loom, 20" weaving width; 10-dent or 12-dent reed; 1 stick or ski shuttle, 1 boat shuttle; rotary cutter (optional).

Yarns

Warp: 8/4 cotton/polyester rug warp (1,680 yd/lb), 400 yd, or 8/2 polyester (3,360 yd/lb), 480 yd, natural or white or colors to match plastic strips.

Weft: plastic strips 1½" wide, 170 yd (yellow bag), 190 yd (black-and-white bag).

Very thick or bundled yarn for handles, 24 yd. 8/4 cotton polyester or 8/2 polyester for headers, about 14 yd each.

Yarn sources

8/4 cotton polyester rug warp is available from Great Northern Weaving, 8/2 polyester from Maurice Brassard et Fils.

Notions and other materials

Matching sewing thread; seam binding if desired.

Warp order and length

200 ends for yellow bag, 240 ends for

black-and-white bag, 2 yd long (allows 9" for take-up and 27" for loom waste).

Warp and weft spacing

Warp: 10 epi (1/ dent in a 10-dent reed) or 12 epi (1/ dent in a 12-dent reed).

Width in the reed: 20".

Weft: 8 ppi (yellow bag) or 9 ppi (black-and-white bag). Woven length (measured under tension on the loom): 36".

Finished dimensions

After assembling and sewing, amounts produce one bag 16½" × 18½" with a 10" or 20" handle.