

# A TOUCH OF SUMMER

## Grasscloth Journal Covers

PATRICIA MORTON

**F**orget the compost heap; turn your garden waste into textiles rich in natural beauty, with textures, colors, and scents not usually found in handwoven cloth. My interest in weaving with plants started in 2006, as I listened to Rita Buchanan lecture to the Weavers' Guild of Boston on creating "grasscloth" using leaves and stems for weft. I was so inspired that I grabbed some plants from our neighbor's garden and made an eyeglass case for our daughter, a botanist. I was hooked. An Indonesian plant-woven notebook gave rise to these covered journals.

From spring to fall, you can collect leaves and stems, clean and dry them, and tuck them away, where they will keep for years. When winter roars and you need a touch of summer, pull out your treasures, soften them, and weave. To preserve the woven fabric,

apply a light application of tung oil, then move on to the straightforward sewing.

This project shows two types of journal covers. The plain-weave journal covers, with their subtle log-cabin effect, can be woven on a rigid-heddle or 4-shaft loom. Four shafts are better for weaving the 2/2 twill version. Warping the loom for these journal covers takes no time: it's a sparse warp, and any fine cellulose yarn works. The nice thing about weaving grasscloth is that, for once, you need not worry about selvages: they will be cut off!

I plan to experiment next on an 8-shaft loom, combining the color effects of the log-cabin with the weft emphasis of the twill. Whenever I am out riding my bicycle, I will be scanning the neighbors' yards for new plants to try.

- 1 Prepare your leaf weft. Instructions for harvesting and drying leaves to be used for weft can be downloaded from [weavertoday.com](http://weavertoday.com).
- 2 Wind 96 ends, 3 yd long, following the color order in Figure 1. For ease in warping, wind holding one thread of each color for the section together, separated by your fingers, and making a thread-by-thread cross to keep the color order straight.

- 3 Wind plastic wrap around your front beam and cloth beam to protect your loom from the damp leaves.

- 4 Use your preferred method to warp the loom and thread following the draft in Figure 2. Sley 1 per dent in an 8-dent reed. Measure out 2 floating selvages, sley and weight over the back beam.

- 5 Four to eight hours before you plan to weave, assemble a quantity of leaves that you will be able to use in one or two weaving sessions and spread them on an old, well-dampened terry-cloth towel. Sprinkle water over the leaves and roll the towel to make a damp bundle. Wrap the bundle in a large plastic bag. Place the bundle in a warm area to soften the leaves. Unused softened leaves can be stored in the refrigerator for a few days.

- 6 Wind a bobbin of each of the weft colors.
- 7 Grasscloth requires a firm, flat base, so spread the warp with a firm, straight header using heavy scrap yarn. Begin the first

### STRUCTURE

Plain weave, twill.

### EQUIPMENT

4-shaft loom, 13" weaving width; 8-dent reed; 2 shuttles with bobbins; 1 stick shuttle.

### YARNS

**Warp:** 5/2 mercerized pearl cotton (2,100 yd/lb; Valley Yarns; WEBS), Madder Brown #7382, 96 yd; Posy Green #5877, 54 yd; 5/2 mercerized pearl cotton (2,100 yd/lb; UKI), Beige #43, 54 yd; 8/2 Tencel (3,360 yd/lb; Valley Yarns; WEBS), Fire Combo #4959-02a, 90 yd.  
**Weft:** 5/2 mercerized pearl cotton, Madder Brown #7382, 52 yd; 8/2 Tencel, Fire Combo #4959-02a, 105 yd; 85–225 leaves per journal.

### OTHER SUPPLIES

Lining fabric, 44" wide quilting fabric, ¾ yd; binding fabric, Ultrasuede 47½" x 4½" strip cut on the crossgrain; 20" wide lightweight, fusible, nonwoven interfacing, 1½ yd; sewing machine needles for leather; Hope's Tung Oil; white glue; plastic wrap; rotary cutter and mat; 4 blank journals 8½" x 5½".

### WARP LENGTH

98 ends 3 yd long (includes 2 floating selvages; allows 7" for take-up, 30" for loom waste, and 11" for sampling).

### SETTS

**Warp:** 8 epi (1/dent in an 8-dent reed). **Weft:** Plain weave: 8–11 ppi; twill: 15–22 ppi. (Note that actual ppi is dependent on the thickness of the leaves you are using.)

### DIMENSIONS

**Width in the reed:** 12¼".  
**Woven length (measured under tension on the loom):** 60" for 4 journal covers.  
**Finished size:** Four journal covers 12¼" x 14¼" before trimming and sewing.



journal cover by weaving 1/2" using Madder Brown and a firm beat. This is a sparse warp so this 1/2" will be weft-faced. Continue to weave the body of the journal using the prepared leaves and following your choice of twill or plain-weave treadling in Figure 2. **Handling the leaves:** Keep the leaves in the plastic bag and pull out as needed. Insert the stiffer end of a leaf into the shed, passing it all the way through so that the end sticks out a bit at the opposite selvage. Use a stick shuttle to push floppier leaves through the shed. Change the shed and beat firmly, to help lock the leaf in place. When a leaf ends in the middle of the shed, pull the tip down from below to anchor it and overlap the next leaf a bit, pulling its tip down through to the wrong side of the cloth. For longer leaves, bend them around the selvage edge, crushing them a bit if necessary. Note that you will trim the selvages later, so don't worry too much about how they look.

**8** Weave the main body of the cover for 14". End by weaving 1/2" using Madder Brown. If you have to leave the weaving prior to finishing a journal cover, insert 2 shots of nylon cord to hold the leaves in place. If you need to leave the loom for an extended period of time, unroll the cloth from the loom to let the grasscloth dry and to protect your loom.


**9** Repeat steps 7–8 for the second journal cover. When the first cover starts to roll around the cloth beam, insert an old terry-cloth hand towel between the grasscloth and the cloth beam to cushion the grasscloth.



**10** To protect the grasscloth from excessive crushing on the cloth beam, before you weave the third and fourth covers, cut the first 2 journals off about 3/4" inches from the last pick of the second journal. Retie the warp to the apron rod. Do not cut the journal covers apart yet, as the grasscloth and cotton ends both ravel easily.

**11** Repeat the weaving steps for the last 2 journal covers.

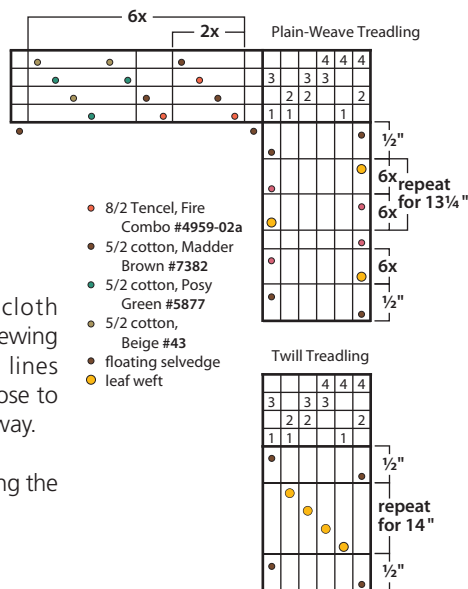
**12** If possible, take the damp cloth straight from the loom to your sewing machine. Stitch two straight lines across the cotton areas: one close to the leaves, and the other 1/2" away.

**13** To download directions for sewing the journal covers. 

### 1. Warp color order

	6x		
	3x + 5x		
18	1		■ 5/2 cotton, Beige #43
18	1		■ 5/2 cotton, Posy Green #5877
30		1	■ 8/2 Tencel, Fire Combo #4959-02a
30		1	■ 5/2 cotton, Madder Brown #7382
96			

### 2. 4-shaft draft



# A Touch of Summer Grasscloth Journal Covers: Leaf Preparation and Sewing Instructions

PATRICIA MORTON



DONALD SCOTT

## HARVESTING AND DRYING LEAVES FOR WEFT

The stems of daffodils and the leaves of Siberian and Flag iris work well for grasscloth. It is best to harvest daffodil stems soon after the blossoms fade, and cut iris leaves while mature, but still green.

- 1** Clean the leaves by washing in a sink or tub with warm water, a squirt of dish soap, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of bleach. Swish for a minute, and rinse with clear water. Be sure to wear rubber gloves and eye protection.
- 2** Spread the leaves to dry in thin layers on newspapers or old window screens, with each layer stacked at 90 degrees to the one below. Alternatively, you can hang them in bundles to dry in a barn or well-ventilated attic. Secure about 30 leaves very tightly with a rubber band at one end, and hang. The leaves take 1 to 4 weeks to dry. The leaves are quite fragile when dry, so handle them with care.
- 3** Once dry, store the leaves in paper or boxes to protect them.

## SEWING INSTRUCTIONS

- 1** Place press cloths on top of and underneath the grasscloth and gently flatten with a steam iron.
- 2** To secure the cotton weft, spread white glue over the plain-weave cotton areas. Let the grasscloth dry. Once the cloth is dry, apply tung oil to the right side of the journal bodies. Use one rag to apply the oil, and another to wipe off the excess. Lay each cover out flat to dry for 1–2 days in a well-ventilated area. Dispose of the rags safely, as they are flammable.
- 3** Machine wash and dry the lining fabric. Press and cut it and the interfacing according to the schematics in Figure 1.
- 4** Set the pocket lining and interfacing pieces aside. Center and apply interfacing pieces to the wrong sides of the corresponding body lining pieces according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- 5** For the pockets, align the interfacing pieces along one long edge of the pocket pieces and apply according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- 6** Trim the leaves that stick out on the wrong side of the grasscloth, and trim the selvages to  $\frac{1}{2}$ " being very careful not to bend the cloth weft-wise. Leaving the pairs of covers attached, iron the 2" interfacing strips to the wrong sides of each end of each cover piece. The interfacing will span the narrow cotton strip as well as 1" or so of the grasscloth. It won't stick tightly to the grasscloth, but will help to prevent breakage.
- 7** On each pocket piece, fold a narrow hem under twice on the non-interfaced edges. Press and machine stitch. Using  $\frac{3}{8}$ " seam allowance, sew the wrong side of the pockets to the right side of the lining as seen in Figure 1. Make sure that you sew diagonally across the corners.
- 8** Slip one of your blank journals into the pockets to check for fit. The fabric should fit the journal nicely when closed, but quite loosely when open. If the book doesn't fit easily, open the seams and re-stitch. It is important to make these adjustments at this point, before the grasscloth has been attached.

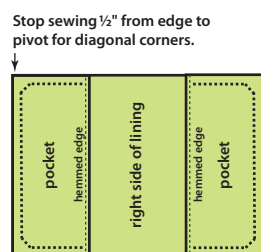
**9** Using a rotary cutter and mat, carefully cut the journals to  $13\frac{3}{4}$ " x 10" rectangles.

**10** Wear eye protection while sewing. Set your sewing machine stitch length a little longer than usual, insert the leather needle, and using a  $\frac{3}{8}$ " seam allowance, sew the grasscloth to the lining, wrong sides together, grasscloth on top. Sew diagonally across the corners as before. Test fit the book into the cover again.

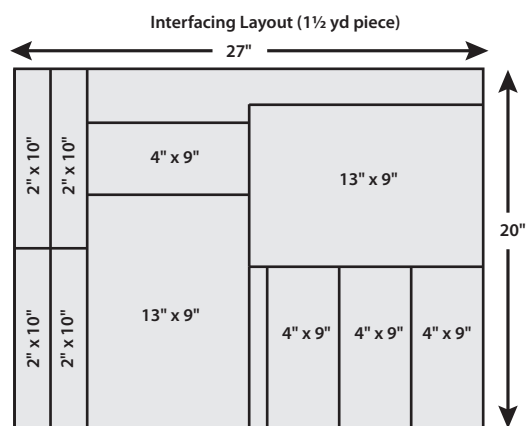
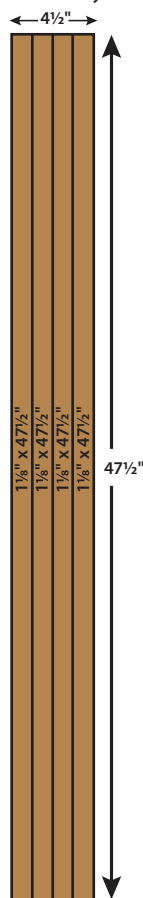
**11** With the lining side facing you, trim seams to  $\frac{3}{16}$ " and corners to  $\frac{1}{8}$ ".

**12** Cut binding according to schematic in Figure 1. To apply binding, start in the center of one long edge of the cover with the grasscloth facing up. Fold the binding around the raw edge of the journal cover so there is  $\frac{3}{8}$ " of the binding showing on top; wrap tightly. I found that stretching the binding tightly around the edge and adjusting as I sew works better than pinning. Sew in place  $\frac{3}{16}$ " from

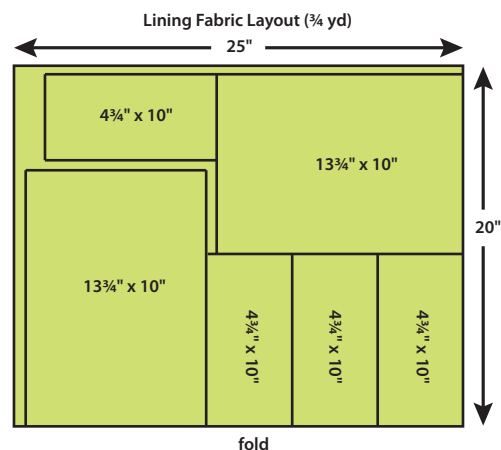
### 1. Schematics



Ultrasuede Layout



Cut 8 pocket pieces 4" x 9".  
Cut 4 body pieces 13" x 9".  
Cut 8 end pieces 2" x 10".



Cut 8 pocket pieces 4 3/4" x 10".  
Cut 4 lining pieces 13 3/4" x 10".

the edge of the top binding. At the corners, stretch and adjust as you sew, leaving the needle down and pivoting as needed. Go slowly and make sure that all layers are caught in your stitching and that the corners are smooth.

**13** When you are 1" away from your starting position, stop and cut the binding at a 45° angle with the longer part on top. Finish sewing.

**14** Using a short, sharp scissors, trim the binding a 1/8" from the stitching on the lining side and 3/16" from the stitching on the grasscloth side where needed.

**15** Repeat these sewing steps for the other journal covers.

**16** Grasscloth leaves a mess inside your sewing machine, so remove the throat plate and clean the bobbin case.



# A Touch of Summer Grasscloth Journal Covers

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## Rigid Heddle Project Instructions



DONALD SCOTT

### STRUCTURE

Plain weave.

### EQUIPMENT

Rigid-heddle loom, 12" weaving width; 8-dent rigid-heddle; 3 stick shuttles.

### YARNS

**Warp:** 5/2 mercerized pearl cotton (2,100 yd/lb; Valley Yarns; WEBS), Madder Brown #7382, 90 yd; Posy Green #5877, 54 yd; 5/2 mercerized pearl cotton (2,100 yd/lb; UKI), Beige #43, 54 yd; 8/2 Tencel (3,360 yd/lb; Valley Yarns; WEBS), Fire Combo #4959-02a, 90 yd.

**Weft:** 5/2 mercerized pearl cotton, Madder Brown #7382, 52 yd; 8/2 Tencel, Fire Combo #4959-02a, 105 yd; 85-225 leaves per journal.

### OTHER SUPPLIES

Lining fabric, 44" wide quilting fabric,  $\frac{3}{4}$  yd; binding fabric, Ultrasuede  $47\frac{1}{2}$ "  $\times$   $4\frac{1}{2}$ " strip cut on the crossgrain; 20" wide lightweight, fusible, non-woven interfacing,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  yd; sewing-machine needles for leather; Hope's Tung Oil; white glue; plastic wrap; rotary cutter and mat; 4 blank journals  $8\frac{1}{2}$ "  $\times$   $5\frac{1}{2}$ ".

### WARP LENGTH

96 ends 3 yd long (allows 7" for take-up, 30" for loom waste and 11" for sampling).

### SETTS

**Warp:** 8 epi (1/dent in an 8-dent rigid heddle).  
**Weft:** 8–11 ppi depending on the thickness of the leaves.

### DIMENSIONS

Width in the heddle: 12".

Woven length (measured under tension on the loom): 60" for 4 journal covers.

Finished size: Four journal covers 12"  $\times$   $14\frac{1}{4}$ " before trimming and sewing.

## RIGID-HEDDLE VERSION FOR THE WEB

- 1 Prepare your leaf weft according to the instructions.
- 2 Wind plastic wrap around your front beam and cloth beam to protect your loom from the damp leaves.
- 3 Wind 96 ends, 3 yd long, following the color sequence of the draft in Figure 1. Use your preferred method to warp the loom, centering for a width of 12". Sley 1 per dent in an 8-dent heddle.
- 4 4–8 hours before you plan to weave, assemble a quantity of leaves that you will be able to use in 1 or 2 weaving sessions and spread them on an old, dampened terrycloth towel. Sprinkle water over the leaves and roll the towel to make a damp bundle. Wrap the bundle in a large plastic bag. Place the bundle in a warm area to soften the leaves. Unused softened leaves can be stored in the refrigerator for a few days.
- 5 Wind one shuttle of each of the weft colors.
- 6 Grasscloth requires a firm, flat base, so spread the warp with a firm, straight header using heavy scrap yarn.
- 7 Begin the first journal cover by weaving ½" using Madder Brown and a firm beat. This is a sparse warp so this ½" will be weft-faced. Continue to weave the body of the journal using the prepared leaves and following the treadling in Figure 1. Handling the leaves: Keep the leaves in the plastic bag, and pull out as needed. Insert the stiffer end of a leaf into the shed, passing all the way

through so that the end sticks out a bit at the opposite selvedge. Change the shed and beat firmly, to help lock the leaf in place. When a leaf ends in the middle of the shed, pull the tip down from below to anchor it and overlap the next leaf a bit, pulling its tip down through to the wrong side of the cloth. For longer leaves, bend them around the selvedge edge, crushing them a bit if necessary. Note that you will trim the selvages later, so don't worry too much about how they look.

- 8 Weave the main body of the cover for 14", end by weaving ½" using Madder Brown.
- 9 If you have to leave the weaving prior to finishing a journal cover, insert 2 shots of nylon cord to hold the leaves in place. If you need to leave the loom for an extended period of time, unroll the cloth from the loom to let the grasscloth dry and to protect your loom.

10 Repeat steps 7–9 for the second journal cover. When the first cover starts to roll around the cloth beam, insert an old terry-cloth hand towel between the grasscloth and the cloth beam to cushion the grasscloth.

11 To protect the grasscloth from excessive crushing on the cloth beam, before you weave the second and third covers, cut the first two journals off about ¾" inches from the last pick of the second journal. Retie the warp to the apron rod. Do not cut the two journal covers apart yet, as the grasscloth and cotton ends both unravel easily.

12 Repeat the weaving steps for the last two journal covers.

13 If possible, take the damp cloth straight from the loom to your sewing machine. Stitch two straight lines across the cotton areas: one close to the leaves, and the other ½" away. Visit [WeavingToday.com](http://WeavingToday.com) for sewing instructions.

### 1. Draft and weave plan

