Weave a Tapestry Bag on a Box

Sarah Swett

Perfect boxes for making bags can come in many sizes. This box would be just right for a briefcase, that for a tote bag, and, why, that one will slip right into the overhead bin on an airplane! Once you’ve enjoyed the pleasure of plucking a sturdy loom from the trash, you’ll never look at the UPS truck in quite the same way. To heck with the contents—it is the box that counts!

Weaving on a box is straightforward, exciting, and a great way to use up bits and pieces of yarn. It is not, however, either fine or fast. Practical cardboard-box setts are 4 or 5 ends per inch, and tapestry has never been a zippy technique. For just these reasons, however, weaving on a box is immensely satisfying. You can take your time and play with blocks of color without tying up a floor loom. While I usually recommend a small box for your first bag, you’ll only have fun if you’re excited about the size, shape, and future life of the bag. Since my first article on this technique (see Resources), bags have been woven on boxes of every shape and size from coast to coast and around the world, so what do I know!

Resources


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**STEPS FOR WEAVING A TAPESTRY BAG ON A BOX LOOM**

**Prepare the box.** Tuck flaps to inside (a) to strengthen edges (cut edges are not strong enough to maintain warp tension). Mark ⅛" lines along edges at ⅛" intervals. Poke a small hole at the bottom of each line and cut on each line to the hole with the X-Acto knife (b).  

**Warp the sides of the box.** With a wide side of the box facing you (or any side of a square box), tape the end of the warp yarn to the inside at one of the corners, leaving a tail of about 6". Bring the yarn through the first notch, down the side, across the bottom, and up to the other side to the corresponding notch. Slide the yarn in the notch, pull snug (not so tight that it crushes the box) and bring it back out of the adjacent notch. Use a see-saw motion to work the yarn into the notch. Again bring the yarn down the side, across the bottom, and up to the notch next to the one where you started. Continue in this way (c–d) until the two opposite wide sides and the bottom are warped. Do not cut the warp.  

**Warp the other sides; weave the bottom.** Measure a length of the uncut warp yarn about 8 yd and cut at this point (this will be about half of what you’ll need to finish warping a box this size and is about as long a strand as you can work with comfortably) and thread it into a needle, folding it back and forth two or three times to decrease overall length (e). Thread the other needle with about 1 yd of weft yarn in the color of your choice. With the bottom of the box facing up (on the same side of the box as the long strand of warp yarn), weave across the bottom in plain weave with the weft doubled in back and forth two or three times to decrease overall length (f). Thread the last strand of weft. Do not bubble, but pull tight the way you did when warping the sides. Bring it up the unwarped side and hook it securely in the first notch and back out the second to hold the tension.  

Return to weaving with your weft yarn and fill another ¼" with tightly packed plain weave, bubbling generously, then again bring the warp down the side, across the bottom as if it were weft, and up the other side, hitching it securely. Continue in this manner (f) to weave the bottom of the box while at the same time warping the remaining sides, until both are covered.  

Turn the box after the first ¼" and weave for ¼" on the opposite edge of the box to keep the far edge warp thread from flipping off and then return to the first edge (g). When you have woven up to that last ¼", it will be easier to weave in the last few picks densely in this area, away from the edge.  

When you run out of warp, cut a new strand and tape the old and new ends to the inside of the box at the top (they can be woven in later) and continue. To change wefts, overlap the new and old threads for 1" or so. When you complete the bottom, add 1 warp thread at the final corner to make an odd number of total ends—necessary for weaving around and around the box in over/under order.  

Take heart! The bottom is the hardest part of the weaving and it is too bad that it has to come first. Stripes make it go faster, but don’t be in a hurry! Like most tapestry, this one is about being in the moment.  

**Weave the sides.** Now go wild! Make shapes or stripes; play with color or use all one color. Test out tapestry techniques from the books in Resources (page 2). This is some of the freest weaving you will ever do. If you weave squares and rectangles, you’ll have to sew the slits together invisibly between straight vertical edges later so that things won’t fall out of your bag. If you weave at an angle to the warp (h)—this is called an eccentric weft—you will need lots of extra weft to cover the distance or your finished weaving will develop distinct bulges. You can draw a cartoon right on the box or slide a piece of paper under the warp as a guide for specific shapes. Be sure to pack the weft as tightly as possible with your fingers.  

At some point, turn the box upside down and weave down from the top of the box (i). It will be easier to weave in the last weft threads if you can do it away from the edge.  

**Finish the bag.** When you finish weaving, insert the tip of the curved sacking needle under each warp loop on the inside of the box and lift it over the cardboard tab. Try not to damage the tabs if you plan to weave handles on the same box. You can leave the loops—the weft will puff out to fill the spaces during fulling. Or, you can thread a cord through each loop as you take it off the tabs (good for very small boxes where there is not a lot of weft to fill into the space). I made a decorative twisted cord out of 4 strands Gold Highland (j and l) for this bag. Release the taped warp ends and weave them into the fabric. Full the bag well in hot soapy water.  

**Make the handles.** Tape the end of the warp yarn to the inside of the box and warp two 2" (8 ends) sections, taping the final end to the inside. Weave with any pattern (k)—stripes, blocks, one solid color—starting at both ends and meeting in the middle. For these handles, I deliberately drew in the edges, switching to single strands when the warp became very close. When the handles are done, lift off the loops, sew in warp ends, full, and stitch the handles to the finished bag.  

**Line the bag, if desired.** This bag is like a basket so I did not line it. I covered a piece of non-corrugated cardboard with fabric to fit the fullest bottom (9" × 7¼"). For other bags, make linings (with pockets, if desired) and attach to the inside of the bag with Velcro to remove easily for cleaning.

**PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE**

**Weave structure for box**  
Plain weave (tapecstry).  

**Equipment**  
Sturdy corrugated-cardboard box with flaps (a box 9" × 7¾" × 7¼" is used for this bag); pencil or pen; ruler; X-Acto craft/utility knife; masking tape; two 4–6" curved sacking needles.  

**Yarns**  
Warp: 4-ply worsted wool (700 yd/lb), Lincoln Longwool, 56 yds for this bag.  
Welt: 2-ply wool (900 yd/lb, Harrisville Highland), Cobalt, Midnight Blue, Teak, Gold, Chianti, and Tundra, 1 skein each.  

**Yarn sources**  
Sacking needles and worsted-wool warp are from Weaving Southwest, 4-ply Lincoln Longwool from Aunt Julia’s Fiber Emporium, Harrisville Highland from Harrisville Designs.  

**Warp spacing**  
4 ep (good for very small boxes where there is not a lot of weft to fill into the space).  

**Finished dimensions**  
Woven dimensions: 9¼" × 7½" × 7¼" (tall) with two handles 1½" × 21¼".
Felted hat and purse

WEAVE GREAT ACCESSORIES FOR WINTER ON LITTLE LOOMS YOU CAN TAKE WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO!

Here’s a brightly colored felted flower of a hat as a reminder of spring when the weather turns cold and blustery! A purse in similar colors (see pages 8–9) is inspired by the popular felted purses made from knitted or crocheted squares. Pin-loom-woven squares work just as well for felting and can be faster to make!

Felting pin-loom-woven fabric is really fun! One of the challenges when you are working with pin-loom squares is getting the seams that connect the squares to look good. When the fabric is fulled, this isn’t a worry because once the squares are sewn together and felted, the seams totally disappear. The result is a very thick fabric, perfect for bags, hats, and other items for which a warm, sturdy fabric is wanted.

WEAVING ON PIN LOOMS

Weaving on a pin loom is an easy way to make fabric because the looms are very portable. Even sewing up the squares can be done on the go, as long as what you are making isn’t too large. An additional advantage to heavily fulled fabrics is that if there is a flaw (like a loose thread where an “over” or “under” was missed), the flaw disappears as it melts into the feltlike fabric. Felting is a very forgiving process.

I found that the point where all the squares come together at the top of the hat needs to be especially securely sewn and even knotted to prevent its coming apart in the washing machine. It is also important to reinforce all of the places where points of squares are connected to each other to eliminate all spaces or holes because any holes at this stage are likely to appear in the finished product.

A note on “felting”: Felting technically describes the process of wet finishing and agitating fibers, not fabrics made of spun yarns. Wet finishing woven fabrics, even when they produce what looks like felt, is correctly called “fulling.”

RESOURCES


Use portable pin looms to weave squares to make into felted accessories.
Pick the look that fits you best!
**Purse**

**STRUCTURE**
Plain weave.

**EQUIPMENT**
4” × 4” pin loom (Hazel Rose, Weave-It, or Arbor Looms); 5–6” weaving needle; tapestry needle; plastic shopping bags to form bag shape.

**YARNS**
Warp and weft: 100% Peruvian highland wool sportweight knitting yarn (942 yd/lb, 103 yd/50 g ball, Telemark, Knit Picks), Aubergine (purple), Pesto (green), Passion Heather (pink), and Mineral Heather (gray), 2 balls each.

**DIMENSIONS**
Woven sizes: sixty-eight 4” × 4” squares: 12 Mineral Heather, 20 Aubergine, 18 Passion Heather, and 18 Pesto.

Lay out the 4” × 4” squares following Figure 2. Sew them together using a tapestry needle threaded with a yarn that matches the squares being sewn.

**TIP:** To sew two squares together, place one on top of the other. Sew back and forth from the top square’s edge to the bottom square’s edge.

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**Hat**

Using the wool knitting yarn in the colors indicated, weave a total of 36 squares: twenty-four 4” × 4” squares (6 Aubergine, 6 Pesto, and 12 Mineral Heather); twelve 2” × 2” squares (all Aubergine). For specific directions for weaving with pin looms, see the article listed in Resources, page 6, and/or the instructions provided by loom manufacturers.

Handsew the squares together as in Figure 1, page 6, using yarn that matches the squares being sewn. Join the points of all squares securely. Sew the two short ends of the resulting fabric together to make a tube.

Sew squares together at top of hat as indicated in Figure 1 and draw them together tightly. Use extra stitches to form the point at the top and secure with a knot; weave in loose ends.

Full the hat in a top-loading washing machine. Add a pair of jeans for extra agitation. Use a low water level with amount of soap for a small load. Run a hot/cold cycle, agitating for about 20 minutes; then check degree of fulling (the hat must be taken out of the washer and wrung out to see if it fits your head and is short enough on the sides). Repeat if necessary. Run through a rinse and spin cycle. Take the hat out of the washer and put it on a bowl or form that is the desired finished size and allow to dry. Fan the petals slightly outward.

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**Purse**

Weave a total of sixty-eight 4” × 4” squares: 12 Mineral Heather, 20 Aubergine, 18 Passion Heather, and 18 Pesto.

Lay out the squares as shown in Figure 2. Handsew the squares together using yarn that matches the squares being sewn; see Photo a. After all of the squares are sewn together, join the fabric at the sides as shown by the arrows in Figure 2.

Cut 12 strands of Aubergine and 3 strands of Mineral Heather 1½ yd long. Divide the 12 strands into three groups of 4; add 1 Mineral Heather strand to each group of 4 for a total of 5 strands in each group. Use the three groups of 5 strands to make a standard 3-strand braid about 1 yd long. Tie a knot to secure the braid at both ends. Sew the braid to each side seam inside the bag about ½” from the top edge of the bag. Stitch securely in two places, leaving the knots free (they can be cut off after fulling).

Full the purse in a top-loading washing machine following the same process as for the hat. Check frequently to prevent overfulling. Shape the purse by stuffing plastic shopping bags inside and let the purse dry thoroughly. When it is completely dry, remove the plastic bags and cut off the knots at the bottom of the handles inside the purse.