

# Braided Rugs and their Making

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In House and Garden Magazine

The braided rug is one of the most serviceable and effective of the needle rugs. It is so simple in technique that any careful needlewoman can make it. And consequently it is one of the rugs most frequently seen in the farmhouses in New England and the Middle States. Sometimes, indeed, a complete floor covering is formed by using braided squares fitted together. These coverings are heavier and warmer than rag carpets. They wear longer, too, and lie flatter, keeping down to the floor at the corners and showing no disposition to kick up in the annoying way that rag rugs do.

Braided rugs can be made entirely at home and with otherwise waste material if the worker chooses. The really old ones were made of cotton rags or cotton and woolen mixed; in fact, of anything

The cotton Washington prints already mentioned are practical for braided rugs because they are soft finished fabrics with little dressing. They retail at from seven to eight cents a yard and are about twenty-four inches wide. Select a medium blue with a small broken-up figure on it, rather than a figure which is distinct in pattern, like a dot or a plaid, for instance. A floral pattern or sprigged effect is better for the present purpose. Of course any print will do if the Washington prints are not obtainable. Plain colors can be used effectively when combined with figured goods, either by using braids made entirely of plain material or by braiding two strands of one with one of the other. A rug this size requires nine yards of medium blue cotton print and six yards of unbleached cotton cloth of the cheapest braid.

The blue cotton prints and the unbleached cotton cloth must be torn into lengths of one and one-half yards. This is done because these lengths are in turn torn into strands for braiding, and if the strands are any longer they are apt to tangle in the process. First wash all the cloth, each color separately, with warm water and with either a borax or naphtha soap. Rinse the blue cotton print until no more of the dye color runs off, and while it is still wet hang it in the sun to dry. Do not wring it out. Hanging in the sun while wet fades it somewhat, and the washing softens the fabric, making it easier to braid. Remember always in selecting and preparing goods for braiding that stiff materials do not crush up nicely in the braids, and as this braided rug is a washable rug, too, all likelihood of the colors running in subsequent washings must be done away with by a thorough washing before they are made up.

After the blue print is dried, dampen it and press it out. The unbleached muslin must also be washed and ironed to soften it. Now tear both the blue and the white lengthwise—that is, the way of the selvage of the goods—into strips three and one-half inches wide. The cotton prints do not measure more than twenty-four inches in width, so in order to have seven strips of the blue, it will be necessary to make each strip a thread or two less than a full three and one-half inches wide.

The width of the unbleached cotton cloth varies with different makes, but whatever its width it must be torn into

points. Take up the cut ends alternately in both hands, first one end in the left hand, and then, one in the right hand, until none is left over. Then pull the goods apart into strips with one sweep of the hands. If two people tear the goods apart it is much more easily done.

Fold in the torn edges of each strip for one-half inch on each side, then fold these turned-in edges together. The strips should measure one and a quarter inches when finished. The width may possibly vary a little, but that is not necessarily harmful, tho it should not be narrower than an inch at any point.

After all the strands are folded, iron them and wrap them around pieces of heavy cardboard to keep them smooth and to keep the fold along the edge in place. Wrap each color on a separate card and do not wind too many strips on any one card.

The design for this rug is planned as follows: The centre of seven rows is of the medium blue. Outside of this there are four rows of mixed blue and white, the blue predominating, as the braid is made of two strands of blue and one of white. Following this come four rows of the reverse—that is, of the braid made of two strands of white and one of blue. Next are two rows of all white, then one row of all blue, then two rows more of all white. After this come four rows of a braid composed of two strands of white and one of blue. And the finish is five rows of braid made of two strands of blue and one of white. This plan gives the rug a dark centre surrounded by bands of graduating color going from dark to light. This is followed by an emphatic note of contrast made by the bands of rows of solid color, first white, then blue, then white again, the white being, of course, the creamy tone of the unbleached muslin. These contrasting bands are followed in their turn by more rows of the mixed braids, graduating this time from light to dark, thus bringing the darker tone on the edge and finishing the rug in the most practical manner. Edges always get more wear and therefore soil more quickly.

In the actual making, take three folded strands of blue and, holding the ends together, sew them. Pin or tie these at the end where they are sewed to something heavy, so that they may be firm and taut while braiding. Braid them together until within three inches of their ends. Then pin or tie these ends

and overhand it round the two first rows and go on thus until, counting from side to side, seven rows are sewed.

Be careful when rounding the ends of the oval not to pull the braid too much nor to hold it too tightly. If the braid is pulled the finished rug will ripple on the edges. If, on the other hand, it is held in too much in the overhanding, the rug will buckle in the centre.

The worker will notice that the sides of the oval are as yet very straight. They will begin to curve out as more rows are added.

These first seven rows form the centre of the rug. Now stop off with all the blue braid.

When starting a braid of different color add it to that already sewed at the curved end of the oval, rather than along



Commencing the rug. The adjacent sides of the coiled braid are sewed together.

old or new which came in handy. For the spacious attics of our great-grandmothers furnished inspiration and material enough at any time that one was needed, and the work is so simple that many a one has been braided during the long winter evenings by the meager light of its contemporary, the tallow dip.

But in these days of no attics and few store-rooms the worker in the cities at least has no treasures of cast-off things to resort to. The basements of the large department stores are the substitute, and these, filled with their odds and ends of remnants and marked-down bargains, I must admit, take the place fairly well, tho they are not as fascinating as the old-time attics. They have many advantages which are not to be despised; for one thing, goods may be bought in any desired quantity, large or small, and the worker of discriminating taste may select just that which is most suitable to carry out the design which has been planned, for there are many kinds of cotton fabrics that are soft and attractive in coloring and printed with fairly reliable dyes.

Of these the blues of all shades and makes are the most satisfactory. Of other colors the cottons known as the Washington prints made by several Rhode Island mills are dependable. These are a revival of some of the quaint old-time patterns and they are principally used for making quilted bedspreads.

The braided rug is made in three forms: square, round and oval. An old square rug is sometimes started with a piece of carpet for the centre, but this has an incongruous look and is not good from the designer's standpoint. The most desirable shape for the small braided rug is oval, so let us take as an example a braided bath mat in blue and white, size 26x32. The tool needed in making a braided rug is a coarse sewing needle suitable for carrying white cotton, size No. 24.

strips three and one-half inches wide. If it does not come out exactly, never mind. There are always uses for all sorts of left-overs in making other kinds of rugs.

The best way to tear off cotton goods of any kind is the manner in which surgical bandages are torn. First measure off the three and one-half inch widths along the width of the cloth, making a cut three inches deep at each of these

so that the braid will not unravel. Measure off fourteen inches of it from the end where the braiding was started and double it together to form a loop. Overhand this together along the inside edges of the braids, beginning to sew where the three strands were first overhanded and working down toward the other end of the loop, which is the rounder end, as shown in the illustration. Go back now and take the loose end of the braid



The first seven rows which form the centre of the rug. It is now time to introduce a new color.

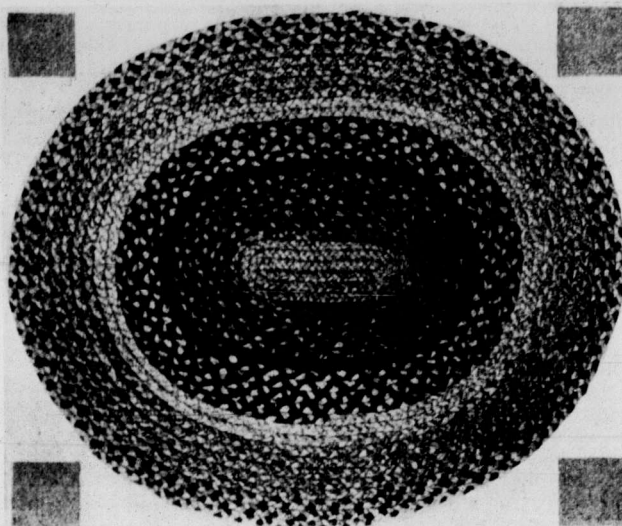
its straight side. Always start off the rows that are to be discontinued on the same side of the rug, as will be seen on examination of the first illustration. If some of the braid just sewed on is left over, when the time comes to add another kind, cut it off, but do not cut it straight across; unbraid it a bit and then cut the three strands off separately, each at a different point. Sew the ends of the strands of the new braid to these ends. Likewise, when adding more strands of the same color, or in introducing new colors to lengthen the braid, overhand these new pieces to the ends of the already braided strand. Let the seams come on the inside of the folded strand, where the raw edges will not show.

In braiding the strands it will be found that the ends do not come out evenly. This is because the worker pulls more on one than on the others. This is alright, however, for the seams in the strands must not all come at one point. If they all came together the braid would bulge and be clumsy at that point. This is the reason for cutting the strands at different points when it is necessary to cut them at all. Sometimes, of course, a length of braid just finishes the required number of rows, but, if it does not, be sure to save all the clipped off ends of the strands. One may need even the smallest piece to finish up a row of some desired color.

Lay the rug down on the floor from time to time during its construction, to see that it is keeping its form and also that it is smooth and flat. When the last row of braid required has been overhanded on, sew the ends down as flatly as possible on the wrong side of the rug, turning the strands under one by one.

The braided rug of the farmhouse, tho substantially made, is not always attractive because it is seldom well planned. It is usually of a variety called "hit or miss," and it is generally "miss," with

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The braided rug is made from strips of cotton print, braided together in the form of a rope and then coiled. A very wide variety of design and color is possible.