

Braiding

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Materials

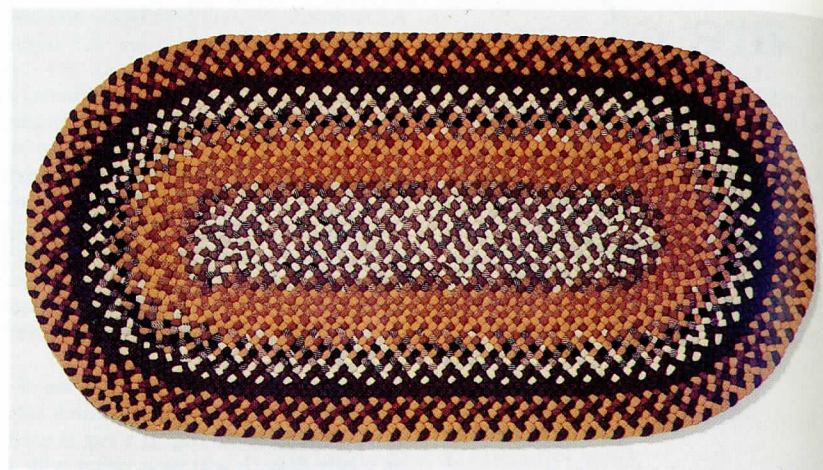
Braided rugs probably originated as mats braided of straw or grass and used to cover dirt floors. Braided rugs as we know them started out as a way to utilize fabric scraps. Many braided rugs are still made from leftover fabric or worn clothing that is cut into strips. Whether you braid with new or used fabric, there are certain guidelines to follow.

The fabric: Heavy or medium-weight wool is the best fabric for a braided rug because it wears so well. The wool should be heavy and closely woven, soft but firm. Loosely woven fabrics wear out more quickly than those that are tightly woven; stiff wools, such as gabardine, are difficult to work with. Avoid using cotton, linen, or silk; fabrics of these fibers do not wear well. Synthetics attract static and will not stand up to the wear that a rug is given. Do not use fabrics of different fiber content in the same rug.

Assembling the fabric: If you use new fabric, buy manufacturer's remnants by the pound to keep the cost down; rugs require a great deal of fabric. Check in your area for woolen mills; most of them sell wholesale only but will probably be glad to get rid of mill ends.

The most economical way to make a rug is with fabric from old coats, suits, skirts, and blankets. If you do this, make sure all of the wool is approximately the same weight. Be sure, with old clothing, to remove any zippers, linings, collars, and pockets. Open darts and cut along seamlines. Cut out any worn areas, such as elbows, knees, and seats. Also remove any areas damaged by moths. Wash the fabric in a machine or by hand, using a mild detergent and cool water. Hang it up to dry; do not put wool in a dryer. You may also want to wash new wool remnants before using them.

Amounts: If you are purchasing fabric by the yard, allow about 1 yard of 54-inch-wide fabric for 1 square foot of braiding. A 2-by-3-foot rug would require approximately 6 yards of fabric. If



Oval braided rug, worked in shades of brown and gold, is started with a straight center braid.

you are purchasing or assembling wool by the pound, allow about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 pound for 1 square foot of braiding. The amount will vary, depending on how wide you cut your strips, and how tightly you braid. Weigh garments after the lining, zipper, and collar have been removed. When buying wool by the pound, allow from 10 to 20 percent for waste. If you are buying strips of fabric, allow extra length for braiding; it takes up approximately one-third of the strip. Each braid tends to be about 8 inches longer than the braid in the previous row. If you have planned a color scheme, buy or collect the maximum amount of fabric suggested before you start so that you will not run out of a particular color.

Using color: There are several ways to employ color in a braided rug. The easiest, especially for a beginner or for anyone who is using old fabrics, is called the hit-or-miss pattern. This is simply a combination of any colors you have. The most common design in a braided rug is stripes or bands of color. In planning a color scheme, there are several design guidelines to bear in mind. Lighter shades look better in the center than dark

ones; a dark center tends to look like a bull's eye. Dark colors on the edge of a rug, however, have the effect of a frame. Keep the size of the center of the rug in a pleasing proportion to the size of the overall rug. To determine what the center size should be, make a sketch of the rug and color the rows. With this to guide you, you can decide how many rows to use in the center. Braids need not be a solid color. Since they consist of three strips, there can be three colors in them. Solid fabrics can be braided with checks, tweeds, or small plaids for an interesting texture. Bright colors look best combined with beige, tan, or other neutrals. Remember that the appearance of a color can change according to the color surrounding it.

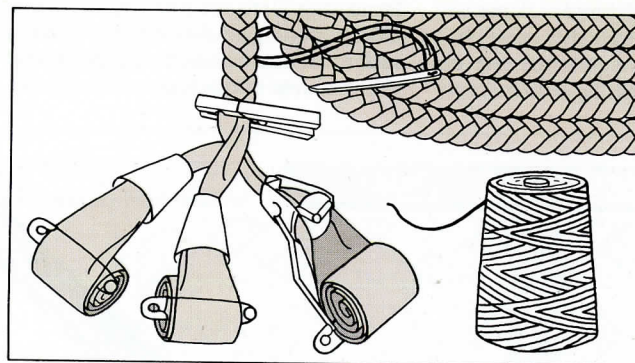
Work gradually to change colors in a rug. Add a new color to the rug by having one strip of the new color in the first braid, two strips in the second, three strips in the third and subsequent braids for a solid band of the new color. Always change colors of braids on a curve near the end of a round, in approximately the same place each time, to make the change less obvious.

Equipment

A braided rug is made of braided strips of fabric either sewed or laced together. In addition to the fabric strips, you will need a *sewing needle and carpet-and-button thread* to stitch the first bend of the braid to itself. The remainder of the rug is laced together with a *blunt-edged lacing needle and heavy thread*, such as upholstery's twine or carpet thread. You will need a clip *clothespin* to keep the end of the braid from unraveling when you stop braiding.

There are several other braiding accessories that are not necessary but will

help speed the work. *Braiding cones* are tubes that automatically fold a fabric strip. These are sold in sets of three; each strip of fabric requires one. The cones eliminate the whole process of folding and basting the fabric strips. Some braiding cones come with a *reel attachment* that keeps a long strip of fabric from tangling during braiding. A *braid holder* is a metal clamp that attaches to a table; it holds the braid under tension. A *cloth cutter* is a machine that cuts uniform strips of fabric; it adjusts to cut various widths.



Braid is shown at left being made with braiding cones that automatically fold the fabric strips; one cone has a reel attachment to prevent the strip from tangling. A clothespin holds the end of the braid. A blunt-edged lacer and heavy thread are used to lace the braids together.

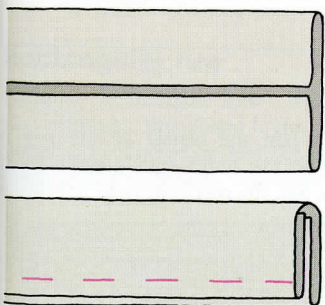
Making fabric strips

Fabric strips for braiding can be folded and sewed together by hand, or fed into braiding accessories that fold them automatically. With either method, you must

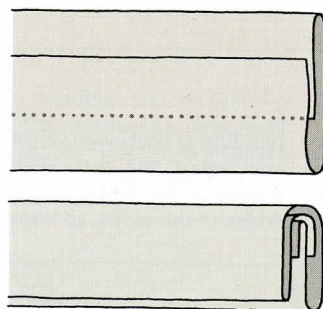
first cut the fabric into strips $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, the width depending on the weight of your wool and the width you want the braid to be. Always cut the

strips with the grain of the fabric; cut either lengthwise or crosswise, whichever will give you the longest strips. To determine the most desirable braid

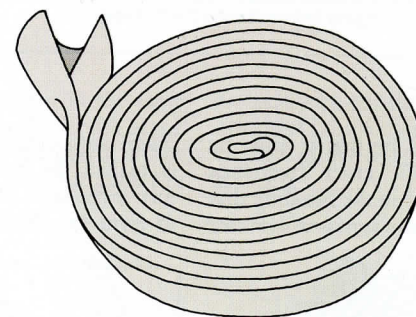
width, cut sets of three strips to various widths; fold and braid them, then use strips in the width that produces the braid width you find you prefer.



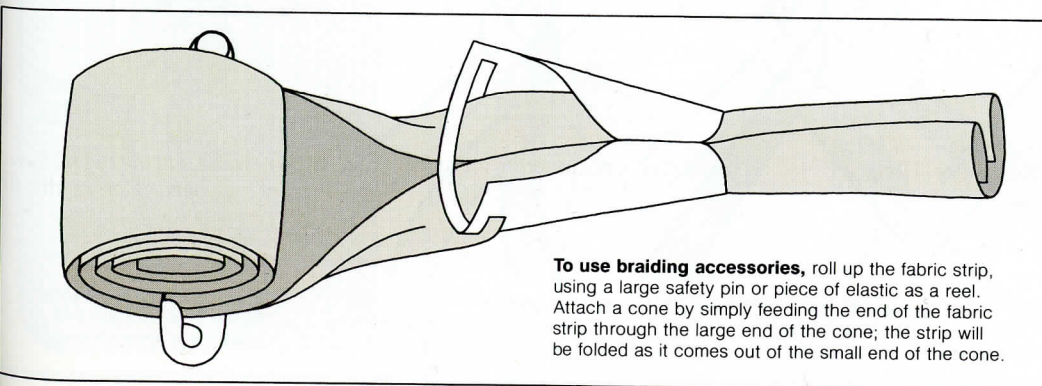
Fold fabric strip by bringing each raw edge to the center (top). Then bring folded sides together (bottom). To keep the folded edges together, you can sew a long basting stitch along the open edge.



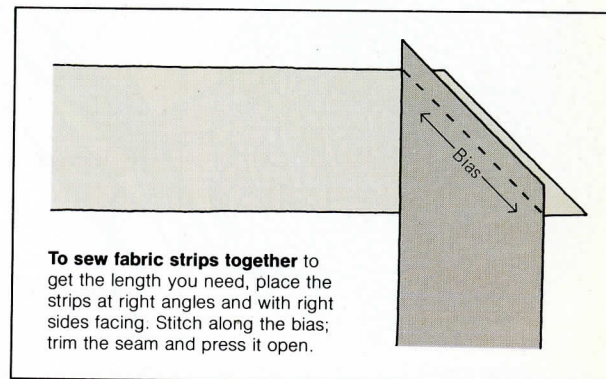
You can add bulk to fabric strips of lightweight fabric by folding the raw edges beyond the center (top). Then bring folded edges together (bottom) as usual and baste open edges together if you wish.



Handling of folded strips will be easier if you wind each one into a coil. The coil will unroll easily when you are ready to braid with it. Also folded fabric strips can be stored more conveniently in flat coil form.



To use braiding accessories, roll up the fabric strip, using a large safety pin or piece of elastic as a reel. Attach a cone by simply feeding the end of the fabric strip through the large end of the cone; the strip will be folded as it comes out of the small end of the cone.



To sew fabric strips together to get the length you need, place the strips at right angles and with right sides facing. Stitch along the bias; trim the seam and press it open.

Braiding

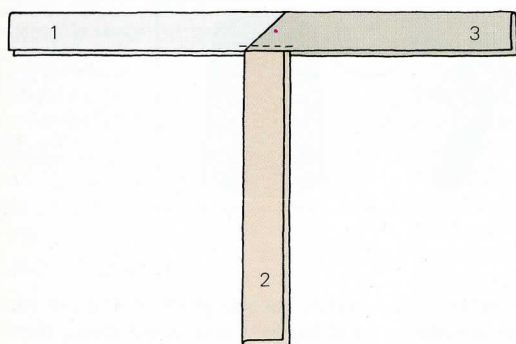
Making a three-strand braid

The simplest type of braid is composed of three strips of fabric. It is possible to braid with four or more strips (see pp. 492-493) but larger multiples do not con-

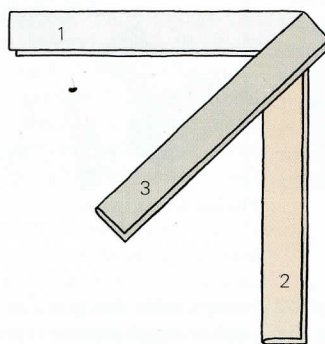
form as well to the shaping of a rug. When braiding, anchor the strip ends by tacking them to a board or using a table clamp so that the ends are under tension.

Always keep the open edges of strips to the right. To make a tight braid, pull each strip to the side, not down, as you braid. When you stop braiding for any

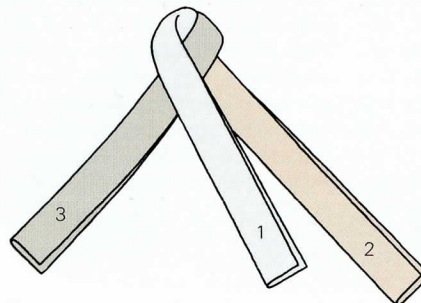
reason, clip a clothespin to the braid end to hold it. The length of the braid you make to start will depend on the shape you want the rug to be.



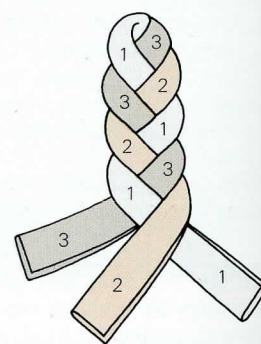
To make a T shape, join two strips with a bias seam. Place the end of the third strip inside fold, with open edge facing right; stitch securely. If you are using automatic folders, slip one on each fabric strip before making the T shape.



To begin braiding, fold the right strip over the center strip, keeping the open edge to the right as shown.



Bring the left strip over what is now the center strip, making a tight braid, pull each strip to the side, not down, as you braid. When you stop braiding for any



Continue braiding by alternately bringing right strip, then left strip over center; always keep open edges to the right.

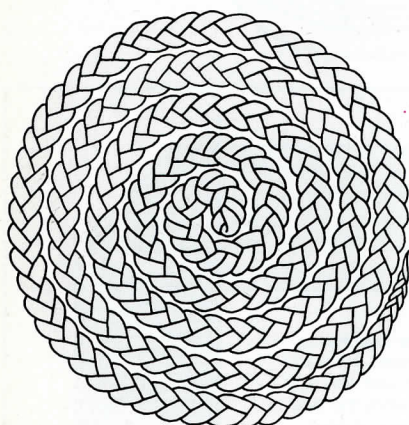
Round rug

For a round rug to lie flat, it must be started correctly in the center. To do this, you make a variation in the braiding that is called either a *round turn* or a *modified*

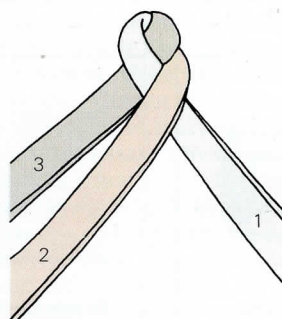
square corner; this variation makes it easier to coil the braid around itself. The turn is repeated from six to twelve times to form the center circle, then regular

braiding is continued. How many times you repeat the turn depends on the weight of the fabric you are using, the width of the strips, and how tightly you

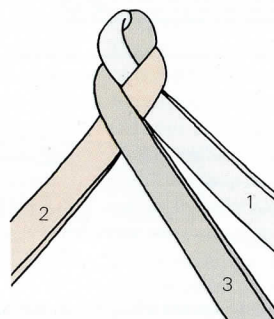
braid. When the center of the rug is formed so the braid coils around itself and lies flat, the rest is worked in regular braiding.



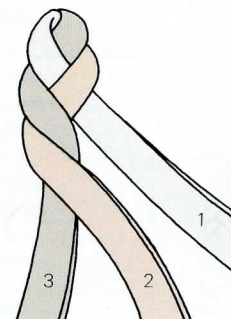
Braid spiraled around itself forms a round rug.



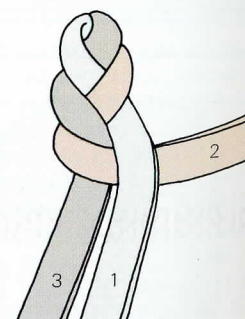
To begin, braid in the usual way with right over center, left over center, right over center.



Start round corner turn by bringing the left strip over the center strip.



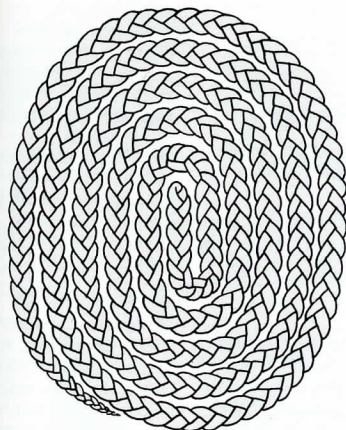
Bring what is now left strip over what is now center strip again, ignoring right strip.



Bring right strip over center tightly. This will make the braid curve toward the right.

Oval rug

An oval rug is made by coiling a braid around a length of straight braid. The length of the center braid is determined by the overall size of the rug: length of

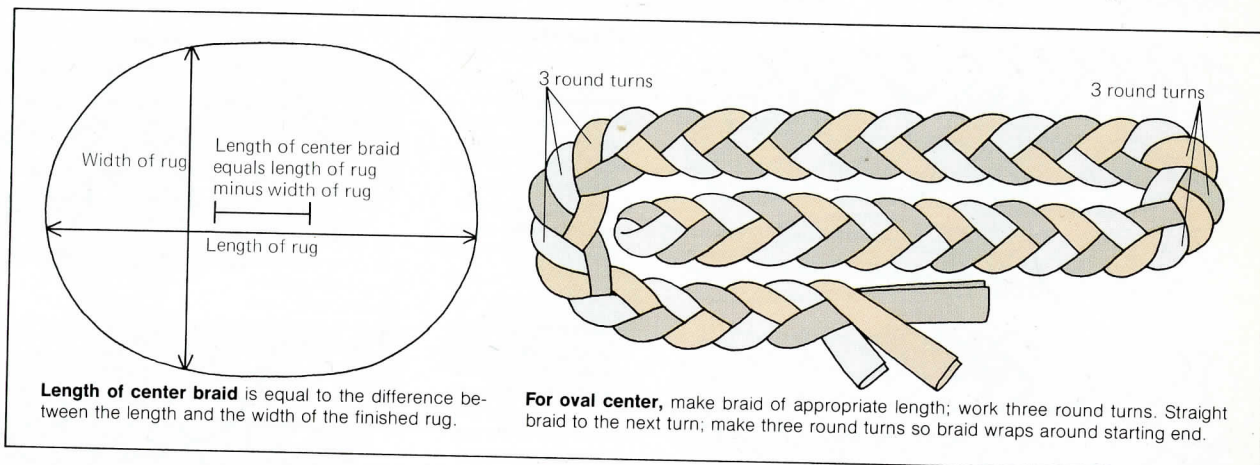


In oval rug, braid coils around straight center.

rug minus width equals length of center braid. For example, a 3-by-5-foot oval rug has a 2-foot-long center braid. To start the rug, make a braid of the appropriate

length; then make three round turns as described for a round rug (see facing page) so the braid turns the opposite way. Continue regular braiding until

you reach the starting end of the braid; make three round turns around the starting end. Continue regular braiding for the remainder of the rug.



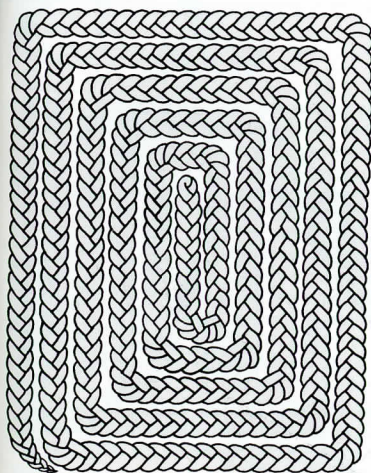
Rectangular rug

A braid can be made into a rectangular rug, although this shape is not as traditional as a round or an oval. To shape the braid into a rectangle, you make a variation in the braiding that is called a

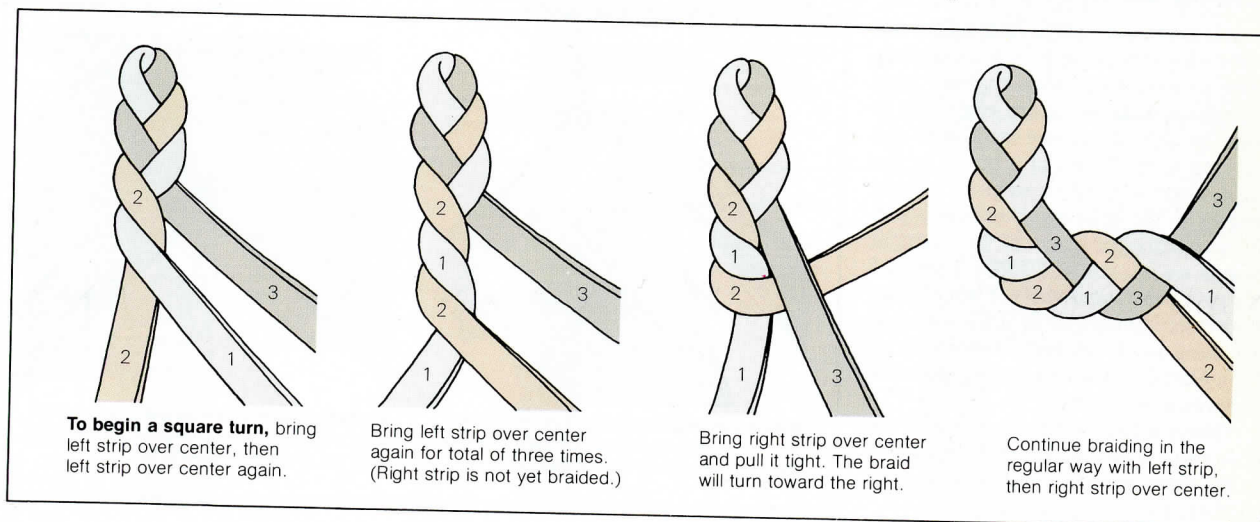
square turn. This produces a right angle in the braid so that it can turn a corner. The length of the center braid of a rectangular rug is determined in the same

way as with an oval rug: the length of the center braid is equal to the length minus the width of the rug. The rectangular rug

is made with regular braiding along the sides and a square turn at each of the four corners of the rug in each row of the braiding.



Rectangular rug has square turn at each corner.



Braiding

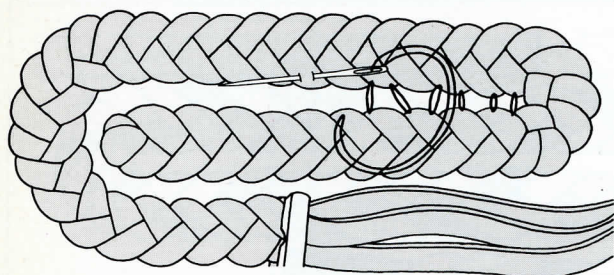
Lacing

The center of a braided rug, where the braid first turns on itself, is sewed together; the rest of the rug is laced. Lacing is faster than sewing and makes a sturdier rug. For sewing, use any carpet-and-but-

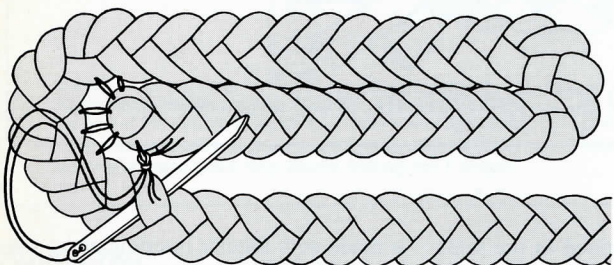
ton thread and a sharp needle. For lacing, use a blunt-edged needle, called a lacer, and a heavy waxed thread, such as upholsterer's twine or carpet thread. Always use a double length of thread. Lace with

one continuous strand; when a length of thread is used up, tie another length to it with a square knot. Work on a table or other flat surface so the rug lies flat; do not let it hang over the side or it will be

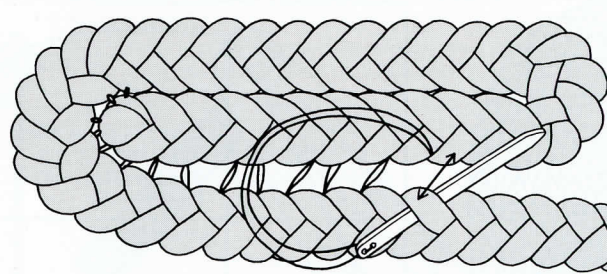
distorted. Pull the lacing thread tight as you work so it is hidden in the loops of braid; if it does not show on either the top or the bottom of the rug, the rug will be reversible.



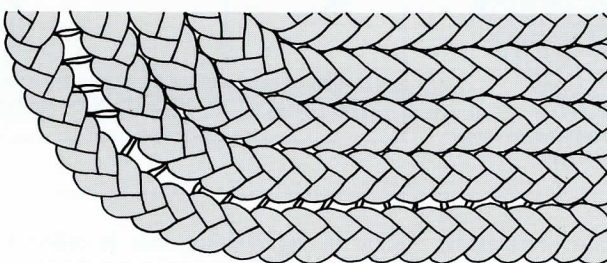
1. To sew first loops of braid together, start at first bend of braid (start of oval rug is shown). Knot thread; hide knot inside braid. Stitch through the folds of the inside loops of braids, working from one braid to the other. Keep thread concealed as you stitch.



2. Continue stitching loops together until you are just beyond the second bend. Thread lacer with waxed thread; attach this to the end of the sewing thread with a square knot.



3. To lace, position braids so they are not side by side but at an angle. Lacing cord goes between loops; it does not penetrate fabric. Bring lacer diagonally under inside loop of each braid; pull thread tight so it does not show. Lace all straight edges this way.

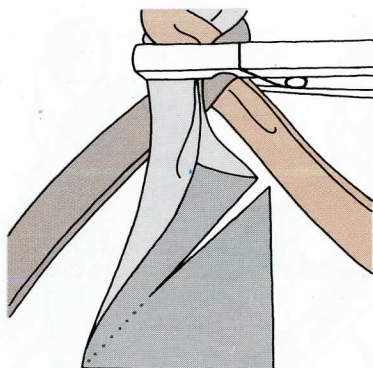


4. To lace curves of round or oval rug, loops must be skipped (on braid, never on rug) so rug will lie flat and not buckle. Decide when to skip a loop after thread is through loop on rug. If next loop on braid is even with or in back of the thread, you should skip it.

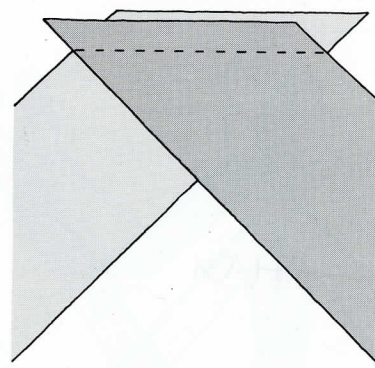
Joining fabric strips

As you braid, you will need to add to the fabric strips because it is too cumbersome to start with strips that are long enough to make an entire rug. This is done by splicing a new strip onto the working strip. To avoid a bump in the braid, begin with fabric strips of uneven lengths so the splicing of each one will fall in a different place. If you want to change colors, you can splice a strip of the new color onto the old strip. Plan your color changes so they will occur at the same place on each round (see p. 486); planned color changes give a more uniform look to a rug.

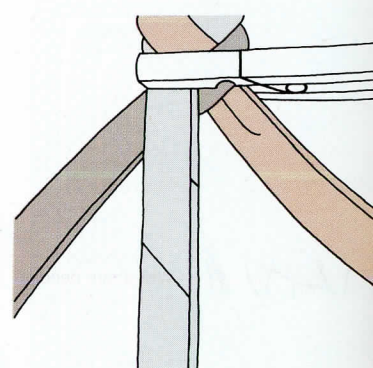
Always splice a strip when it is in the center after it has been in an *over* position so the seam you make will be hidden by another strip going over it.



Before you begin splicing, secure the braid against unraveling with a clothespin. Unfold short strip and cut it on the bias.

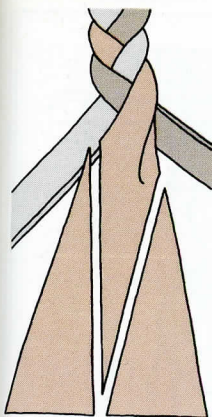


Place the old and new strips together, with right sides facing, and stitch along the bias. Trim the seam allowance to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch.

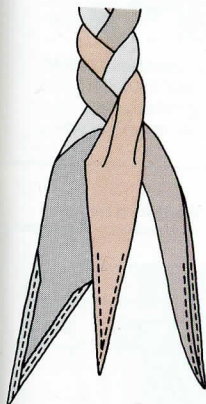


Re-fold the spliced strip and continue braiding; make sure the seam is hidden when the next strip is placed on top of it.

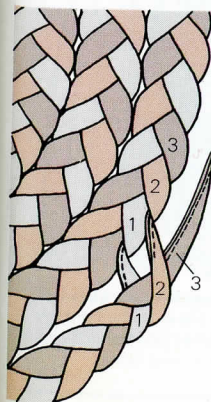
Tapering off



When the rug has reached the desired size, taper each strip into a long, thin point that extends for about 5" to 7". Cut each strip to a slightly different length so they do not end in the same place.



Fold edges under on both sides of each point; stitch fold by hand for about 1½". Re-fold each strip and continue braiding and lacing as far as you can.



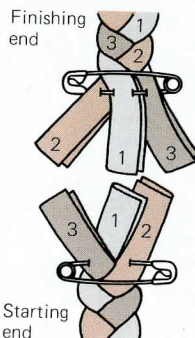
Insert strip ends into adjacent loops in the braid with a bodkin or other pointed implement. If strip end and loop are the same fabric, the end will be less visible. With sharp needle and sewing thread to match each of the fabrics, stitch the points to the loops; make stitches as invisible as possible. Clip thread ends close to the loops.

Butting

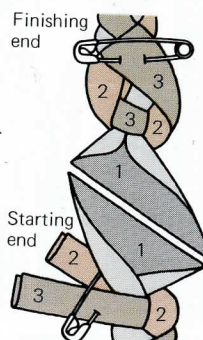
Butting—joining the beginning and end of a braid to form a complete circle—is an advanced technique that permits distinct color changes. Although an entire rug can be made by this method, it is most often used on the final rows of a rug for a

finished look. To prepare a braid for the final row of a rug, attach a safety pin 1 inch from the ends of three folded strips. Make a braid long enough to go around the rug, and place it so its ends will not be butted at the same point where the pre-

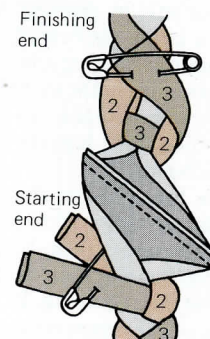
vious row was tapered. Leaving four loops of braid free at the beginning, lace the braid to the rug; leave about four loops of braid free at the end. Remove safety pin. To butt the ends, follow directions below.



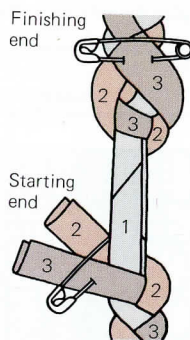
1. Put starting end of braid in front of you, finishing end above it. If your three strips are not identifiable by different colors, put a piece of colored thread on corresponding strip ends to identify them. Start butting with strips in the position shown.



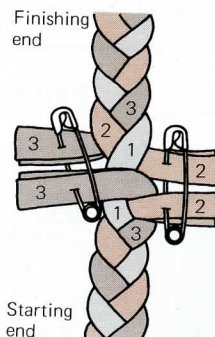
2. Pin Strips 2 and 3 out of the way. Unfold both ends of Strip 1 and cut the ends along the bias.



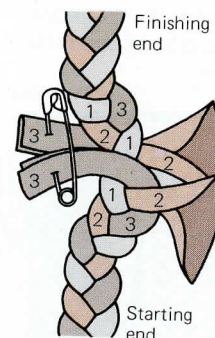
3. Place the ends of Strip 1 together, with right sides facing, and stitch the two together ¼" from the edge.



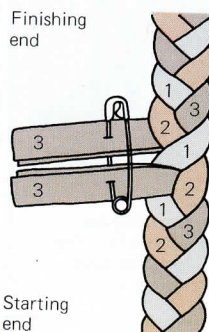
4. Fold Strip 1 back into a tube; the seam allowance will be on the inside.



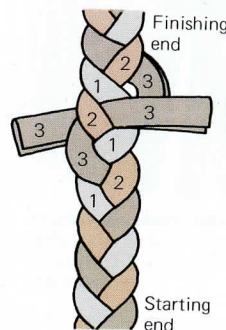
5. At finishing end, braid Strip 3 over Strip 1, concealing the seam. Braid Strip 2 over Strip 3 and bring Strip 2 under Strip 1. At starting end, bring Strip 2 out from under Strip 1. Both ends of Strip 2 should be on the right side of the braid.



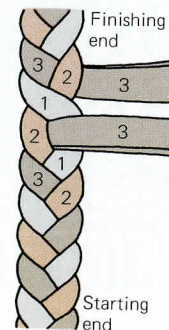
6. Pull both ends of Strip 2 out of the braid slightly so you can butt the ends together. If you don't pull the ends out slightly, the butted strip will be too long to fit in the braid and will bulge. The braid will be somewhat distorted now but will be put back in shape later.



7. Butt the ends of Strip 2 and fold the strip back into a tube, following the directions given for Strip 1. Pull both ends of the braid so it is smooth again.



8. At starting end, bring Strip 3 under Strip 2. At finishing end, pull Strip 3 out from under Strip 2.



9. Butt the ends of Strip 3 together, using directions given above for Strip 1.

Reader's Digest

COMPLETE GUIDE TO NEEDLEWORK

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Quilting
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Macramé
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Rug-making
Lacework



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