Weaving with Rags: 3 Free Rag-Weaving Patterns
Sakiori: recycling something old into something new


Kimono fabric is too beautiful to waste, even when too worn to be used (many sources for old kimonos are available online; see www.ichiroya.com, for example). One kimono is enough for one vest, and the kimono collar band can be used to trim the vest front.

The fabric for this vest is woven using a 6-shaft warp-rep draft. The warp threads are spaced so far apart, however, that the pattern created by the warp shows only slightly. A very similar effect can be woven on two or four shafts. For other warp-rep drafts to use with kimono rag wefts, see Joanne Tallarovic in Resources, page 3.

One of the two alternating warp colors should be similar to the kimono; the other should contrast (the “pattern” color). Light blue warp threads in this vest create a subtle light-blue motif on a dark-blue background.

Kimono fabric is about 14 1/2 inches wide and rectangular when the stitching is removed (any extra fabric is usually turned under, tucked, or included in a seam rather than trimmed off). Kimonos are easy to take apart since they are usually handstitched with long stitches that can be removed for cleaning. You can use commercial fabric for similar vest, of course.
Wind the warp alternating 1 Blue Jay end with 1 Ink Blue end and thread the loom on two, four, or six shafts using your preferred warping method. To prepare the rag weft, first remove all stitching from the kimono. Press the fabric. Cut lengthwise into 1/2” strips, saving the collar band (usually an 8” wide strip of fabric) to use for the collar band on the vest; for cutting tips, see page 25. (I didn’t use interfacing for the collar band but doubled it to give it body the way it is doubled in the kimono.) Wind the strips onto a ski shuttle, overlapping the ends.

Begin and end the vest fabric with 1” plain weave using doubled 5/2 Ink Blue pearl cotton. Weave the pattern alternating a single strand of Ink Blue 5/2 cotton with the rag weft following the treadling in your selected draft.

Remove the fabric from the loom and machine zigzag or serge raw edges. Machine wash and dry fabric. (I do this even with silk kimono fabrics, using the gentle cycle on my washing machine and the low setting on my dryer.) Press well.

Using the Kwik Sew pattern pieces or those from any basic vest pattern, overlap the side seams and back seam (if there is one) and trim about 1 1/4” from the front edge (to accommodate the collar band). Use a French curve if you have one to draw the new front edge where it curves to meet the shoulder seam.

Copy your new pattern onto pattern-tracing material to create a single pattern piece for the vest; see Photo c (because the fabric is so thick, it’s helpful to avoid using side and back seams).

If you are unsure about the fit, cut the pattern pieces from scrap fabric, sewing all seams indicated in the pattern (see “Make It Fit! Start with a Muslin” on page 54). Make adjustments if needed and then take apart shoulder seams and trace around the constructed muslin vest on the pattern-tracing material to make the new pattern in a single piece.

RESOURCES
Sewing the vest

1. Place the new pattern on the woven fabric so that the weft runs vertically and the warp horizontally. Run a line of Fray Check on the fabric along the edge of the pattern piece and allow to dry. Cut out the piece just outside the Fray Check line and serge all cut edges with a serger, if available, otherwise machine straight stitch two rows. (A differential feed on the serger is helpful to keep the curved edges from rippling and stretching.) Handle the fabric gently so as not to put stress on the cut edges. Sew shoulder seams with right sides together; press.

2. Measure the complete front edge and cut a strip a few inches longer than this measurement from the collar band of the kimono (or use a 7/2” wide strip of fabric). Fold this in half lengthwise and press. Stitch with right sides together to the front and neck edge of the vest with a ⅛” seam allowance, leaving 1” at each hem end unstitched. Press the seam, fold away from garment, and press again.

3. Now finish the armhole and hem in one of the following ways: 1) Turn the armholes under ½” and bottom edges under 1” and machine stitch (as for this vest). 2) Using the sleeves of the kimono (or extra fabric), make a continuous bias strip 2” wide to encase the edges (for directions for making a continuous bias strip, see Handwoven, March/April 1995, page 55, or check out the several good sources available online). Press one edge of the bias strip under ⅛”. Sew to the outside edges of vest, right sides together with a ⅛” seam allowance, press seam, and press bias strip away from garment. Fold so the bias strip encases the edge, showing on the outside and overlapping the stitching line with the folded edge of the strip on the inside. Stitch on the front of the garment in the ditch of the seam, catching the folded edge of the bias strip inside in the stitching. 3) Sew a purchased bias tape to the outside edges of the armhole and bottom of vest, press, turn to the inside, and stitch by hand or machine.

4. Finish stitching the collar band to the front edges. Fold the ends of the collar band right sides together and sew bottom seam, trim excess fabric, turn, and press. Fold collar band to the inside so that the folded edge just covers the stitching line. Stitch through all layers on the outside in the ditch of the seam, catching the fold of the turned-under collar band inside. Press. Enjoy wearing your Sakiori vest!

The 2-shaft and 4-shaft drafts create motifs of subtle light squares on the dark background. The 6-shaft draft creates a flower-like motif.

Other vests made from recycled kimono fabrics
Peekaboo Rep Rug

KARLA STILLE

What do you get when you combine log cabin and block geometric designs with Swedish rep weaving? A fairly easy-to-weave, beautiful, reversible, wonderful-to-touch rug that’s almost too pretty to walk on.

I wanted to do a rep rug after looking at the book *Rep* by Catharina Carlstedt and Ylva Kongbäck in our guild library. At the same time, I was drooling over the wonderful examples of warp-faced block weaving done by Lynne Giles and Bryn Pinchin in *A Rug Weaver’s Source Book*. I wanted to use some cotton carpet warp I already had but didn’t have enough for the 36 ends per inch suggested for the rep weave. After some calculations, my project worked out to a “two-thirds rep” sett of 24 ends per inch (epi).

With only 24 epi for my warp, my weft was going to show through the warp a little bit. I wanted the weft to complement the warp, so I purchased 6 yards of 100% cotton fabric. After prewashing the fabric, I cut it into 2” wide strips about 6 yards long and folded and ironed the strips like bias tape.

The thin weft can be any coordinating novelty yarn with compatible fiber. I like bumpy bouclé yarns with little tufts here and there for textural effect. Whatever you choose, the size does need to be considerably thinner than the thick weft. [Ed note: Rep weaver Rosalie Neilson recommends that the thick weft be at least seven times the thickness of the thin weft.]

*A Rug Weaver’s Source Book* offers suggestions for measuring and warping your loom, or you can follow your own preferred method. Before beginning to weave the rug, be sure that the threading is correct. With warp this closely sett, make sure your sheds open cleanly and the warps don’t stick to each other. My loom requires...


1. Warp color order

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2. Draft

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• If the sheds aren’t clear when you treadle, you can clear the shed with a
  hand knot in each group tight to the rug’s edge, then combine groups to make
  3-strand braids, securing each braid end with an overhand knot.

The variations of this rug are endless. You can use two or four colors of warp instead of three and still get the look of blocks. The thin weft could be a contrasting color instead of a coordinating one. The weight of the fabric and the width of the strips will make a difference. With all these choices, this is my favorite rug to weave.

RESOURCES


Machine wash and dry the cotton fabric. Using scissors or a rotary cutter, remove the selvedges. Cut the rest of the fabric into 2” strips lengthwise. With wrong sides together, fold the strips in half and press. Open, fold each long edge into the center, and press again. When the fabric strips are ready, wind them onto a ski shuttle.

Wind a warp following the color chart in Figure 1. Wind the two colors of each section together, separating them with your fingers as you wind to prevent them from tangling. Warp the loom using your preferred method of warping following Figure 2.

Wind the bulky knitting yarn, the Parakeet carpet warp, and the red carpet warp onto separate stick shuttles.

Allowing 7” of warp at the beginning for the braided fringe, spread the warp using scrap yarn. Start the rug with a header of 8 weft picks alternating between the red and Parakeet carpet warp, then follow the treadling sequence in Figure 2, starting with a thin weft and then alternating between thin and thick weft picks. Leave a tail hanging out of the selvedge on the first thick weft pick and tuck it in as described in Notes. Weave enough picks to square your design, about 10 picks of the thick weft or 4” of weaving. To change blocks, reverse the colors by omitting the thin weft shot and weaving two thick wefts in a row as shown in Figure 2. For the shorter blocks, weave 5 shots of thick and thin weft, or enough to equal 1”, and reverse the colors again by weaving two shots of the thick weft to start the next large block. Continue to weave in this manner until you have completed 12 large blocks. After the last thick weft pick, cut the fabric weft 5” past where it exits the selvedge, and tuck it in as described in Notes. Finish the rug with a header of 8 picks, alternating Parakeet and red carpet warp. Weave in scrap yarn to secure the ends and remove the rug from the loom, leaving at least 7” of warp for fringe.

Trim the warp ends to 7” on both ends. Working across each end and removing the scrap yarn headers as you work, divide the warp ends into groups of 6 ends. Tie an overhand knot in each group tight to the rug’s edge, then combine groups to make 3-strand braids, securing each braid end with an overhand knot.

Rep Weaving with Rags

• When starting the first pick of thick fabric weft, leave a tail of 5” hanging out of the shed. Miter that end (cut it at an angle), open the same shed, pull the end over an edge thread to secure it, and tuck it into the shed. Tuck in the tail the same way at the end of the last thick weft pick.
• Lay each weft into place straight across the warp to keep the selvedges straight.
• If the sheds aren’t clear when you treadle, you can clear the shed with a pick-up stick or sword, or you can retie each shaft to a separate treadle and raise the shafts separately for each shed.
• As you weave, miter the ends of the strips of fabric as you add them to the rug, overlapping the mitered ends inside the sheds. You could also prepare longer strips of fabric weft by using fabric glue to attach the shorter strips together before winding them on the ski shuttle.


cut lengthwise along the grain, 115 yd (takes 6 yd of 40” wide fabric). Thick weft: Bouclé or novelty knitting yarn (255 yd/5 oz skein. 816 yd/lb; Bernat Soft Bouclé), Folksong, 99 yd. Weft for hems: 8/4 carpet warp, Parakeet, 6 yd; red, 6 yd.

WARP LENGTH

576 ends, 3 yd long (allows 19” for take-up, 27” for loom waste; loom waste includes fringe).

SETTS

Warp: 24 epi (2/dent in a 12-dent reed). Weft: 10 picks per 2” (5 thick picks/5 thin picks) in rep areas; 8 ppi in hems.

DIMENSIONS

Width in the reed: 24”. Woven length (measured under tension on the loom): 62”. Finished size: 1 rug 24” x 55½” plus 3½” braided fringe at each end.

YARNS

Warp: 8/4 cotton carpet warp (1,600 yd/lb, Maysville), Parakeet, 864 yd; black, 144 yd; red, 720 yd. Thick weft: 2” wide strips of washed red print cotton fabric.
Prepare the T-shirts for weft by cutting across the T-shirt at ½” intervals to make loops, then chaining the loops together. (For directions with photos, see Resources or download directions at weavingtoday.com). Note that the ½” thickness will be doubled when you weave because of the loops.

Wind 332 warp threads, 2½ yd long. Using your preferred method, warp the loom for plain weave following the warp color order in Figure 1 and centering for a width of 272⁄3”. Spread the warp with scrap yarn.

Using 2 strands of Dark Gray carpet warp, weave 3” for a rolled hem. Weave the body of the rug using the prepared T-shirt weft.

Allow the weft to lie loosely in the shed when beating to prevent stretching and subsequent draw-in. After throwing each pick and before beating, use your finger to tamp down the selvedge to make a neat turn and prevent the stretching of the weft from pulling in the selvedge, then beat. Change sheds and beat again. When the rug reaches 51” (including hem), weave 3” with carpet warp as you did at the beginning.

Weave a few rows of waste yarn. Cut fabric from loom, machine zigzag hem ends, and cut away waste material. Turn hem under twice and machine or handsew the hem. Machine wash rug and hang to dry.

RESOURCES

Old T-shirts are an abundant, if somewhat problematic, source of weft material for rag rugs. Knitwear fabric, such as that in T-shirts, can create uneven selvedges with excessive and erratic draw-in due to its stretchiness. A simple technique for preparing T-shirts and other knitwear produces a neat, tidy, and structured rug.

Before I began weaving, I was inspired by Kay Gardiner and Ann Shayne in their first book, Mason-Dixon Knitting, to make “calamari” T-shirt yarn. This involves cutting loops (these are the “calamari”) from the circular parts of clothing—the trunk of a shirt, the sleeves, the legs and hips of pants and leggings—and then joining those loops together to form a continuous strand. I tried knitting with the resulting monster-yarn (on size 50 needles!) but gave up because the knitted rugs wouldn’t hold their shape and always ended up looking like someone had dropped a very bulky towel on the ground.

The idea, and the calamari yarn, sat unused as I spent several years learning to weave and trying different things. When I finally got around to making rag rugs, I dug out some of the unused calamari yarn and used it on a warp I was working on—and finally found the perfect marriage of material and structure. Through additional research and after the production of many T-shirt rugs, I have tailored the calamari technique to best prepare the yarn for use as weft. Tom Knisely included an excellent photo tutorial of my technique in his 2014 book, Weaving Rag Rugs (see Resources).

I hope this perfect marriage will soon brighten your home, too.
STRUCTURE
Plain weave.

EQUIPMENT
2- or 4-shaft loom, 28” weaving width; 12-dent reed; 1 ski or rag shuttle; 1 boat shuttle.

YARNS
Warp: 8/4 cotton carpet warp (1,600 yd/lb, The Mannings), Black #02, Slate #13, Dark Gray #60, Lime-stone Gray #36, Pale Blue #91, 115 yd each; Purple #25 and Lime #90, 54 yd each; Kentucky Cardinal #223, Burnt Orange #18, and Parakeet #48, 50 yd each.
Hem weft: 8/4 cotton carpet warp (used doubled), Dark Gray #60, 124 yd.
Rag weft: assorted T-shirts, approximately equivalent to 7–9 large adult shirts, cut into ½” wide loops and joined (see sidebar), about 160 yd.

OTHER SUPPLIES
Sharp fabric scissors or rotary cutter.

WARP LENGTH
332 ends 2½ yd long (allows 36” for take-up and loom waste).

SETTS
Warp: 12 ends per inch (1/dent in a 12-dent reed).
Weft: 12 ppi for hems (carpet warp used doubled); 4 ppi for rag weaving.

DIMENSIONS
Width in the reed: 27½”.
Woven length (measured under tension on the loom): 54”.
Finished size after washing: one hemmed rug 27” × 48”.
Preparing the T-Shirt Yarn

- Selecting T-shirts: You need to make a design decision as to whether or not you want bits and pieces of screen-printing or letters to show in your rug. I normally choose T-shirts on which the design ends above the armpit seam, so there won’t be a design on any of my loops. Also consider your colors. The most common T-shirt color is white, but a white rug has limited uses because it shows dirt quickly. It can, however, make a nice bath mat. If you are going to use colored T-shirts, think about how you want the colors to show up in your final rug. For example, you could link the shirts together in sequence, one shirt at a time, for a striped rug, or mix all the loops together for a hit-or-miss rug.

- Machine wash and dry the T-shirts.

- Lay one shirt out flat on your cutting surface, matching the front and back hems and sleeves together as evenly as possible. Cut straight across the bottom just above the hem. Discard the thick hem loop, unless you want to save the hems to do an all-hem rug later.

- At ½” intervals, cut straight across the body of the T-shirt, through both layers, until you reach the armpit seam.

- Cut off and discard the sleeve hems. Cut the sleeves into ½” loops, the same as the body.

- Once you have cut up all your shirts and have decided on a color order (or lack thereof), it’s time to join the loops. Lay two loops out so they overlap slightly, with the right-hand loop on top. Lift the overlapped end of the left loop up through the right-hand loop, then reach under and through it to grasp the other end of the right-hand loop. Pull this end through, stretching both loops tightly as they lock together. This is the important step: As you pull the loops, the stockinette stitch of the T-shirt fabric curls back along itself and loses much of its elasticity. You are left with a much longer and thinner loop, but one that has much more stability as weft material.

- Continue joining new loops, pulling each one tight as you add it to the chain. Roll your finished weft material into a ball to keep it under control and for ease of winding your shuttle later. Two approximately volleyball-sized balls of yarn will make one rug.