

# Perfect Marriage T-Shirt Rug

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## 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, Limestone 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 21½ 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: 27⅔".

Woven length (measured under tension on the loom): 54".

Finished size after washing: one hemmed rug 27" × 48".

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 selvages 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.

## RESOURCES

- Gardiner, Kay and Ann Shayne. *Mason-Dixon Knitting*. New York: Potter Craft, 2006, p. 100.
- Knisely, Tom. *Weaving Rag Rugs*. Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole, 2014, pp. 76–77.

- 1 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](http://weavingtoday.com)). Note that the ½" thickness will be doubled when you weave because of the loops.
- 2 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 27½". Spread the warp with scrap yarn.
- 3 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 selvage to make a neat turn and prevent the stretching of the weft from pulling in the selvage, 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.
- 4 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. 

### 1. Warp color order

|           | 12x | 5x | 11x | 10x | 11x | 5x | 12x |   |
|-----------|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|---|
| 20        |     | 1  |     |     | 1   |    | 1   |   |
| 20        |     | 1  |     |     | 1   |    | 1   |   |
| 20        |     | 1  |     |     | 1   |    | 1   |   |
| 21        |     |    | 1   |     | 1   |    |     | 1 |
| 21        |     |    | 1   |     | 1   |    |     | 1 |
| 46        | 1   |    |     | 1   |     | 1  |     | 1 |
| 46        | 1   |    |     | 1   |     | 1  |     | 1 |
| 46        | 1   |    |     | 1   |     | 1  |     | 1 |
| 46        | 1   |    |     | 1   |     | 1  |     | 1 |
| 46        | 1   |    |     | 1   |     | 1  |     | 1 |
| 332 total | 1   |    |     | 1   |     | 1  |     | 1 |

- Parakeet #48
- Burnt Orange #18
- Kentucky Cardinal #223
- Lime #90
- Purple #25
- Pale Blue #91
- Limestone Gray #36
- Dark Gray #60
- Slate #13
- Black #02

## 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.



Left:  
Cutting a  
t-shirt loop



Right Top:  
Overlapping  
the loops



Right Bottom:  
Pulling the loops  
together  
PHOTOS BY AMANDA  
ROBINETTE