

The following is an excerpt from the book *Hold It! How to Sew Bags, Totes, Duffels, Pouches, & More*, by Nancy Restuccia. It is offered free on this Web site to show the quality of the instructions throughout the book. Individuals are invited to print these instructions for their own private use. Any other form of copying and distributing these instructions is prohibited by copyright law.

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Project 8

Classic Open Tote

Difficulty: 

The open tote is an enduring style, both easy to make and well suited to a wide variety of uses. This is the “free tote bag” that all manner of merchandisers offer as a premium to induce you to buy their wares; the “boat bag” that sporting goods companies like L.L. Bean have been selling for years; the upscale “museum bag” that our finest cultural institutions offer through gift shops and catalogs, many of them with a hefty price tag attached; and the

“ecological grocery bag” that will help save our planet from the evils of paper and plastic sacks. Your fabric choice—which may range from plain, unbleached canvas to upholstery fabrics, leathers, tapestries, and even wools—will determine whether

you'll end up with a designer original or a utilitarian carryall. The following instructions are for making a plain, slightly oversize “green” grocery bag, but it's easy to change the size and look to suit your every need.



How to Make a Classic Open Tote

You'll Need (for one 18"×13"×7" bag)

Fabric: 1³/₈ yd. sturdy fabric, such as canvas, denim, Cordura, or pack cloth, at least 44" wide (Note: This is enough fabric for two bags.)

Optional: contrasting fabric for bottom (see Option 2, page 35, for measurements)

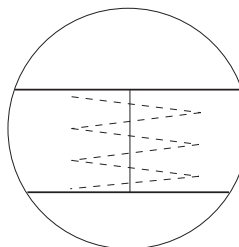
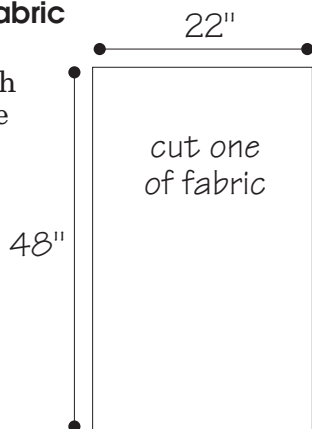
Notions: 3/4 yd. of 1/2" webbing

chalk or other marker; ruler

Optional: decorative patch, label, or appliqué

1. Prepare fabric

Cut fabric to 22"×48", with length on the lengthwise grain.

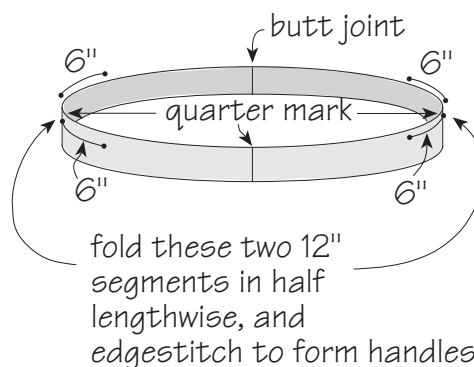


b. Quarter-mark webbing, using butt joint as one of the four marks.

c. Measure and mark 6" to either side of two opposite quarter marks (this will define two 12" segments, the handles).

2. Prepare webbing

a. Clean-finish ends of webbing: sear nylon and polypropylene; stitch or fold under cotton and blends. Butt ends together snugly; stitch back and forth several times to secure. (Note: Be sure webbing isn't twisted before stitching.)

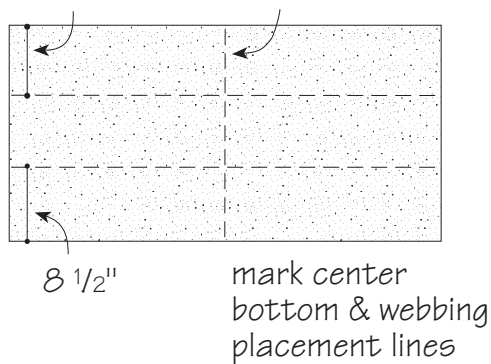


fold these two 12" segments in half lengthwise, and edgestitch to form handles

d. Fold webbing in half lengthwise along each 12" segment. Edgestitch to form handles.

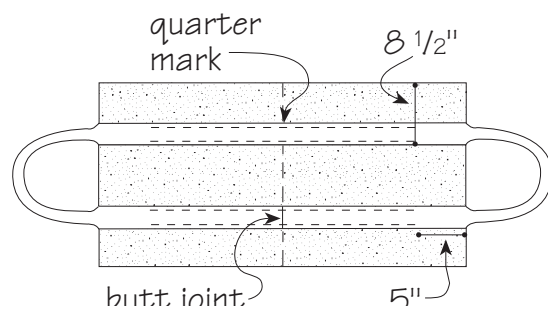
3. Apply webbing

a. Mark center bottom line midway across width of fabric. Mark webbing placement lines on right side, $8\frac{1}{2}$ " in from each long edge.



b. Position webbing on right side of fabric, inside edges along placement lines, positioning butt joint and remaining quarter mark on center bottom line; handles will loop over ends of panel. Pin.

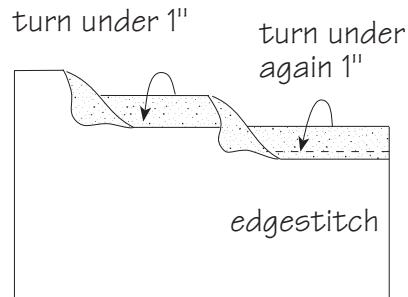
c. Edgestitch webbing, beginning and ending about 5" from each edge of panel.



4. Stitch side seams and hem

a. Fold panel right sides together along center bottom line. Stitch or serge side seams, using $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam allowance. *Optional:* Trim seam allowance to $\frac{1}{4}$ " and clean-finish if not serged.

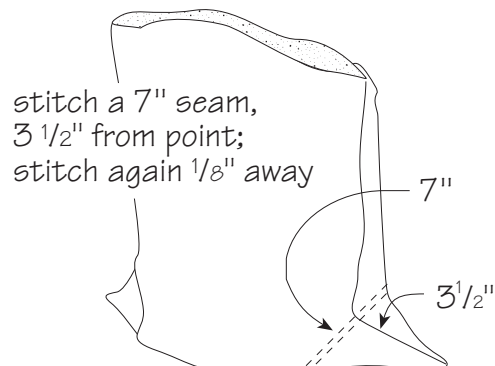
b. Fold top raw edge under 1"; finger-press. Fold under again 1"; finger-press. Edgestitch.



5. Create bottom

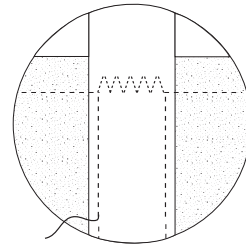
a. Flatten one corner to create a triangular point, aligning side seam with center bottom line.

b. Mark a 7"-long line perpendicular to seam, $3\frac{1}{2}$ " from point. Stitch along line. Stitch again $\frac{1}{8}$ " from seam, toward point, to reinforce. Repeat for other corner.



6. Finish bag

Finish stitching webbing to bag at top, to within $\frac{3}{4}$ " of edge. Reinforce between stitching lines, using a narrow zigzag.



Options, Ideas & Variations...

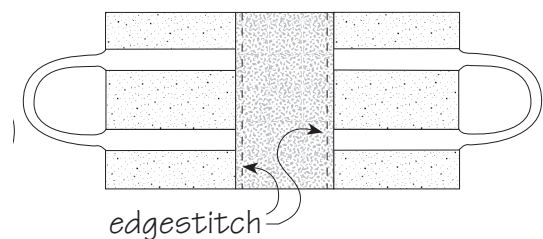
1 Make a Classic Open Tote in any size. To determine cutting dimensions, use this formula:

- Length will be finished height times two, plus finished depth, plus 2"–5" (2" for smaller bags, up to 5" for larger bags).
- Width will be finished width, plus finished depth, plus 1"–2" (1" for smaller bags, up to 2" for larger bags).
- Webbing will be finished height times four, plus finished depth times two, plus finished handle length times two (handle length generally ranges from 10" each for teeny totes to 16" each for grocery-bag-size totes).

2 Add a contrasting bottom. This is a practical as well as decorative option; the extra layer reinforces the bottom, which has to stand up to the most wear. To add this option, you'll

need a piece of contrasting fabric the same width as the bag fabric, but 3"–7" longer than the bag's depth (3" for small bags, up to 7" for large bags).

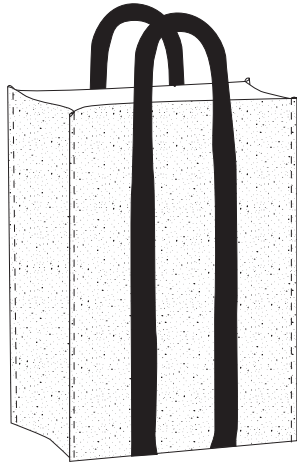
- a. Construct as for Classic Open Tote, through Step 3c.
- b. Press under $\frac{1}{2}$ " on each long side of contrast panel.
- c. Edgestitch panel to bag at center bottom, right sides up.



- d. Complete Step 4.
- e. Turn bag right side out. Stitch corners as in Step 5a, except working on right side of bag. Fold triangular points up along each side, matching seamlines; pin. Stitch in the ditch through all layers to secure corners to bag.

3 Attach a gripper snap at center front to hold the bag closed.

4 For a crisper look, edgestitch all four sides, from top edge to bottom corners.



5 If you don't need the strength of wrap-around webbing, use shorter handles. Either stitch them



behind the hem at top, or anchor them to the outside with decorative swatches of fabric, such as leather or Ultrasuede.

6 If it's important that the bag be waterproof, choose a laminated fabric for your tote. Purchase already-laminated yardage, or laminate it yourself (see sidebar for instructions).

How to Laminate Fabric

To laminate your own fabric, you'll need equal yardages of fabric, fusible web, and clear vinyl. Choose one of the new low-temperature fusible webs, such as HeatnBond Lite, and a thin (such as 2-mil) vinyl; both are readily available in fabric stores (try the home-dec department for vinyl).

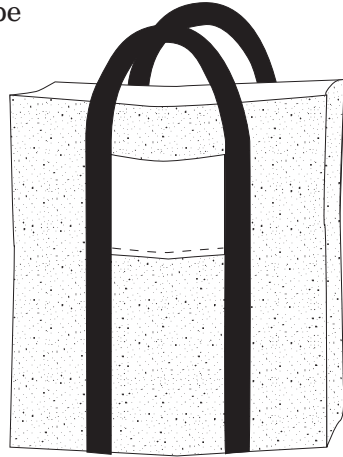
- Fuse the web to the right side of your fabric, following the manufacturer's directions.
- Place clear vinyl on top of the fusible web, taking care to smooth out any wrinkles.
- Place the tissue paper that comes with the vinyl on top of the vinyl-web-fabric sandwich. Press on top of the paper, using approximately a silk/wool setting, until vinyl is fused securely to fabric. (*Tip:* Test to determine the proper heat setting: too hot, and you will melt the vinyl; too cool, and it will not adhere.)
- After fusing, stitch or serge around all the edges to keep the layers securely together.

Alternatively, purchase Fab-Lam (see "Sources and Resources"), which is a one-step iron-on laminate, or Converseal (available in art-supply stores), which is self-adhesive (no heat required). *Whatever your choice, remember to test first.*

7 Add a pocket. Stitch a small one either inside or outside, between the webbing; use hook-and-loop tape

as a closure, to keep coupons, checks, pen, credit cards, keys, cash, etc. securely inside.

Or perhaps you need a large inside pocket, channel-stitched vertically every inch, to keep knitting needles in place.



9 Stitch an appliqué or decorative patch or label to the front, or satin-stitch a monogram to personalize your bag.

10 Stencil, paint, or appliqué the bag for a unique creation.

11 Teeny totes are great for kids, and also for holding special hostess gifts . . . like a pair of mugs with mulled cider spices tucked in . . . or maybe a mason jar filled with layers of colorful dried beans and your favorite hearty soup recipe (for a 6" h, 5" w, 4" d finished bag, cut fabric to 19" x 10").



8 Pamper yourself or a favorite green-thumbed friend with a handy garden tote. Toss in a new pair of gloves, a trowel, and some seeds or bulbs to complete the ensemble (for a 10" h, 13" w, 5" d finished bag, cut fabric to 30" x 20").

