



If you've wanted to learn traditional rug hooking but you're just not sure where to begin or how to get information, I can help! This article shows you what you need to get started and teaches you the basics. You can find lots more information, instructions, and options at my web site [www.folkandfiber.com](http://www.folkandfiber.com)

The first traditional hooked rugs in North America were probably made in the eighteenth century in the areas of the Northeastern United States and the maritime provinces of Canada. This fiber art expanded out of those areas and into the rest of the United States during the Victorian era. Women created hooked rugs in their homes or in groups, much like quilting bees, using strips of cloth scraps from clothes, rags and feed sacks.

## Selecting Tools and Supplies

**Rug Hook:** There are many brands, prices and sizes of hooks. You can start with a less expensive hook, but always choose a hook that corresponds with the width of the wool strip you wish to use and one that fits your hand comfortably. Rug hooks are gauged fine, medium, primitive and coarse to guide you in choosing one that will work with the width you intend to use.



Hook Gauges from Fine to Coarse (Primitive)

**Foundation:** Several rug hooking foundations are available from inexpensive burlaps to higher-priced linens. Burlap is fine as a learning material, but as you begin to hook rugs that you really want to last for generations, use a better quality foundation, such as linen. Choose a different foundation for each of your first few projects and you'll find the one that you prefer.



Rug Hooking Foundations

**Frame or Hoop:** Rug hooking frames also vary widely in price, size and capability. Some are stationary and others swivel and tilt. Frames can sit in your lap, stand on the floor, or be stabilized by your own weight (sit-on frames.) Frames have

gripper strips on all sides, which hold your pattern very tightly while you hook. Alternately, you can use a large, heavy-duty quilting hoop, which must be stabilized against a table edge during hooking.

**Strip Cutter:** Strip cutters cut wool into strips. Different size cutter heads fit into the strip cutter to produce wool in the strip width you need. Strips are measured in 32nds of an inch; when you see 'strip cut #8,' that means the strip of wool is 8/32-inch wide and was cut using a #8 cutter head. The larger the number, the wider the cut strip.



Rigby Model D Strip Cutter

**Wool:** There is much to learn about choosing the correct wool for rug hooking. Fabric stores do not carry what you need. You can recycle wool clothing if it is labeled 100% wool and is not worsted, twill, or gabardine. When you first begin rug hooking, choose a kit that includes the cut wool and a pattern. As you progress, you'll learn the best wool to purchase. There are many online retailers and local shops that carry wool specifically for rug hooking. For an overview of which wool to use and which not to use, see my website.



Rug Hooking Wool

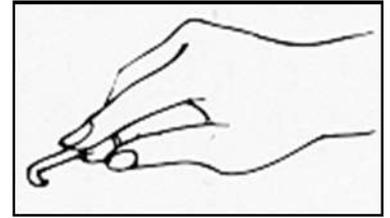
**Pattern:** You can design your own pattern or purchase from many commercially-available patterns and kits. To design your own, sketch your design on paper first at the size you want your finished rug. Trace your design onto red dot tracing fabric. Cut a piece of foundation 3-4 inches larger, along both length and width, than your pattern; you need 3-4 inches on each side to attach to your frame. If you are using a hoop, allow about 8 inches additional foundation in both length and width. Mark the perimeter measurements on the foundation, keeping lines straight on grain. Position your red dot tracing within the measurements, and then use a permanent marker to slowly re-trace the pattern lines; the marks bleed through the red dot tracing and onto foundation.

## Hooking a Rug -- the basic steps . . .

1. Stretch pattern on hooking frame, design-side up. Pull each side really taut, keeping it straight on frame. Cut wool into strips of desired width.
2. Sit in a comfy chair and place frame in your lap. With left hand, hold end of wool strip between thumb and forefinger beneath frame.

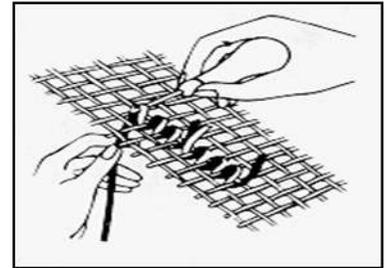
3. Hold hook in palm of right hand, with barb facing downward.

4. Insert hook into a hole in foundation just inside pattern line. Push hook through at a slight angle; shaft of hook should gently rub your forefinger as it passes behind wool strip, between your finger and thumb. As it passes, it should 'catch' the wool on the barb. Never loop wool over hook with your left hand; this will result in a lumpy and twisted rug back. If you can't pick up strip with hook, the barb is probably not properly positioned. Try again!



5. With right hand, pull end of strip up about 1/2-inch to start the strip. Leave this "tail" sticking up through top of foundation.

6. Insert hook into next hole, catching wool strip again and pulling it up to form first loop next to "tail" end; pull loop about as high as strip is wide (1/4-inch for #8 cut wool.) Each loop holds previous loop in backing. To help prevent pulling out the loop you just hooked, slightly rotate hook and pull loop back toward previous loop.



7. Working from right to left (or left to right if you are left-handed), skip over about 2 holes and pull up another loop – repeat for rest of loops from this strip. Pull even loops that just touch each other. Loops should not be crowded—this is called 'packing' and it will cause your rug to be wavy or buckle and not lie flat when it's done.

8. To end a strip, pull ending "tail" up through backing to top. Tails left on back will cause rug to wear unevenly and pull out easily. Strips are never knotted; they hold one another in place. Start next strip in same hole with this tail, leaving a 1/2-inch tail again.

9. Repeat steps 5-8 to hook subsequent strips of wool. Periodically go back and trim pairs of "tail ends" even with top of pulled loops. These cut off pieces are referred to as "snippets."



10. When you reach the end of a row or section, begin the next row 2-3 holes over and continue hooking in the opposite direction or around a corner. Don't end a strip at a corner — end it early if you don't have enough wool left to hook around the corner, and then begin a new strip. To keep the back from becoming lumpy, do not cross a row of hooking with another strip. Cut the strip and start it again where you want to begin hooking.

11. Continue hooking, following pattern lines and changing wool colors, as needed, until pattern is complete.

## Whipping and Binding Edges with Yarn

Measure length and width of rug, add measurements, and then multiply by 2. To determine how much yarn you'll need, divide result by 4 to get number of 3-ply 100% wool tapestry yarn lengths required. The standard length of tapestry yarn is about 5 feet, so 1 piece 5 feet long = 4" - 6" of whipped edge. Always have a few extra yards to accommodate personal style and to compensate for any mistakes.

Cut small W-shaped notches from foundation corners to reduce bulk, as shown. Roll excess foundation toward front of the rug (you can place a length of cotton cording inside rolled foundation to create a harder, more even edge.) Use sewing needle and buttonhole thread to baste edge in place. Cut enough rug binding tape to cover all edges, plus about 4 inches. Use a blunt #13 tapestry needle with a large eye, threaded with tapestry yarn. On back of rug, align binding tape with outer edge of folded foundation; pin it in place or just hold it and adjust it as you go. You will have two layers of foundation to go through, so use holes in foundation as much as possible.

Starting on a straight edge at back of rug, about 1" from a corner, insert needle through binding tape and through foundation until it comes out very close to outer row of hooking on front of rug (you can even come up between two loops or inside of a loop for a very close edge). Pull yarn through until you have about 2 inches of tail end lying in fold of foundation—you will whip over this to secure the end. Bring needle end toward you, take it over the edge and insert it into binding tape and foundation again, coming up in next foundation hole—by taking a stitch in every hole you will have a very neat edge with good coverage. Lay each pass of yarn right next to the last without overlapping to make binding dense enough to completely cover foundation, but not bulky. Pull yarn so it is secure, but not tight – pulling too tight will cause edges to buckle. As you end one length of yarn, run end under whipping stitches about 1.5 inches, and then clip off excess. Start next strip just as you did the first, and continue whipping until all edges are bound.

As you approach a corner, ease folds into binding tape to make a neat corner. When you get to a corner, you will be stitching through more layers, so take several short stitches near the tip of corner. This will help hide backing better. Next take a few stitches on opposite side to frame in corner. Take a large stitch over corner and pull it tight to shape. Now take stitches on one side, and then the other. If you gradually shorten stitches as you work toward the center, you will have a nice mitered corner. Corners are tricky, but they are important for a neat finish. If it doesn't work out the first time, carefully snip yarn, pull it out and start over. If spots of foundation are showing because your whipping was not close enough, use a single ply of yarn to touch up areas that need more yarn.