

Raffia for the Weaver

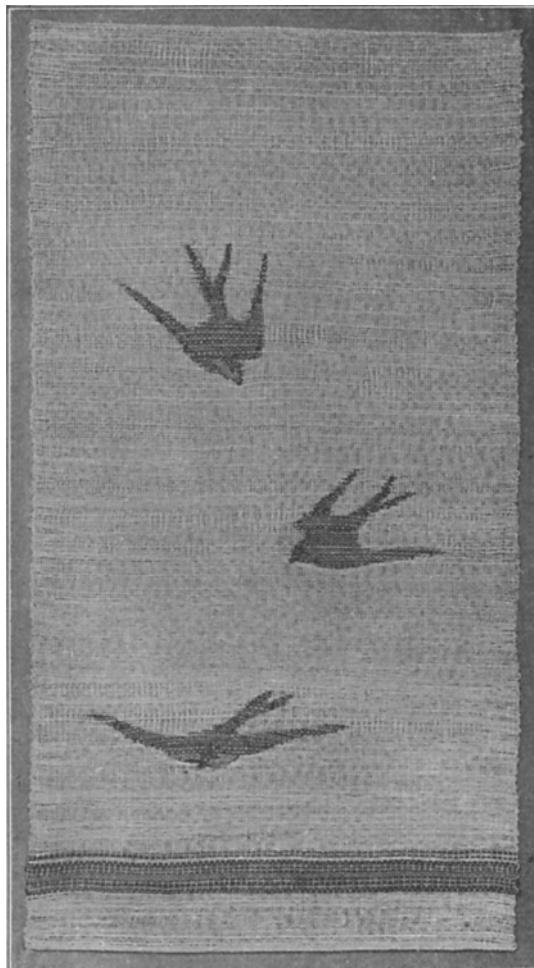
By ANNA NOTT SHOOK

THE use of raffia as a weaving material is not entirely new. For centuries the natives of Madagascar, whence all our raffia comes, have cultivated the beautiful feathery leaved palm and stripped off its thin tough skin to weave into mats. The best grade of raffia comes in strands two yards or more in length. It is of the palest straw-color, and when properly prepared is soft, pliable, and very strong. If short, dark, and ragged-looking, it is of an inferior quality and not suitable for weaving.

For outdoor furnishings raffia is unsurpassed, and the weaving of the soft, damp strands into screens, pillow-covers, mats, and other things a delightful summer occupation.

To prepare raffia for weaving, soak in warm water for an hour or more, until it is perfectly soft, like fine silk ribbon. Keep it damp by wrapping in a wet cloth or sprinkling occasionally. Unless the article to be woven is very heavy or very delicate, the strands should be split, each strand being about a quarter-inch wide when spread out like a ribbon. Ends may be spliced if they come in the middle of the warp, as they will not slip out as easily as ordinary weaving material.

When plain or natural raffia is used for the ground work, select bright, strong colors for the decoration, as the natural raffia neutralizes or seems to eat up the color that is woven into it. Do not attempt elaborate designs, especially on pillow-covers. Keep the work plain, with a close, even surface, remembering that pillows made for use should be of comfortable texture.



Veranda shade or screen

PORCH SCREENS OR WINDOW SHADES

For an old-fashioned front porch or a long veranda where a table is set for breakfast, luncheon, or tea in hot weather, or where a hammock is hung, a set of screens to shelter from the direct rays of the sun without excluding the air is delightful if the treatment of the screens is simple. Select a pattern which gives a good silhouette. Vines or branches trailed across in the Japanese style, or even broken lines, are suitable. A flight of swallows is good and easy to draw. Avoid having too many or too close together; just a few in different positions. Use black raffia for the birds, with perhaps a patch of orange on the breasts. When finished, any place that is not quite clear can be touched up with drawing ink or black paint.

Use a white cotton warp threaded eight to the inch, and for the filling natural raffia split rather fine and loosely woven, every alternate thread being cotton like the warp; two-shuttle work.

Sketch the swallows on the warp with black water-color paint, and fill in closely with black raffia split fine, carrying twice across design between each tabby. The panels may have a border of black and orange if desired. Weave a few threads of cotton at each end to make a firm edge for hemming.



Showing how a little tree can be woven

When finished the screens may be tacked on sticks and rolled like a map, left loose or attached to regular shade rollers for window shades.

PILLOW COVERS

For outdoor uses in hammock or canoe the woven raffia covers are delightful. They may be made all in one color, as red, blue, or brown on a white or yellow warp, or in stripes on a brown warp. Lavender and natural raffia on a light blue warp is nice and cool-looking. Remember to weave close and smooth. A dear little balsam pillow which breathes of the pine woods is made on a light green warp with natural raffia filling; a fir tree woven in the middle with green raffia.

Begin with the trunk, following the pattern at the top of the page, laying back and forth with each strand of tabby. When you come to the branches, weave out one side, then back to the middle, then out again, bringing the strand across this time to weave the branch on the other side. Repeat first on one side, then the other, shaping the tree as pictured. Beat close.

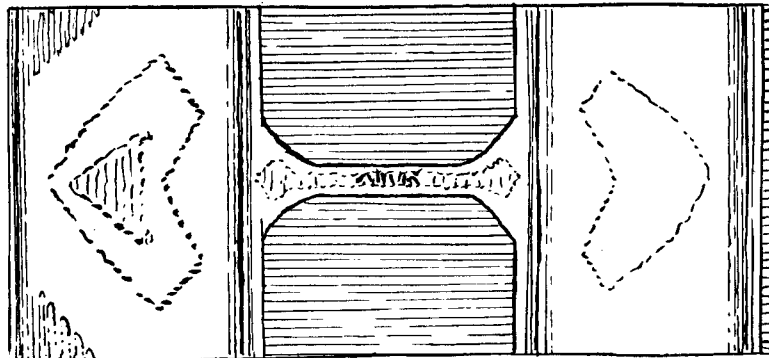


Diagram for weaving bag

UTILITY OR SCHOOL BAG

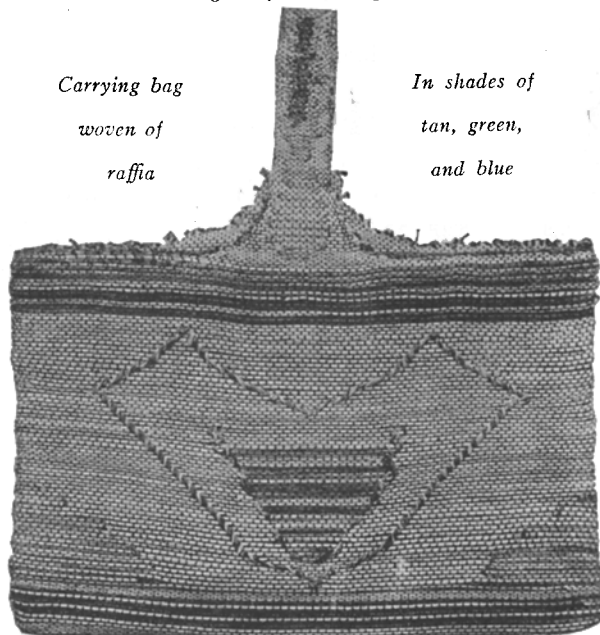
For this bag use brown cotton warp threaded eight to the inch and natural raffia filling, with red, green, and black for the design. A good size is fourteen inches wide, ten inches deep, and the handle strip twelve inches long, that is, twelve inches from the front section of the bag to the back section on the warp. The design may be outlined on the

warp with white water-color paint.

Beginning with the bottom of the bag, weave one inch plain, beating the raffia close. Splice ends of raffia as you come to them, lapping one end of the new strand about half an inch over the end of the woven strand in the same shed. Then weave border of one each of red, black, natural, red, black, natural, green, three natural, red (letting middle of strand come to middle of warp, the two ends hanging loose at each side), natural. After changing shed, weave red ends back three inches on each side; change shed, then weave them out; change shed.

To begin design in middle of bag, take a strand of red and lay it in the shed under two threads only, so the middle of the strand is in the middle of the warp. Weave one natural; change shed; lay in a strand of green

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Carrying bag woven of raffia

In shades of tan, green, and blue

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same as the red (proceeding with outer corners at the same time, alternating red and green); one natural. Follow outline of design by carrying colors up on each side, always weaving under two warp threads first the red thread, then the green; the tabby is carried all the way across. This makes a pretty outline, slightly raised, something like satin-stitch, and is applicable to many things besides raffia.

The central part of the pattern is laid in with red, green, and black carried back and forth, kept on outside until the end is reached, when it is spliced or dropped. This must be woven very close and beaten hard. Do not forget to take fresh strands of raffia and begin the point in the upper part of the design as soon as you come to it, following the pattern up and out.

When the design is finished, weave half inch plain, then a border; black, red, black, green, black, red, black, natural, red, two green, two red, green, red, green, three natural.

To make the handle, weave only five inches across in the middle, then gradually narrow by dropping off one at each side until it is an inch and a half wide. Keep this width until you have woven a nine-inch strip or the length you wish the handle to be, when it is increased again by taking up the warp threads. Colors may be woven into the handle if you choose — red, green, and a little black.

Continue with the other side of the bag, reversing the border. Weave all close and strong and keep the edges even. The finish is left to the individual taste of the worker. Warp threads are tied in pairs at the top. Back and front are joined by tying warp threads together tightly on the wrong side at the bottom and the side sewed together. All threads are then clipped. The top of the bag may be hemmed, and the bag lined or not, or used just as it is with the little row of knots across the top. A colored lining with the top hemstitched and turned over the edge like a cuff makes a pretty finish for these bags

LAMP SHADE

A lamp-shade is not difficult to make, but requires some care and patience. White warp is used, same as for the screens, and natural raffia, with a little black and orange for the pattern. For a round frame, eighteen inches across, the warp should be twenty inches wide and the woven piece sixty inches long.

The weaving is done very closely on the left side and the right side loose and open. The loose side is to be the top of the shade and is shaped over the frame, which has been wrapped with raffia, by drawing up the warp threads and tying. The ends are then clipped and the knots concealed on the under side, working the raffia over them with a hairpin. This is the part of the work which takes time and patience, but any one can do it and the result is worth the effort.

Split the raffia fine. Beginning at the left, weave all the way across the warp and back, then half-way across and back, the next time taking the strand only one-third the way across and back. Repeat and continue weaving in this way for two inches, then weave an orange strand across and back. Weave two inches natural as before. Then a black arrow, made by bringing the strand half-way across, back to left about an inch, right an inch and a half, left one inch and a half, right one inch, then back to left edge; two inches natural; orange arrow; two inches natural; black arrow; two inches natural; an orange strand as before. Repeat, making the arrow heads at different distances across the warp between the orange strands and letting ends come out at left side.

When the woven raffia is mounted on the frame, the thick edge which extends below the side of the frame is to be raveled out, and the ends trimmed. This makes a crimped fringe which should be tied every two or three inches, the knots being moistened if the strands stick out awkwardly.

Either line the shade with orange silk or leave it as it is.