

Weft-Faced Twined Bags

by Caroline Spurgeon

Introduction:

Twining is an ancient technique that is useful to all fiber artists. It is a simple form woven entirely by finger manipulation. No tools are needed. Because the equipment is low cost and the technique is simple, twining makes excellent projects for school, camp or other groups.

Twining is a simple textile construction which has as its base a set of foundation cords called the **warp**, the vertical strands. The warp strands are enclosed by the **weft**, the horizontal yarns. Twining is a technique that does not lend itself to mechanization. It has been noted that twining dies out as industrialization increases.

It is found the world over with New Zealand, Peru, India, and North America producing some of the best-known examples. Many Native Americans used twining dating back to the cliff dwellers who lived 1100 to 1300 in the Southwest. The best known example of twining is the Chilkat blanket. Attributed to the North Pacific Coast, this handsome textile continues to be made today.

Twined bags have many uses depending on the size and material from which they are made. They may be simple and durable bags for shopping, knitting or book bags or elaborate bags made with fine yarns and intricate in design.

Equipment:

In ancient times a twining loom was formed by driving two sticks into the ground. Twined fabrics can be woven on either taut or free hanging warps. Free hanging warps are the preferred method of making twined bags. Today twined bags are made on a simple, sturdy frame loom.

The loom in your kit consists of:

1 - 2" x 6" base 15" long

1 - 1" x 4" top 15" long

2 - 7/8" dowels

It is adjustable so you may make bags of many sizes. Simply decide on a size, insert the dowels in the bottom base and add the top piece.

Materials:

Materials may range all the way from fine linen to heavy cotton. This is a good time to use those left over yarns from other projects or handspun yarn that is unsuitable for other projects. Different weight yarn may be used in a bag with interesting results. Multiple strands may be held together to form a thicker weft.

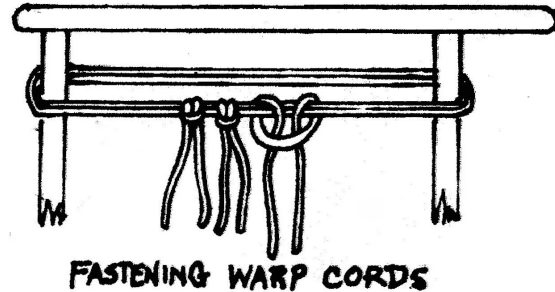
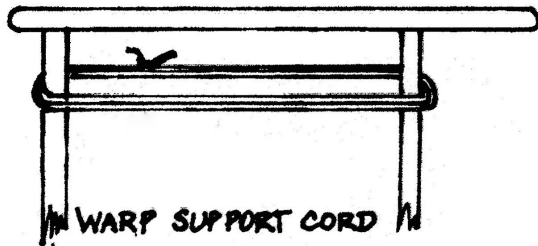
Thick, heavy yarns are most suitable for twining. Cotton or wool rug yarn works well. "Mop cotton" is available from yarn shops that deal in specialty yarns. It takes dye easily, is easy on the fingers and is a good size for warp and weft. Jute is also a satisfactory warp but is too coarse for weft.

Fabric cut in strips also makes a good weft yarn. You may wish to alternate a row of fabric with a row of yarn.

For the warp, try to choose a strong, smooth yarn with little stretch. Jute, wool or cotton may be used for the warp.

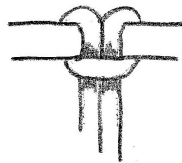
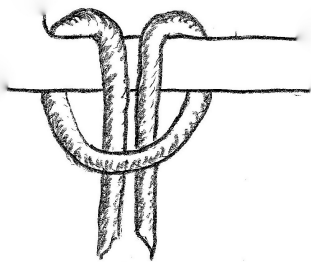
Warping:

To start a bag, wrap a strand of the warp yarn twice around the uprights of your frame and tie with a square knot. This forms the header. See figures below.

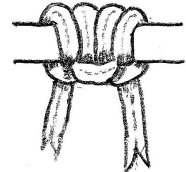
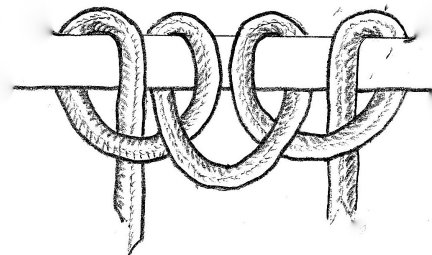


Now you are ready to attach the warp cords. Decide on the length of your bag and cut the warp strands twice the length of the bag plus six inches. The number of warp strands you will need depends on the weight of yarn and the size bag you are making.

Fold one of the strands in half and secure it to the header with a Lark's head knot or a triple lark's head. A triple Lark's head will space the warps if you are using them singly. The warp strands should touch but not pack or overlap. Continue to add warp strands, sliding the top header cord to the left, until your base cord is completely covered by warp strands. If, after weaving the first row of weaving, you do not have enough or too many warps, you may add or remove a few.



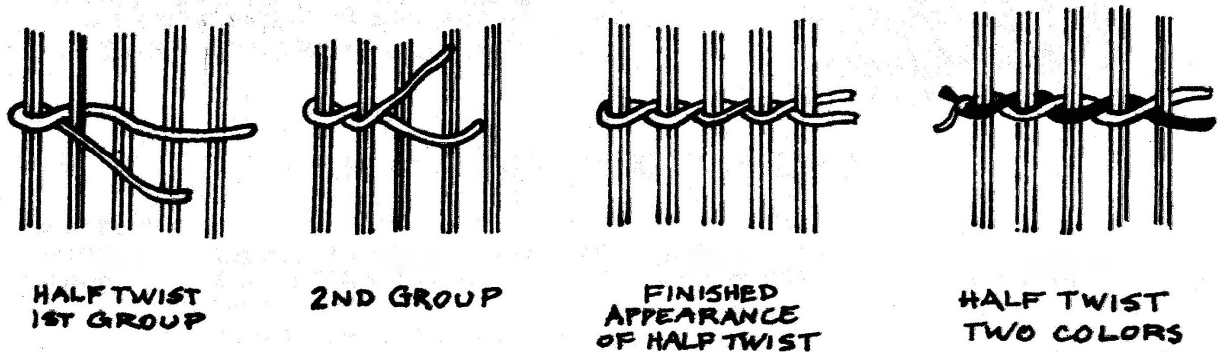
Lark's head knot



Triple Lark's head knot

Weaving:

Cut a 3-yard weft yarn, fold it in half and enclose a warp strand in the fold. You may use the warp strands in pairs or singly. With the right hand twist the weft yarn half a turn clock-wise and enclose the next warp strand between the two weft yarns, twist again a half turn and enclose the next warp cord.



Be sure that the weft yarn in front of the first warp strand is in back of the second, in front of the third, and so forth around. Continue twining in this way around the bag. Slide your header to the left so you are always working on the front of the loom. Work from left to right, pushing your work upward as you go so the warp is covered. Try to keep even tension on your weft so you have an even weave. When you reach your starting place, row 1 is complete.

Continue twining below row 1. You will see that the twining forms “stitches” which slope upward in the same direction. If you twist the 2 weft strands counter-clockwise, the “stitches” will slope downward. The direction you twist the yarns form the basic for the different design techniques. When the two weft yarns are different colors, interesting designs are achieved. You can create individual tweeds and textures by varying your choice of color and the direction you twist them.

When you reach the end of your weft yarn, knot a new length to the old and push the knot to the inside of the bag. It is better when both ends of the weft end in different spots so you don't have two knots together on the inside of your bag.

Continue weaving until your bag is the desired length. Tie a knot around the last warp threads with the two weft yarns.

Shaping is accomplished by adding or dropping warp strands. You can also reduce the width by increasing the number of warps enclosed in each twist of the weft.

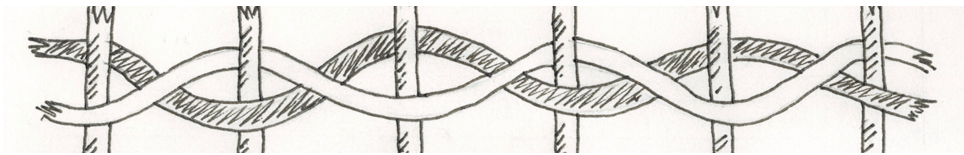
Color control is achieved in many ways. In weaving with wefts of different colors, a full turn between warps will always bring the same color to the surface, while a half turn will alternate the colors. Since either color can be brought forward at any time during the weaving, there is no limit to the two-color patterns that can be created.

Three wefts can be manipulated in a similar manner, enlarging the opportunity for design. Two yarns may be carried on the front of the weaving or on the back. Design is accomplished by bringing the desired color to the front.

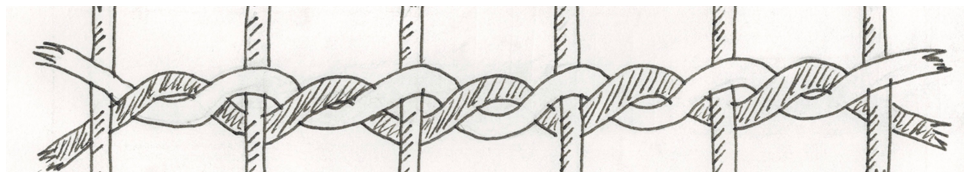
Yarns can be added in many ways so they give surface enrichment to a twined bag. Yarns may be carried over the surface and caught into the twining occasionally or surface yarns may be looped under the twining in many possible variations.

Variations of twining

HALF TURNS: Each warp is enclosed by two wefts which are given a half turn between each of the warps. The weft yarn in front of the first warp strand is in back of the second, in front of the third and so forth around. If using two colors you will have a row that alternates the colors.



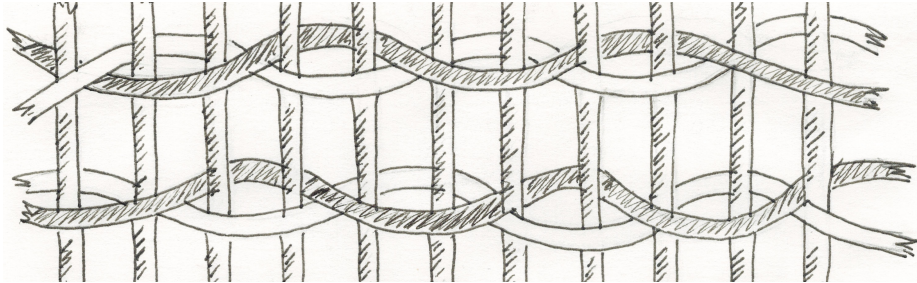
FULL TURNS: Each warp is enclosed by two wefts which are given a full turn between each of the warps. If using two colors the same color will be in front on the row.



PAIRED TWINING: Instead of a single warp, the wefts enclose a group of two warps. They may be enclosed by a half or full turn.

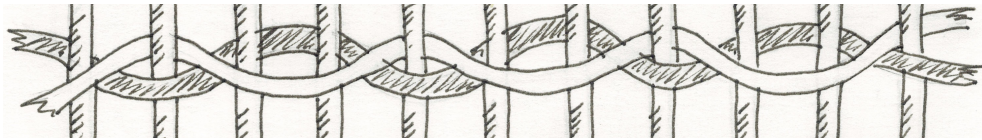


ALTERNATE PAIRED TWINING: The wefts enclose two warps but alternate groups are enclosed in every other row. For example, in row one the wefts enclose warps 1 and 2 and then 3 and 4 and so forth. In the second row the wefts enclose warps 2 and 3 and then 4 and 5. This forms a diagonal that strongly resembles a twill.

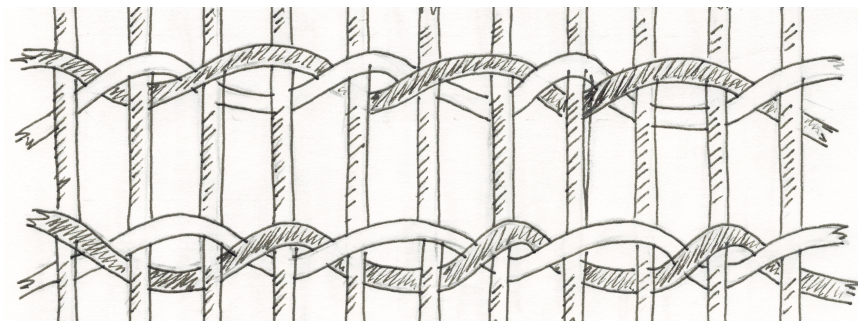


1 2 3 4 5

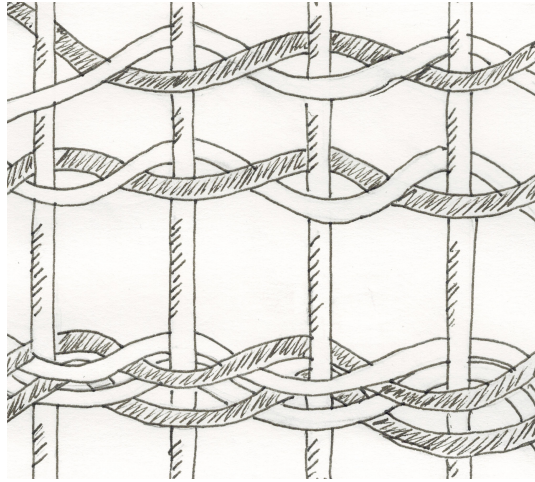
In another variation the wefts enclose first two warps and then one warp. Separate the warps with a half turn.



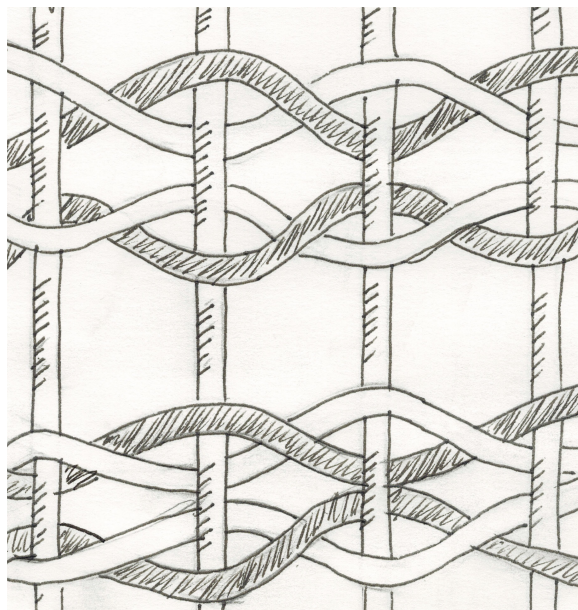
In this variation the groups are the same as above but the warps enclosed move one warp to the right in each successive row.



COMPACT TWINING: Simple twining is repeated row after row and is firmly beaten. This makes a thick fabric that is slightly elastic. The wefts cross each other in the same direction in each row.



COUNTERED TWINING: The first row of wefts is turned clockwise but the second row the wefts are turned in the opposite direction. Many small repeat patterns may be created by use of color.



Finishing:

There are several ways to finish your bag. First, remove the top bar of the loom and slide the bag off your loom.

1 - Turn the bag inside out and knot the ends of the warp strands together.

2 - Fringe can be made by taking two strands from the front and two from the back and tying them together in an overhand knot.

3 - Another method of fringing the bag is made by holding the front and back together and twining back and forth holding warps from the front and back together. Twine back and forth for three or four rows to secure your twining.

4 - A shaped bottom may be made by tying double half hitches with the warp strands around a new length of warp cord. Continue the double half hitches around until the desired shape is achieved.

The type of handle is determined by the ultimate use of the bag. They may be made of yarn and plied, braided or knotted. Leather is also a practical handle. Handles may be attached to the inside or outside of the bag and may be decorative as well as functional. Fasteners may be added as desired and you may embellish the bag with beads or other decorative items. You may also choose to line your bag. However you decide to finish your bag it will give you pleasure to use and last many years. Relax and enjoy this natural, harmonious process.

May you always weave in beauty,
Caroline