

## Resources for Teachers of Beginner Rug Braiders: Continuous Oval

This document pulls together a list of Resources for Teachers of Beginner Rug Braiders. It was assembled by the Education Committee of the Valley Forge Rug Braiding Guild in 2024. This document includes oval rug course plans by Nancy Young, Norma Sturges, Mary Hibbard, and Christine Manges.

### Course Plan for Teaching an Oval Rug in Person

#### I. Course Set-Up

**A. Room Layout** – most teachers are comfortable just having the students at a large table or two rectangular tables shoved together, and walking around the outside to critique students' work. Additional tables off to either side can be for display of rugs and equipment.

**B. Number of Students** – most teachers are only comfortable teaching a maximum of 8 students at a time. If more students are planned, it would be advisable to have an assistant teacher.

#### C. Equipment

- 1. Sewing Machines:** Two if possible... but you can teach with hand-sewn seams if desired.
- 2. Ironing Board:** Not needed unless the teacher plans to work with pre-pressed strips.
- 3. Older wooden tables instead of plastic ones,** (IF you are using table clamps such as the Verna Cox, Rigby, or LeSure metal clamps, because those clamps only accommodate up to 1.5" thick tables-tops). If you are using Braid Stands *or* Peggyann Watts' Big Mouth Clamps ([belfastbraids@gmail.com](mailto:belfastbraids@gmail.com)), then plastic tables are fine.
- 4. Braid Stands or Braid Clamps:** some teachers loan their students these items; some require that students purchase them. Many table clamps only fit onto older wooden tables: see comments under #3. Janice Lyle demonstrated a very simple and inexpensive braid clamp: using a spring clamp (battery clamp or hand grip clamp) and a piece of 1" wide elastic and a wooden chair, tie the elastic around the top rail of the chair and knot it. Take the braid, hold it next to the knotted elastic, and clamp both the braid and the elastic together. When the braid is too long, unclamp the braid from the elastic and move the braid to make it shorter; re-clamp the braid and the elastic.
- 5. Braid-Aids:** A lot of teachers like them, but some do not. They reduce student frustration from learning to finger-fold raw edges of strips inward. Only one kind is still made: Braid-Masters, which are sold by Halcyon Yarn and Country Braid House, in sets of three, for \$13. The Braid-Masters only accommodate 1.5" wide strips, and they do not work well with thin wool (example: unwashed Dorr solids). They do work well with washed Dorr and heavier weights.  
Some teachers desiring to work with the larger, old-style of braid-aids called Vari-Folders will loan these devices to their students. Some teachers will ask students to purchase them on used online platforms such as eBay and Etsy. The larger Vari-folders can accommodate up to 2.25" width of strip, and can be tightened up when working with thin material. These are often more expensive.  
Teachers who do not like working with braid-aids ask their students to finger-fold, or pre-press their wool, or pre-sew their wool's folded edges.

6. **Other Braid Kit Equipment:** Some teachers provide a kit for a fee; some give students information about where to purchase these items.

- a. Braidkin lacing needle
- b. #16 or #18 tapestry needle, for burying knots
- c. Needle-nosed Pliers or a Hemostat (5-6")
- d. Lacing cord (#9 cotton splicing cord or linen or waxed linen or nyltex)
- e. Rubber bands, for rolling up strips
- f. Safety pins, of several sizes
- g. Ball-headed straight pins, for marking skips/increases
- h. Clothespin, as a working end clamp
- i. Needle and thread; thimble if needed
- j. Sewing scissors
- k. A 4" X 8" plastic pencil case to fit all kit items

#### D. Fabric

In general, there is agreement that a 2' X 3' oval requires about 4.25 to 5 yards of wool fabric. Some teachers choose to make a smaller mat, such as 9" X 15", which would only require about 1.25 yards of wool.

Most teachers prefer that their students work with wool and encourage them to find approximately 5 skirts or pants at thrift stores or in friends' closets. Wool jackets are still obtainable in thrift stores; about 7 or 8 jackets may be required due to unusable portions.

Several teachers expressed concern about the fabric kits available from Country Braid House: they have been sending students wool of such varied weights that it has been extremely frustrating for students to work with, and CBH has not improved with feedback.

Several teachers suggested having non-wool options for students, such as corduroy or napped upholstery fabric or heavy denim. There was general consensus that polyester fleece was not a good idea unless it was being recycled, because it is a petroleum product. Even when being recycled, poly-fleece can be difficult due to the great disparity in possible fabric weights, leading to bad-looking braids of unequal loop sizes.

Instructing students using recycled wool on washing fabrics at different temperature and agitation settings depending on the wool content and the estimated fabric weight could be part of class prep, or part of the first class.

## II. Course Content

A. **Handout** – Beginner oval handouts are available from Christine Manges for teachers. They are for use by Valley Forge Guild members who are teachers. They are not for personal publication. [ccmanges@gmail.com](mailto:ccmanges@gmail.com)

#### B. 5 Sessions or 6 Sessions?

Teachers were not in complete agreement as to how many sessions were necessary; the decision depends in part on how much is accomplished in the first session: see below.

C. **Butting** as the last part of a Beginner Course? Teacher consensus: No.

D. **Slide Show** of oval rugs with Color Choices is helpful.

#### E. **First Class: Two pathways**

1. Goal of 1<sup>st</sup> class is to make a T-Start and begin braiding only.

Justification: Homework can focus on wool acquisition, washing, and strip prep.

2. Goal of 1<sup>st</sup> Class is to get students braiding up to and just beyond the set of double corners at the hairpin turn. Also... put a pattern at the rug's border.

Justification: If students get to just beyond the hairpin turn, their homework can be to braid several feet of braid. It gets students engaged with braiding quickly.

Note: The teacher using this approach schedules 2.5 hours for the first class only. Other classes are 1.5 – 2 hours.

**1st Pathway: Get to T-Start (Hibbard)****First Class: List of Skills/Steps**

- Introductions; who has braided before?
- Pass out flyers on Valley Forge Guild!!!
- Review tools/kit/websites for supplies
- Fabrics discussion: wool weights, other fabrics, washing fabrics
- Cut/tear strips; roll them up
- Seam Strips/Add Length: diagonal seam
- Optional: Braid aids
- Other methods of folding raw edges of strips inward
- Make a T-Start
- Flip the 1st strand of T to get all folds on one side
- Begin to braid
- Difference between plait and braid
- Keep folds to one side
- Determine length of center braid

**Homework:** Acquire more wool (if needed); wash, take apart used garments, prepare and roll up strips; braid 13" for centerline.

**2nd Class:** Questions? Problems?

- Importance of maintaining braid gauge
- Braid two double corners for hairpin turn
- Continue to straight braid about 18-24 inches
- If e-lacing: knot lacing cord, bury knot betw folds
- Thread a braidkin
- Lace the center line: shoe-lace or e-lace
- Splicing cord: how to splice
- Linen or Nyltex: knot lacing cord; bury ends

**Homework:** Braid 6 more feet

**3rd Class:** Questions? Problems?

- Lace around T-Start
- Regular lace on straight sides
- Lace around 2-DC curve
- Anatomy of Oval Rug: location of row changes
- Mark 1st & 2nd curves in a row (1 & 2 pins)
- Theory of skips/increases on curves: multiple of 3
- Make 2<sup>nd</sup> curve skip# match 1<sup>st</sup> curve skip#

**Homework:** lace first 3-4 rows, be ready for a color change

**4th Class:** Questions? Problems?

- Share pictures of color changes
- Where to change colors
- How to change colors
- How many colors to change?

**Homework:** Braid & lace more rows and be ready for a taper

**5th Class:** Questions? Problems?

- Work on tapers
- Steam-pressing vs cold-pressing a rug
- Take photos and celebrate

**2nd Pathway: Get to 2-DC Turn (Manges)****First Class: List of Skills/Steps\* Takes 2.5 hrs**

- Introductions
- Pass out flyers on Valley Forge Guild!!!
- Review tools/kit/ websites for supplies
- Fabrics discussion: wool weights, other fabrics, washing fabrics
- Cut/tear strips; roll them up
- Seam Strips/Add Length: diagonal seam
- Optional: Braid aids
- Other methods of folding raw edges of strips inward
- Make a T-Start
- Flip the 1st strand of T to get all folds on one side
- Begin to braid • Keep folds to one side
- Difference between plait and braid
- Determine length of center braid
- Braid two double corners for hairpin turn

**Homework:** Acquire more wool (if needed); wash, take apart used garments, prepare and roll up strips; braid 6 feet

**2nd Class:** Questions? Problems?

- Importance of maintaining braid gauge
- If e-lacing: knot lacing cord, bury knot betw folds
- Thread a braidkin
- Lace the center line: shoe-lace or e-lace
- Splicing cord: how to splice
- Linen or Nyltex: knot lacing cord; bury ends
- Lace around T-Start
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- Anatomy of Oval Rug: location of row changes
- Mark 1st & 2nd curves in a row (1 & 2 pins)
- Theory of skips/increases on curves: multiple of 3
- Make 2<sup>nd</sup> curve skip# match 1<sup>st</sup> curve skip#

**Homework:** Lace first 3-4 rows; braid more, be ready for a color change

**3rd Class:** Questions? Problems?

- Share pictures of color changes
- Where to change colors
- How to change colors
- How many colors to change?
- Patterns (dots, arrowhead, zigzag, etc)
- Discussion of maintaining a pattern on the curves vs. dropping the pattern on curves

**Homework:** Braid & lace more rows; make a color change if haven't already

**4th Class:** Questions? Problems?

- Work on a pattern in the border?
- Teacher demonstrates a taper

**Homework:** Finish braiding and lacing a border pattern and get ready for taper.

--(Helps to have a week off for students to catch up)--

**5th Class:** Questions? Problems?

- Questions? Problems? • Work on tapers
- Steam-pressing vs cold-pressing a rug
- Take photos and celebrate!

From Nancy Young's "Braid On" booklet:

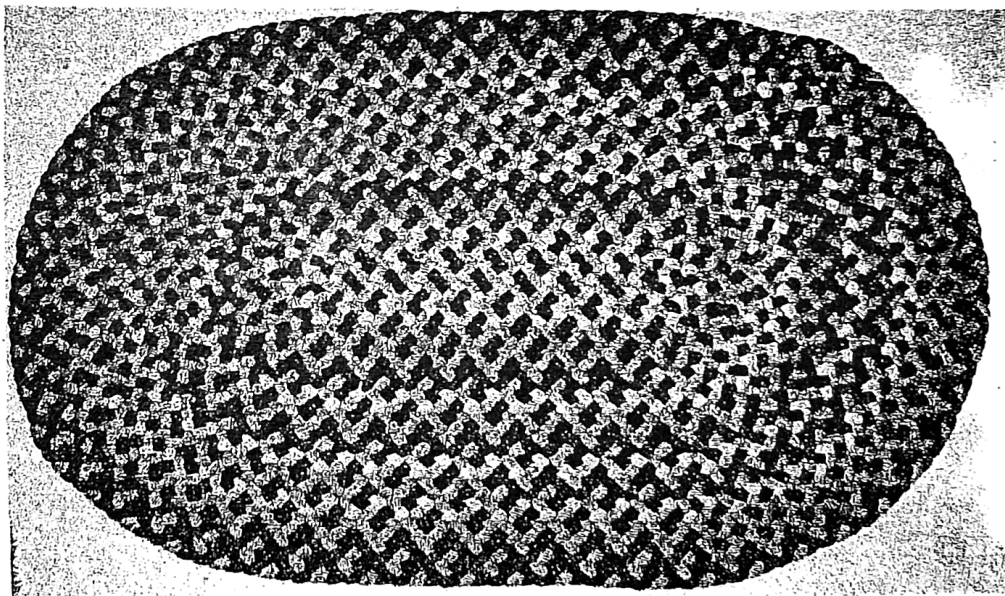
## GENERAL KIT FOR A 2' X 3' RUG

In order to make a kit available for those who took my classes in braiding, I had to come up with something which was not only portable, but also flexible enough so that the students could have something they liked, color wise, to work on. To this end, I found that one kit for a 2 x 3 foot rug, could be used with several variations in the patterns. The basic "kit" contained one and one half yards of each of two fabrics. I tried to have one of these a dark fabric, and the second one a light color, a tweed, a check, or a plaid. Then I also included five quarter yard pieces which would be used all through the piece, but in different ways. I called these the "random" colors. I also brought along at least twenty quarter-yard pieces in bright colors any of which could be chosen as a substitute, one on one for any of the "random" colors which the student wanted to change. Below are the ways in which these kits could be braided. Both the general directions, followed by a picture.

### #1 HIT OR MISS

Call the five quarter-yard pieces A, B, C, D, E. Use the large, 1 1/2 yard pieces, one strip of each, throughout the entire rug.

Then choose one of the medium colored random pieces (call this A) and begin to braid these three strands until the first A strip runs out. Then join it to B, and braid that to the end, followed by C and so forth. When one has braided a sequence of all 5 colors, then return and begin with A again and continue until the rug is 14 rounds. (28 braids across). The rug should measure 2' by 3' at this point. Hopefully there should be some fabric left over.



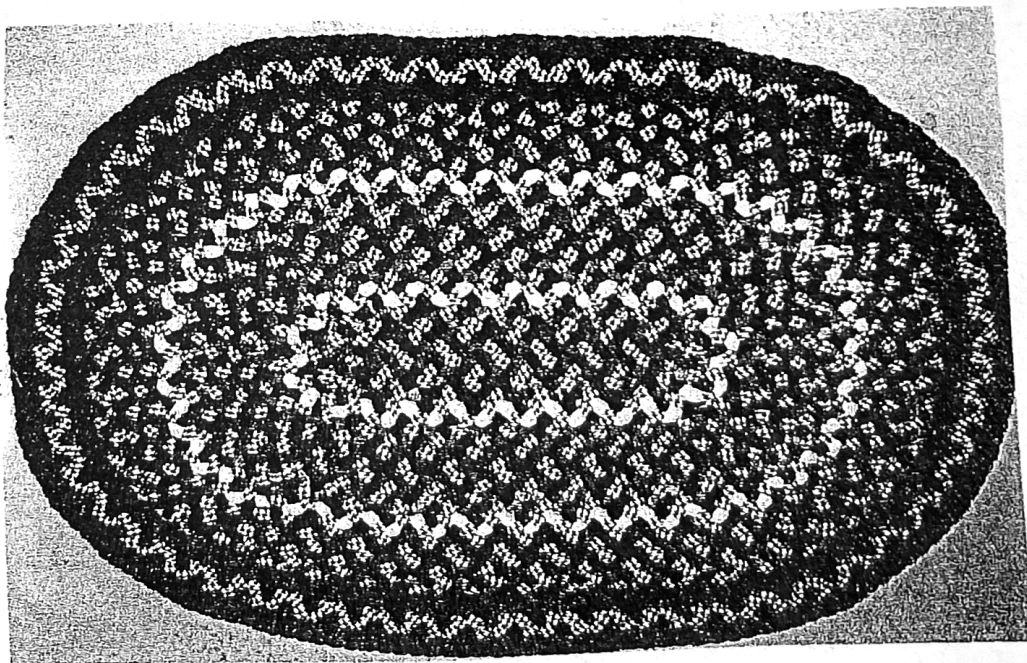
## #2 INDEPENDENT ROWS

Using the same kit as above, and again, calling the random colors A,B,C,D,E, begin with what ever you choose to be A. But, only braid it and lace it on as far as it will go on one complete round. When the braid begins to repeat, around the beginning of the braid, then change the A color to color B...and again, continue one full round with B. When B finishes one complete circuit, then attach C and so forth until all five colors have been used to complete the first five rounds on the rug. Then repeat the same colors in sequence until the end of the rug. The 2'x 3' rug will be finished when it is 14 rows. This means that if each row is a single circuit of each color, A,B,C,D,and E...that all five colors will be repeated almost three times. The final row will end with the third round of D. Using this pattern gives the student plenty of practice in learning how to change colors so that they do not show...both where to change them, and HOW to change them. The last loop of the finished fabric should appear on the inside of the braid, while the color it is joined to should appear on the outside of the braid as it straightens out along the side.

## #3 INDEPENDENT ROWS WITH A BORDER

This is very similar to pattern #2, but the rug is tapered after the 11<sup>th</sup> round. The 12 and 14<sup>th</sup> rounds drop the lighter of the continuous color. ( the plaid, check, tweed)...and the 13th round uses two strands of this lighter color, and also what ever of the random colors has enough of a strip left, to braid around the rug at that point. Depending on which of the random colors is chosen, it could be short just a few inches, in which case one has to be creative in finding a color that is similar to complete the row.

Using this pattern not only gives students practice in knowing how and when to change colors, but also practice butting. It is therefore the most challenging way to use the kit. But it is also the favorite look for many



### DESIGN AND QUANTITIES FOR A 2' X 3' BRAIDED RUG, USING FOUR DIFFERENT COLORS

The X,Y,Z,W letters are used in a general way to indicate the four different colors, and where they are placed in the rug. The chart below gives the plan for each of 14 rounds, which should be enough to get the indicated size. The chart also gives the length of the braid needed to complete each round as well as the strip length, so one can plan ahead. To use this chart effectively, make a copy of it and write in the exact colors you have chosen for X,Y,Z and W.

COMBINATIONS

**Suggestions**

for the X fabric, 1 5/8 yds (dark)

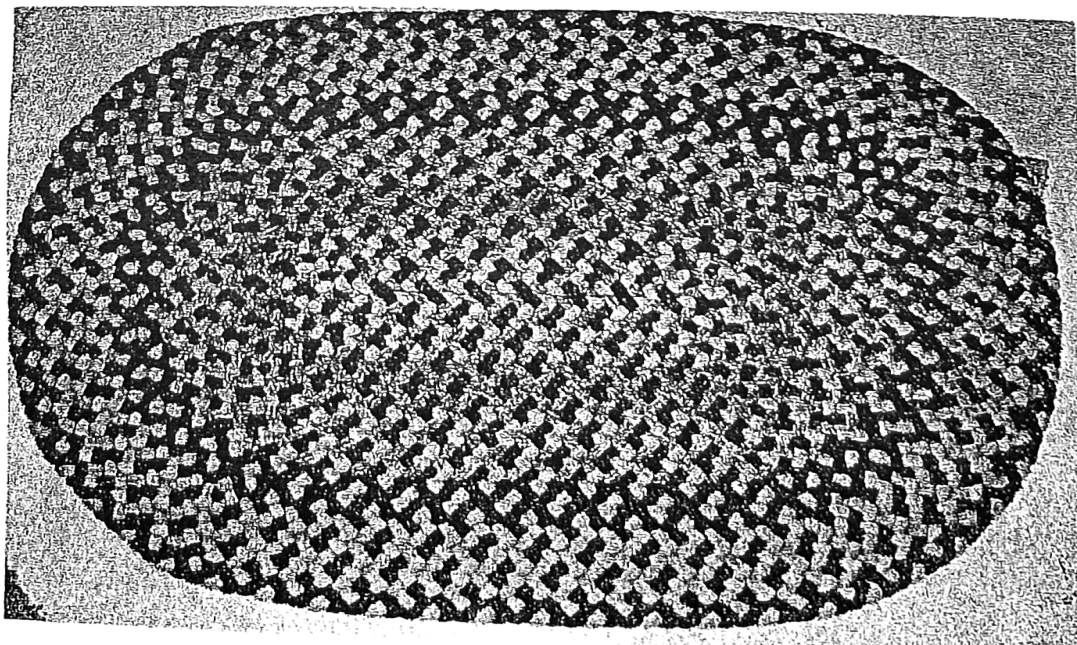
for the Y fabric, 1/2 yd (bright)

for the Z fabric, 3/4 yd (tweed or plaid)

for the W fabric 1 yd (medium or light color)

round	braid lgth	strip lgth	color	color	color
1	25	37.5	X	Y	Z
2	31	46.5	X	Y	Z
3	37	55.5	X	Y	Z
4	43	64.5	X	Z	Z
5	49	73.5	X	Z	Z
6	55	82.5	X	W	Z
7	61	91.5	X	W	Z
8	67	100.5	X	W	Z
9	73	109.5	X	W	X
10	79	118.5	X	W	X
11	85	127.5	X	W	Y
12	91	136.5	X	W	Y
13	97	145.5	X	W	Y
14	103	154.5	X	W	X
SUM	896 in	1344 in			

} A  
 } B  
 } C  
 } D  
 } E  
 } F



From Norma Sturges' *The Braided Rug Book*:

## *Lesson Plan*



I have included the following lesson plan for readers interested in teaching rug braiding. This plan has worked for me. It shows the steps needed to finish a rug in six weeks.

### **Lesson 1**

1. Talk about wool, equipment, cost, design, and use of color.
2. Explain how to measure for the size rug you want.
3. Show samples of steps in making the *T*. Pass out practice strips; start braiding the *T*.
4. Pass out Braid-Klamps; talk about Braid-Aids, and distribute, if requested.
5. Practice braiding; teach corner, turn, and how to add another strip of wool.
6. Teach how to count five rows.
7. Assignment for next week: Purchase wool, repeat *T*, braid 13 inches (33.5 cm), turn the corner, and braid as much as you can (up to five rows).

### **Lesson 2**

1. Teach center lacing, then teach lacing technique for the rest of the rug.
2. Show how to make a square knot.
3. Teach color change.
4. Assignment for next week: Finish lacing five rows, change color, and continue braiding.

### **Lessons 3 and 4**

1. Check on progress of lacing and other techniques.
2. Continue braiding, lacing, and changing colors.
3. Assignment for next week: Braid and lace ten rows.
4. Be ready to rattail in class at the end of row 15.

### **Lesson 5**

1. Do rattailing.
1. Show how to start butting.
3. Assignment for next week: Start to butt; braid and lace around rug for one or two rows.

### **Lesson 6**

1. Butt one or two rows.
2. Celebrate the students' completion of their rugs. Photograph the rugs.