

Tricks of the Trade

Tips for cutting fabric strips for weft

FROM DEBRA SHARPEE

There are three basic ways to prepare fabric strips. All of them work, some tools are just higher tech!



TIP. When you want a folded rag strip, you can use a bias tape maker to create the folds. Feed the strip through the tool and then press.

Before you even think about cutting it, wash the fabric. If the fabric is not colorfast, if it might shrink, or if it just has cooties—take care of that before it goes into a lovely handwoven. I wash the fabric at least as aggressively as I'll ever wash the finished textile.

Ripping strips

You can rip your strips. This is low-tech, sustainable and earth-friendly, but really dusty. I make small cuts along the grain of the fabric where I want the strips to be. It can then be taken outside, and you can proceed to scare the small neighborhood children with your dust mask du jour. This works best with fabric that is 100% cotton. The torn strips create a fuzzy or misty look to the finished rug. Bear in mind the final look that you are aiming for when considering this method.

Cutting with scissors


I use Gingher shears—a knife-edge utility shears used by the industry for cutting things like leather. There is also a left-handed version. The fulcrum (that part that holds the two halves of the scissors together) is farther down the blade to give great leverage, allowing you to cut several layers at

once. Sharpen scissors often. Hide them from paper/wire/whatever-cutting family members.

Using rotary cutters

Non-electric rotary cutters are in almost universal use by quilters. Great tool! Watch those fingers! Use a clear plastic rectangle with a measuring grid as a straight edge.

An electric rotary cutter is a tool with a capital T. I have used mine to cut through ten layers of corduroy! I can well imagine that it could cut through your fingers with the same ease, so watch out. I especially like the Eastman Rotary Cutter, Chickadee II, model D2. Some might call it pricey, but consider how many rugs you will weave over your lifetime. Who can put a price on making the experience all that much more fun? It's certainly cheaper than any treatment for carpal-tunnel syndrome.

I carefully fold the fabric I want to cut into about six layers. Using chalk and a straight edge, I then mark the top layer of fabric for cutting. Keeping fingers, toes, small children and pets out of the way, you can then cut your strips quickly and safely. Add about ten percent for warp and weft take-up. 

Tools for cutting fabric strips



scissors



rotary cutter



electric rotary cutter

PHOTOS BY DEBRA SHARPEE