

A Warp-Faced Dog Leash

woven on a tape loom

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Here's a simple project that can be done on a shaft loom, rigid heddle loom, inkle loom, or, if you're lucky enough to have one, a special loom called a tape loom. Warp-faced tapes are like inkle-woven bands, but tape looms are different from inkle looms. Most tape looms have warp beams, allowing for long warps, and tape-loom sheds are made with one or two rigid heddles. This dog leash is woven in a variation of a historical tape pattern.

Handwoven animal leads are very rare today, but as recently as two hundred years ago, handwoven tapes were used as leads for horses and other farm animals.

Handwoven tape: history

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Pennsylvania Germans of rural south-central Pennsylvania relied heavily on handwoven tape for their family needs. Because of its strength and colorful patterns, handwoven tape served many important farm uses. Yards of tape were woven and stored in baskets so family members could cut off pieces as needed.

One of the most important uses for these long, narrow bands of linen, hemp, wool, or cotton was securing clothes. In pre-zipper days, tapes provided men's suspenders, drawstrings for women's petticoats, apron straps, garters (these were pre-elastic days for socks, too!) bonnet straps, and shoestrings. Tapes were used as wicks for candles and oil lamps, tabs for hand towels, and ties for bags. The



Baskets were filled with lengths of tape, allowing pieces to be cut off as needed.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAE NEWHOUSE

term "tape measure" comes from handwoven tape.

Tape weaving was done mostly by women and children. Considering that families often included ten or more children, a lot of tape could be woven (and a lot was needed)! Home weaving of tape diminished in the middle of the nineteenth century, when textile mills began to mass produce twill tape.

The tape loom

Tape looms were usually built by the men of the family in whatever wood was available, so they were made in a wide range of shapes and styles. Even so, there are three basic tape-loom types (see page 3): the

floor or standing loom with two treadles, rigid heddles, and warp and cloth beams (Photo a); the more common box-type loom without treadles (Photo b); and the simple paddle (Photo c), which was usually held between the weaver's legs, with the warp threads tied to a table leg instead of wound on a warp beam.

For both the box loom and paddle, to apply tension to the warp and make the sheds, the weaver holds the warp just below the fell of the cloth.

Although woven tape is very similar to the bands produced by an inkle loom, tapes are usually not wider than $\frac{5}{8}$ ". The advantage of a tape loom (except for the paddle style) over an inkle loom lies in its built-in warp beam with ratchet-and-pawl, which allows the beaming of many yards at one time. Very long lengths of tape can therefore be woven without rewarping the loom.

Tape-woven patterns are determined by the color sequence of the warp threads. Tapes are completely warp-faced—only the warp threads can be seen. Traditional Pennsylvania German tape patterns were shared throughout a community and consisted mostly of checkerboards, vertical stripes, dots, and bars. Tape colors were the natural colors of the fibers as well as the colors obtained from available natural dyes: indigo blue, madder red, and lots of browns, tans, and golds.



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