BASIC TABLET WEAVING
by Cara Wythers

EQUIPMENT:
You’ll need Yarn, Tablets, a Loom, a Shuttle

Yarn: For your first few projects, you should probably avoid the really fine threads. My first tablet woven project used yarn from Wal-Mart. Crochet thread is also cheap and works very well. Once you get accustomed to tablet weaving, you may want to purchase Perle Cotton, Silk Threads, etc. Most yarns and threads will work.

Tablets: Also called Cards. What you need are squares with holes at the corners. You can purchase sets of cards or tablets from fiber supply shops and some SCA merchants. Some people make them from leather, wood or cardboard. In period, they were also made of bone, and one set I’ve heard of was made of ivory. My first set was made from a deck of playing cards that kept beating me in Solitaire. Most tablets have four holes although there are some having less or more (3,6,8, etc.). This set of instructions is meant for tablets with four holes, which are the most common.

Loom: Below is what is commonly sold as a modern inkle loom in fiber shops and a few SCA merchants. (It can also be used for tablet weaving) The illustrations I’ve seen of period tablet looms were a couple of posts connected together by a crossbeam. Extra warp was probably secured on spools, which were secured to the posts or was wrapped around the posts, which may have turned. This way, you could work more than just the space between the two posts. My first loom was similar in that it was two legs of a dorm loft.

Shuttle: Shuttles are sold in fiber shops or by some SCA merchants. Basically a shuttle is a device that holds the yarn, making it easy to pass through the shed and has a straight fine edge for the purpose of packing down the weft threads. You could also make small skeins of the weft-yarn and pass it through the shed, then use a ruler to pack it down.
Other Terms:
Warp: The string that goes on the loom before you start the weaving
Weft: The string you weave through the warp
Tension Adjustment: The part of the loom that you would adjust to make up for the fact that as you weave, the woven piece is shorter than the original warp is making the warp tighter and tighter on the loom.

The tension adjustment is not absolutely necessary if you are using table legs or bed posts as your first loom. But do keep in mind that the more you weave, the shorter and tighter the warp will get. This may end your first project before you weave as much as you wanted if you don’t take this into account.

GETTING STARTED

Tablet weaving is a type of “warp-faced” weaving. Basically, that means that it’s the warp that you see and that makes up the pattern. To the side is an illustration of what it would look like if you used just one tablet. You’d get a cord that would have 1 predominant color on each turn of the tablet and each turn would be kept in place by the weft-thread running through it. Using many tablets together and you get a belt, trim, ribbon, straps, etc.

As you twist and weave the yarn, twist builds up in the unwoven warp. After a while, you need to turn around and go the other way to unwind it. In basic tablet weaving, you turn the tablets four times forward, then four back, then four forward, then four back, and so on. This makes a sort of symmetry in the weaving, so take this into account when you make your pattern.

The pattern can be expressed as a grid. The grid is four by the number of tablets you’re using. 10 tablets are good to start with. The four rows on the grid represent four holes in the tablets which are often marked A, B, C and D on the tablets. If you made your own tablets, you may want to mark the corners with colored marker.

This pattern works out to look like this on the loom.
To start you have to warp your loom. Thread the yarn around the loom and through the tablets, then tie them off. Make sure you get the letters on the tablets lined up with each other. IMPORTANT NOTE: Weaving will be easier if as you thread the tablets, on one tablet you have the threads coming from one direction, and on the next, you have the threads coming form the other. So every other tablet would be S (the slant in the middle of the S matches the slant of the tablet \) and the others would be threaded Z (the slant in the middle of the Z matches the slant of the tablet /).

This will make it easier as you turn the tablets. The yarn won’t tend to get caught on the tablets so much. This does alter the pattern a bit.

The one on the left is not alternated, the one on the right is.

Once you get your loom warped, it’s time to start weaving. Pass the shuttle through the shed and leave some weft sitting on the warp. You won’t need to tie a knot, as the weft will be secure after a few passes. Turn the tablets forward making a new shed. Use the edge of the shuttle to pack down the new shed and make it even. You don’t need to pack it all the way down to the tension knob. Pass the weft through the new shed. Turn the tablets forward again, pack down, and then pass the weft through the shed. Turn, pack and weave two more times. Then do the same thing only changing the direction the tablets are turning. So you’ll turn, pack and weave four times forward, then turn, pack and weave four times back, then four times forward, and so on.

It often takes and inch or so at the beginning to find your pattern. Sometimes, due to the way the tablets and turned (that S and Z thing) the pattern doesn’t look quite right. Look on the bottom of what you’ve done so far. Your pattern is probably there. In that case, you can either live with the fact that your pattern is on the bottom or keep turning the same direction four past where you were supposed to change directions and then change directions. Pick up going back and forth but now with the pattern on the top.

Have fun weaving.

FIBER SUPPLY SHOPS
Yarn Barn – 930 Massachusetts, Lawrence, Kansas 66044 – www.yarnbarn-ks.com
The Woolery – P.O. Box 468, Murfreesburo, North Carolina 27855 – www.thewoolery.com
Hill Creek Fiber Studio – 7001 Hillcreek Rd., Columbia, Missouri 65203 – www.hillcreekfiberstudio.com

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