

# HANDWEAVING

## NEWS

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Choice of a Loom.

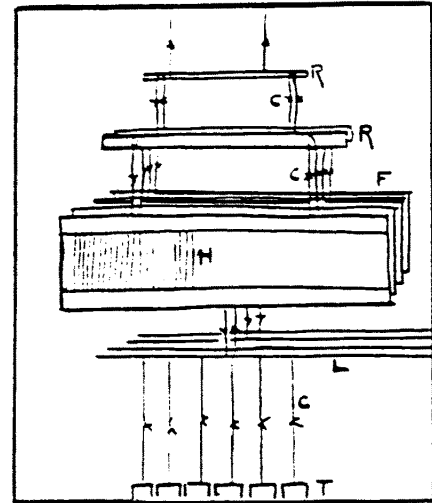


Diagram of Loom Tie-up

The choice of a loom is an important question. It represents a fair amount of expenditure and is a more or less permanent investment. There are many excellent looms being built, but which of these to select is often a difficult problem. It is hoped that some of the suggestions given here will be of some help.

1. Consideration of the person who is to use the loom. This is the first thing to be considered. Is the weaver small, large, in full physical health or handicapped in some way, and how old are they?

2. For what kind of weaving is the loom to be used? Is it going to be used for the weaving of all kinds of textiles, fine and heavy, as rugs and linens as well? There are looms which will weave both kinds of fabrics, but a loom to weave heavy rugs should be heavy and firm to stand much hard beating, while a lighter loom would be entirely suited for linens, bags, coverlets, etc.

3. Looms for school use. In the elementary schools, small looms which children can handle easily are most advisable for several reasons. No small child should work a large heavy rug loom on account of their size. And secondly the cost of the yarns to operate a rug is generally much more than the average school child can afford, and if furnished by the school these weaving supplies are expensive. A large floor loom in the average public school room takes up too much storage space and at best will keep not more than two children, out of a class of 40 or more, busy at once. Small 12" heddle looms tied into plain wood frames are inexpensive and easy for children to use, and can be stored into a small space. The total cost of these is only \$3.75 each. The small 4 harness Structo No. 240 loom is also very satisfactory for school use, and the cost of this is only \$10.00. For college work both of these small looms are excellent for experimental samples, the learning of different techniques, and to enable students to become familiar with what happens with different kinds of yarns and threads when woven. And they may be easily carried back and forth to school if desired. The 20" Jenness two harness loom at \$15.00 is also an excellent loom for school use too. In any kind of school work where there is room for several looms, it seems to me that it is an advantage to have as many different kinds of looms available for student use as is possible, so they can become familiar with them, and know the good points about each in comparison to their cost, and what they will do.

4. Other points to think about are the cost of the loom, how much space will it require? Is it to be used in a small apartment, a large studio, or a hobby room? Would it be an advantage to have a folding floor loom which could be easily carried in the ordinary space in an automobile? In other words the kind of a loom you buy should fit your needs.

5. Buy your loom from a well established responsible firm. It is easy to determine whether a company is a reputable firm or not. Occasionally something on the loom may need to be replaced, although on a good loom this does not happen often. But if it does happen, make sure that the loom is standard enough so it can be replaced. I know of one company who makes looms and it is almost impossible to get any parts for looms made three or four years ago, they make a new experimental loom each year, instead of manufacturing a standard loom they can stick to. A short time ago several subscribers sent me a clipping from a newspaper containing the statement that there was only one man in the country who makes satisfactory looms, that these were all made by hand, and that he was slow on delivery because he could only make 100 looms a year. I was asked if this were true. Now I do happen to know that this particular man does make an excellent loom, and it is true that he makes them by hand. But simply making them by hand makes them no better than a machine made loom from a mechanical, useful, point of view. We are living in a machine tool age and it is silly to say that a hand loom cannot be built satisfactorily with machine tools. The loom is built to do handweaving, and a machine made loom, provided it is built properly, is exactly as good as a hand made loom as far as the finished weaving is concerned.

6. Mechanically a loom should be strong, well built of seasoned wood which will not warp or crack under hard use. It should be good to look at - good in design- and not too fussy. And to be strong, it is not necessary to use a whole lumber yard to build it, some looms have enough wood in them to build two looms, and are difficult to transport or even move at all. Easy action of the harnesses, lamms, treadles, etc is very necessary. These should not be too heavy and clumsy, and should be easy to tie up and adjust, and to keep in adjustment. The Scandinavian looms generally use so called "horses" to which the harnesses are tied. These are difficult to keep in adjustment to make a good weaving shed for the shuttle to pass through, rollers or some rigid construction where the harnesses cannot move out of their proper place are more desirable in my own opinion. Often also the question of metal or string heddles through which the threads pass comes up. String heddles are cheaper and perhaps more romantic but much more difficult and slower to thread than metal heddles, I have heard the statement that metal heddles cut warp threads. This does not happen often to my knowledge, and anyway metal heddles are used on our power looms for even the finest fabric, so I am sure that they are more efficient on a hand loom also. Should the loom have a plain or a sectioned warp beam? Some people prefer a plain beam to a sectional one. But here again, it seems to me, that should be determined by the purpose and use of the loom. For long wide warps the sectional beam is much easier and quicker to set up, which is important where time is a factor in the weaving. Ratchets and pawls which control the winding up and letting off on the warp and cloth beam should be of metal. I recently saw a loom built with the ratchet of plywood, this is not satisfactory. On one of my old looms which has been in use for nearly twenty years now and on which I have woven hundreds of yards of all kinds of material, even the cast iron ratchets and pawls are much worn through continued use, wood ones would have had to be replaced long ago. These metal ratchets and pawls are often the parts which present difficulty when one wishes to build their own loom. Loom plans for a 25", 36" and 42" loom may be purchased from Mrs. Edna Burchard, 608 Grand Ave. Oakland, Cal. and are sold only on the condition that all of the hardware, aprons, heddles etc. necessary to build the loom are purchased at the same time. This is an excellent service, for then the builder is assured of a good loom. If interested write for further information concerning this direct, to Mrs. Burchard, though I would appreciate it very much that you mention having seen this information in the News.

Another question which often comes up is "should loom treadles be hung from the front or the back of the loom." My own opinion is that the leverage is better when they are hung from the back of the loom, but the folding Bernat loom has them hung from the front, and they work well indeed. It is easier to find them with ones feet too when hung in the front. Be sure treadles are wide enough for your feet and far enough apart for the width of your feet, but they should not be too heavy as that adds too much weight to the tie-up and harnesses. Should a loom have four or six treadles? I much prefer six myself, as I think it is bothersome to weave with both feet at once. And it always seems as though I can weave much faster when the tabby treadles are tied separately for the plain weave. But this too may be a matter of personal choice. Structo table looms of course have no treadles, and the harnesses are hung in the loom frame so they are always in proper adjustment. This is a great advantage where inexperienced students are using the loom. Weaving results are more sure of a good shed on these looms too, for there is no way they can get out of adjustment. The smaller Structo looms are easy to carry around and to store. A folding floor loom may have some advantages worth considering also, and these should not be overlooked.

7. Second Hand Looms. A word of caution to the novice concerning the purchase of a used loom. Once in awhile it is possible to find these used looms as good as a new one. But very often such a purchase is not an economical one because of the fact that it may be difficult to repair or replace a missing or broken part. Some looms are sold because they are hard to keep in proper adjustment. It is best to consult some one who knows something about looms before buying a used loom.

Different Kinds of Looms. It is not my purpose to advocate any one particular loom in preference to another, but to try to point out some of the distinct advantages of some types as compared to others.

1. Two Harness Looms. The most beautiful textiles in the world have been woven on a two harness loom, as for instance tapestries of all kinds, beautiful textured fabrics, knotted rugs etc. But, and this is important, the simpler the loom the more and greater the need for the weaver to be skilled in his knowledge of the free weaving techniques, and the choice of suitable colors in yarns and threads, in order that he may intelligently use his loom as a tool for the production of unusual handweaving. Technique is very important, for until certain fundamental techniques are acquired one cannot truly create in color on the loom with threads.

A) Picture frame looms, an adaptation of the primitive loom such as the Navajo Indians still use today for the weaving of their blankets. And the same which the ancient Peruvians used for all of their very wonderful textiles. A description of this type of loom and how to set it up has been given in Handweaving News for July 1936, and 1937. This loom is simple but does require patience and skill in order to handle it well. However it is not beyond the average person if he is willing to take time enough to use it, and learn how to overcome some of the mechanical difficulties due to the simplicity of the loom.

B) Simple Heddle Looms composed of holes and slots can now be had for \$3.75 complete with shuttle, leash sticks and frame to tie them into. These also are an adaptation of primitive looms used by many peoples all over the world. These are 12" wide and can be used to learn all of the free weaving techniques, and are useful for adults and simple enough for school children to use also. They are simple, inexpensive, take but little storage space, and can easily be carried back and forth to school if desired. Handweaving News leaflets have contained much information on how to use this type of loom. If anyone is interested in having these there are about 12 leaflets which pertain to this which may be purchased for \$3.50 if desired.

To weave 20" wide, the Heddle Loom made by A.D. Jenness, 92 Roxbury Road, New Britain Conn, is very satisfactory indeed, Cost of this is \$15.00. This is a very sturdy, well built loom with ratchets and rollers, and a loom which one person can warp alone. It is very easy to use and presents no difficulties for a beginner.

C) Two harness floor Looms. There are a number of very satisfactory floor looms available. Many persons using these are entirely unaware that they can weave anything with these looms except rag carpet or plain weave rugs, on carpet warp. But they can weave many other beautiful articles if they would take the time and make the effort to learn about other techniques and other materials. Reed Mfg Co, Springfield, Ohio makes a very good 2 harness floor loom to weave 30" wide for \$30.00. Other firms are making these also, but I have used this one and know it to be entirely satisfactory in every way.

2. Four Harness Looms. Can be had in many kinds, both table and floor looms. It is often advisable to consider space requirements of some of these looms especially when trying to decide what width to buy, and whether to buy a table loom, a folding loom, or just a floor loom. In my own classes I like to have students have the opportunity to use different kinds of looms so they can make their own choice as to what suits their own needs best. For table looms, I have used the Structo for many years and find it very satisfactory indeed. These table looms come in sizes from 8" up to 30" weaving width now, and cost from \$10.00 to \$85.00 for 30" 8 harnesses. The No. 240 Structo can be had in eight harnesses for \$15.00 now also, which increases the range of usefulness of this little loom, one of the best for beginning students that I know of. The question often comes up as to whether to buy a eight or a four harness loom. If you wish to go all of the way in the technique of handweaving, an eight harness or a 10 is advisable, but of course not necessary if you just want to do the free weaving techniques. If you have further questions concerning looms, I should be glad to hear from you.