

OKLAHOMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

4-H Fabrics & Fashions

Beginning Level - Moderately Difficult Construction

Tote Bag

Tote bags can be used for many purposes. They can be used to carry books, 4-H notebooks, project materials and gym shoes. They are useful as beach bags and handy for carrying supplies and small equipment.

With this project you will learn:

- Straight grain of fabric
- Measuring
- Pressing
- Machine-stitching
- Using creases as guides
- Seam finishing.

Supplies

You will need sturdy fabric, like denim, kettle cloth, sailcloth, twill, duck or canvas. Try to avoid fabric with a one-way design. This will simplify your project. To figure the amount of fabric, answer the following questions: *Do I want a 14-, 16- or 18-inch wide tote bag? Do I want a pocket? Do I want handles to contrast or blend?*

Tote bag *without* self-fabric handles

Fabric $\frac{1}{2}$ yard, 45-inch wide fabric, or $\frac{7}{8}$ yard if print is striped or directional. (Using the yardage specified will allow enough fabric for tote bag pocket or pockets.)

Webbing 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ yards of cotton webbing or sturdy braid, 1 to 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch wide.

Tote bag *with* self-fabric handles

Fabric $\frac{3}{4}$ yard of 45-inch wide or 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ yard of striped or directional print (specified yardage will allow enough fabric for tote bag pocket or pockets), $\frac{1}{4}$ yard of 45-inch sturdy fabric for *optional* contrasting fabric handles.

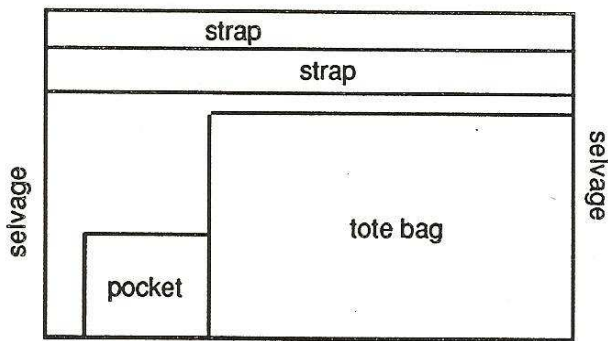
Thread Thread should match the background color of the tote bag fabric. If the webbing handles contrast, you will need thread to match the handles.

Other supplies Marking pencil
straight pins
ruler
optional patch, applique or iron-on decal

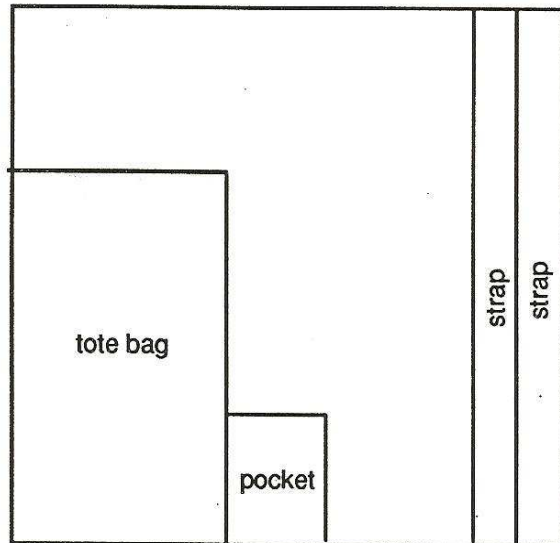
Tote Bag Construction

Step 1 **Pre-shrink all fabric, webbing or sturdy braid.**

Step 2 **Cut out tote bag pieces.**
A. Tear or cut a piece of fabric 29 inches long and 14, 16 or 18 inches wide. Study the direction of the fabric print before cutting. **SPECIAL NOTE:** If you have a one-way directional print or design you will need to cut two pieces, 15 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches long by 14, 16 or 18 inches wide. Place the



Layout for fabric without nap.



Layout for directional print.

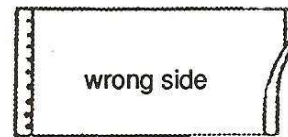
fabric, right sides together, with the design running the same direction. Stitch a $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam along the bottom of the bag. Finish the seam with a zigzag stitch or some other seam finish. Press the seam to one side. This will give strength to the bag. The finished piece should now measure 29 inches long and your selected width of 14, 16 or 18 inches.

B. For self-fabric handles tear or cut two four-inch wide pieces of fabric. Each strip must be at least 45 inches long.

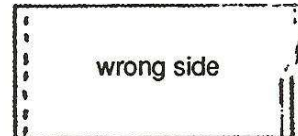
C. From remaining fabric, tear or cut a pocket. Determine whether the pocket will be on the inside or outside, and select the appropriate size from the chart at right.

Step 3

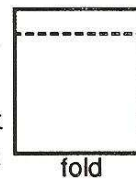
A. On the large piece of fabric for the tote bag body, machine-baste $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the edge on the short ends. Turn this $\frac{1}{2}$ inch toward the wrong side of the fabric, and press along the stitching line.



B. Turn down a one-inch hem toward the wrong side on each short end. Press, and machine-stitch close to the edge of the hem.



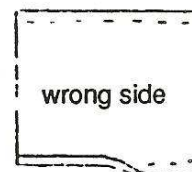
C. Fold the large piece of fabric in half, wrong sides together. Press the fold. This will mark the center of the bottom center of the tote bag.



Step 4 Pocket Construction

Option 1—Outside Pocket

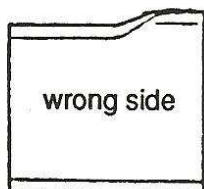
A. Machine-baste $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the edge along each edge of the width (short edge) of the pocket. (If in



Pocket Size Chart (all measurements are in inches)		outside pocket	inside pocket
14-inch bag	width	4 1/2"	5 3/4"
	length	6 1/2" or 7 1/2"	12" or 14"
16-inch bag	width	5 3/4"	7"
	length	6 1/2" or 7 1/2"	12" or 14"
18-inch bag	width	5 3/4"	7"
	length	6 1/2" or 7 1/2"	12" or 14"

doubt, refer to the pocket chart to be sure you have the correct edge.) Turn this $\frac{1}{2}$ inch toward the wrong side of the fabric, and press along the stitching line.

B. Along one of the edges just completed, turn under another $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, and press. This will create a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch deep rolled hem, which will be the top of your pocket. Press, and machine-stitch close to the inside edge of the hem. Set the pocket aside until Step 8, Option 1.

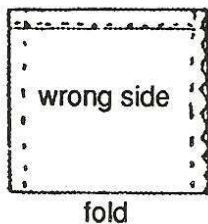


Option 2—Inside Pocket

A. Follow Option 1, Step A, for outside pocket.

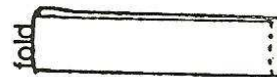
B. Along both edges just completed, turn under another $\frac{1}{2}$ inch and press. This creates a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-deep rolled hem, which will be the top of your pocket. Machine-stitch close to the inside edge of both hems.

C. Fold the pocket in half, right sides together, matching the rolled hem at each end. Stitch down the edges of both sides, using a $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam allowance. Backstitch at the beginning and end of each seam. Finish the raw edges of the seam, using a zigzag or some other seam finish method. Turn the pocket right side out. Press the pocket flat along each seam. Set the pocket aside until Step 8, Option 2.



Option 1—Webbing Handles

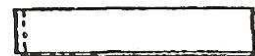
A. With right sides together, match the ends of the webbing. Stitch a $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam. With the webbing lying flat, mark the fold line.



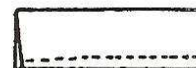
Press the seam open. Proceed to Step 7.

Option 2—Self-Fabric Handles

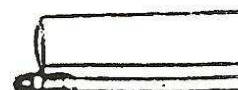
A. Join the two strips of fabric by placing right sides together and stitching one end with a $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam. Press the seam open. Leave the second end free.



B. Fold in half lengthwise, right sides together, matching edges. Pin baste. Do not stitch over pins. Stitch a $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam allowance. Press seam open.



C. Turn right side out. (Tip: Attach a very large safety pin deep into the seam, and close it securely. Push the safety pin through the inside of the casing toward the opposite end. Carefully ease the fabric through the casing.) Press the handle strip flat along the seam lines.



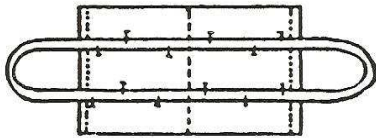
D. Match the two ends, and stitch a $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam. Press the seam open.



Step 6 Attach the handles

Lay the bag on a flat surface, right side up. Lay webbing or fabric strap over the body of the bag, and arrange in an oval shape, matching fold line and seam(s) of strap with the fold line

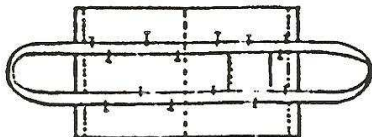
of the bag. The straps should lie parallel to the sides of the bag. The straps on the 14-inch bag should be placed four inches from the edge. The straps on the 16- and 18-inch bags should be 4½ inches from the sides. Pin the strap in place. (Note the direction for pin placement.)



Step 7 Pocket Placement

Option 1—Outside Pocket

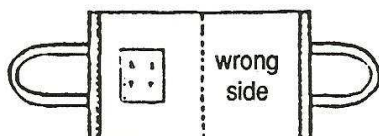
A. With the top of the pocket toward the hem of the bag, tuck the sides of the pocket under the straps of the bag. The top of the pocket should be 3½ inches from the top edge of the bag. Pin in place.



B. Machine-stitch along the bottom edge of the pocket. Lift up the strap, as needed.

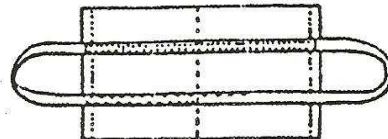
Option 2—Inside Pocket

A. On the wrong side (inside) of the tote bag, place the top of the pocket toward the hem of the bag. Center the pocket over the straps of the bag. The top of the pocket should be 3½ inches from the top edge of the bag. Pin in place. Be sure the pins are not directly under the strap, or you will sew over them when attaching the



strap. As the straps are stitched in place, the pocket will be secured.

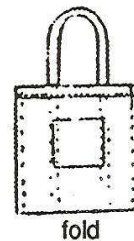
Step 8 Machine-stitch the webbing or fabric to the bag. Stitch close to the edge of the strap. Begin stitching at the fold line, and stitch up to the top edge of the bag. Pivot stitch across the top. Pivot, and come down the other side of the handle. Repeat pivots at the other end. When you return to the beginning, overlap machine-stitching one inch, and backstitch. Trim off threads.



Repeat for the other side of the bag. Press.

Step 9 Apply decals, applique or other personal designs while the bag is flat (*optional*).

Step 10 With right sides together and the top edges matched, machine-stitch the sides of the bag, using a ⅝-inch or ½-inch seam allowance.



Open the side seam, and turn in each seam corner at the top of the bag, forming a point. Close the seam back up. Press and stitch closed by machine or by hand.

Finish the seam allowance with a zigzag stitch or some other method. Press the seam to one side rather than pressing it open. This will give strength to the seam.



Option 1—Flat Tote Bag

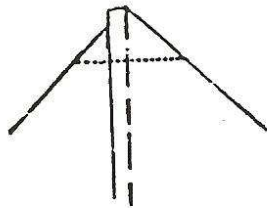
Turn the bag right side out, and it is ready to use.

Option 2—Square-Bottom Tote Bag

Leave the bag inside out. Match the seam line with the crease pressed in the bottom of the bag. From the point, measure in two inches. Draw a straight line at a right angle to the seam.

Machine-stitch along this line.

Be sure to backstitch, and secure each end. This step will give side width to your bag.



Turn the bag right side out.

Press the corners carefully. Now you are ready to go.

Step 11 *Finishing Touches*

Trim all loose thread ends, and press the bag neatly.

NOTE: Decorations may be used on the outside of the bag, but should be quality construction. The bag should meet all other criteria.