

How to Hook with T-Shirt Strips



Ma Jolie Fleur, 16"x17" hooked with T-shirts

Why hook with T-Shirt Strips?

Good question!

The foremost tradition with rug hooking is to hook with what you've got. It started as a craft hundreds of years ago, by weavers looking for something to do with the 'thrums' (the short lengths of yarn cut off the loom after the cloth is woven). Those clever weavers also noticed that they could cut up the remnants of woolen fabric after cutting out the pattern pieces and hook with that too!

Then the 20th century brought new innovations: William Grenfell discovered that 'laddered' (snagged) silk-stockings made distinctive and greatly valued rugs, and the Multicolores folks in Guatemala still make their magnificent designs with T-shirts. Rug hooking is such a versatile craft, throughout time, people have employed whatever materials that they had available to make beautiful, durable, heirloom quality rugs. Fortunately for us today, all of those materials are easily found. It's just a matter of finding which material works best for your project.



Grenfell Mat (above)



Multicolores Rug (right)



Old Books, 17"x32", hooked with T-shirts

People who like hooking with T-shirts:

- ~Like saving money. Per square foot, T-shirts are about 10 times cheaper than wool yarn or fabric
- ~Enjoy upcycling, taking a cast-off item and turning it into a work of art
- ~Don't like dyeing colors. There are two billion T-shirts produced *every year*, in every color, shade and texture imaginable
- ~Are sensitive to wool
- ~Like making rugs that can be washed in the washing machine

Whatever your color palette, you will find it in the T-shirt aisle at your local thrift store, or in your very own closets and drawers.

You can always find bright colors, but I am most drawn to muted, mottled, patterned and textured fabrics.

One large T-shirt will hook approximately 1 square foot of rug. If you can't find enough shirts in the same color, choose a few shades that are close, and mix them while hooking. That will give you a vibrant, interesting background.





T-shirt strips for Book of Kells (above)



Book of Kells, 20"x13.5", hooked with T-shirts (right)

T-shirt rugs are tough and durable, but you can wash them in the washing machine? If you hook your rug on pre-washed linen or cotton, then yes, they wash very well.



The first thing to do is to cut out all the seams. Even if there aren't any side seams, you'll still want to cut up one side. If there are iron-on decals, you'll want to cut around those, you can't hook with those parts.

If there are lots of wrinkles or creases, you will want to iron the pieces so they'll cut up evenly.



To cut your strips, you will need a cutting mat and rotary cutter (they use these for quilting) and a yardstick as a guide for your cutter. I don't measure the width of my strips per se, but I aim for 3/8" to 1/2". Any wider than 1/2" is too cumbersome to pull through the backing. Some T-shirts are lightweight, and some are quite dense, so with a little practice, you'll figure out what width to aim for.



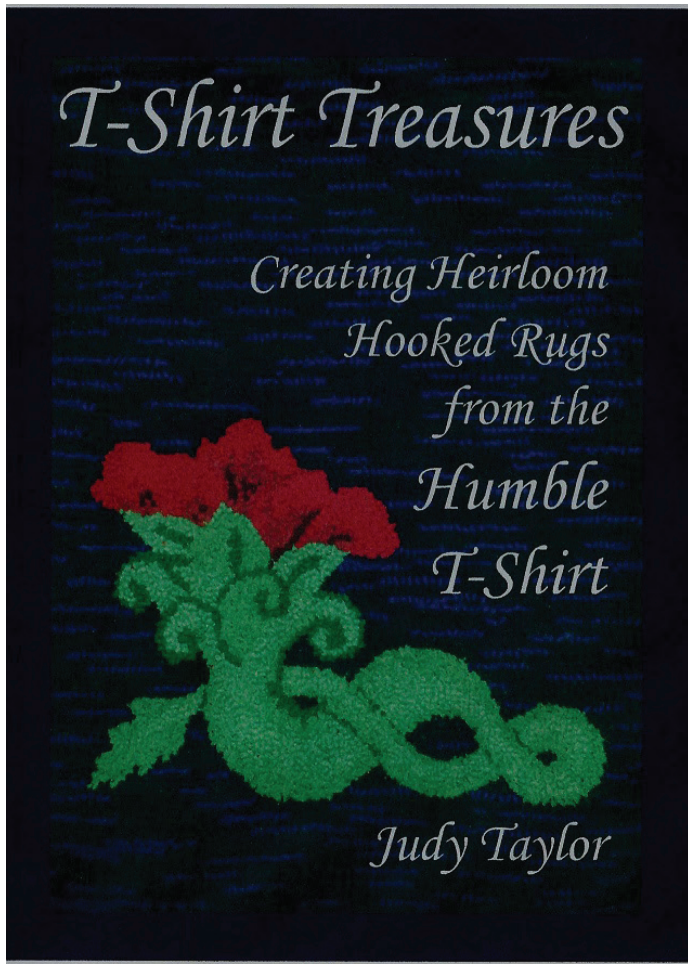
Then I tie the bundles in the middle to keep them organized.

As for how to hook with T-shirt strips, follow the same steps that you use for hooking with yarn, except for one thing: Every once in a while, I will come across a T-shirt that is more textured, and when I pull down on a loop, I find that it drags itself down a little in the back (making a little loop in back). If that happens, I just leave my hook in the loop as I pull it down to the desired height. I don't give upward pressure with the hook, just having it there provides enough resistance so it won't drag down in back.



Waste Not Want Not, 31"x20", T-shirt strips on linen, washed.

To wash a T-shirt rug in the washing machine, like this one, choose gentle cycle, cold water, and lay flat to dry.



For more information, try:

T-Shirt Treasures

This book covers everything you need to know to get started hooking beautiful, durable, machine washable rugs with the humble T-shirt, including how to cut up your T-shirts, which backing fabric to use, detailed rug hooking instructions, how to build your own rug hooking frame, hundreds of pictures and illustrations, and many templates to try the practice projects in the book.

Winner of the eLit Book Awards, 2019 and a finalist in the Foreword INDIES Book Awards, 2019

102 pages, \$24.95

<https://www.littlehouserugs.com/products/book-t-shirt-treasures>

And you can see the hooking process in motion on YouTube. Search for “Rug Hooking with T-Shirts!” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExEbox_Hpns&t=1s)



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