

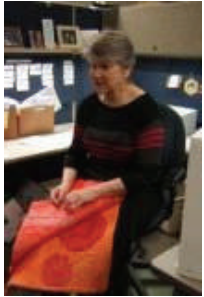
Kansas Green Teams

Friday Facts

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Plastic Bags and Rugs What Do They Have In Common?



Mary Gerstner with the Kansas Department of Commerce is not like most people, she is commonly referred to as the lady that makes “stuff” by family, friends and co-workers. Mary’s latest projects are rugs made out of recycled plastic bags! Here is Mary’s story in her own words.

Last summer, my grandson (Dalton) told me he thought it was time we make something again, but out of fabric. It’s always fun to learn to make something new, so while I was shopping I picked up a book about locker hooking. I hadn’t done that before, so that was what I decided I would do with Dalton. The book showed how to use strips of fabric to accomplish the designs which were used for rugs, bags and book covers. One item used recycled grocery bags. I helped Dalton to make a book cover using fabric strips.

I made my first rug using the locker hooking method with white grocery bags. It is a 6 patch grid with each patch of tan alternating direction. When I googled plastic bags, rugs and locker hooking I found lots of projects. One rug was latch hooked with bags cut in 1” x 4” pieces. My second rug was all latch hook. It took almost three months to get done, but I learned some things about what works and what doesn’t when it comes to designing on this project.



The third rug is the orange one with red circles and it is all locker hooking. It is made from the bags our newspaper is thrown in. When I ran out of orange ones, I brought the rug in progress to work and asked coworkers for the bags, showing them what I was working on. I worked on it about 2 months, sometimes having to wait until I got more bags.

The fourth rug is the all red one. This time I decided to combine both locker hooking and latch hook. I learned how to combine the strips of plastic without knots this time.



From what I’ve read online about the rugs, they are suggested as camping rugs. Well, I don’t know anyone neat enough to actually take a rug when they camp to keep a tidy tent. But I can imagine they would be good if you have an RV. I believe the rugs could be washed in a machine, but of course, not dried in the dryer. Many websites recommended just hosing them off to clean.

I estimate that it takes about 500 bags to make a rug.....because bags come in various shades of the same color, various sizes and various textures. That helps to make the rug interesting, but I don’t have the count down to a science yet. I used latex rug backing on the first two rugs, which runs around \$12 for a pint if not on sale.....it takes more than a pint to seal up the back. The backing secures the loops and gives the rug body. I used 2 tubes clear latex caulking on the red rug. It looks better, I think. Caulk is easier to find, it’s cheap, and easy to apply.....just like frosting!

A locker hook is shaped like a crochet hook on one end and an eye on the other to hold the cord. The rug canvas I used has 3.5 squares per inch. I cut Plastic bags in approximately 3” widths.....I use double thickness when the bag is really thin. The basic locker hook method is to pull up a loop though the canvas hole on three or more holes in the grid, holding the loops on the hook, then pull the hook with the cording on through the all the loops on the hook. The cord locks the loops from pulling back out the hole.

I’ve been asked how much the rugs sell for. I don’t sell them. There are just too many hours in them to price them. Instead, I gifted these to our Project Topeka campaign for a raffle. I’m giving one to my sister-in-law, and I have lots of nieces and nephews that would appreciate the work, the novelty and the “green” nature of my work. I like to sort things out and do tedious work. I regard anything I spend on making them as an entertainment expense. I’m as fascinated as anyone about how they turn out.

Mary does a great job on making recycling fun and if you see her be sure and let her know!



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