

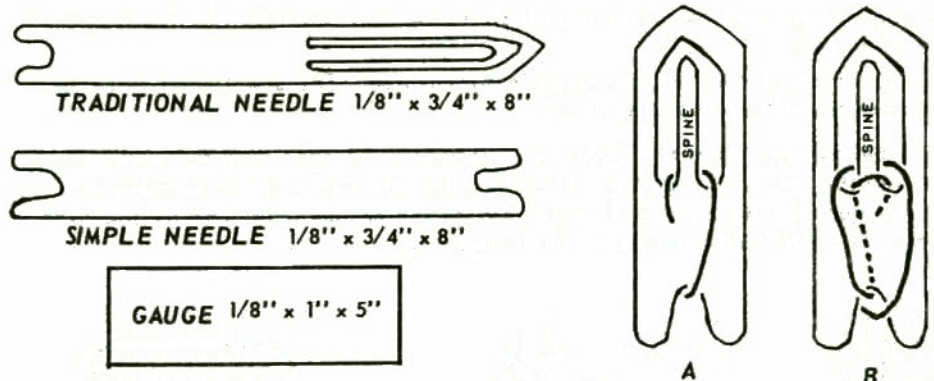
NET MAKING

(A Traditional Craft of Pennsylvania)

by Anthony S. Emery

Net making is a traditional hand craft of Pennsylvania. The method and patterns shown here are those used by the family of Mr. Daniel Moser of Pennsburg, Pa. In the early 1900's Mr. Moser and his family made fish traps & nets for commercial fishermen of the Chesapeake Bay and the lower Susquehanna River. Mr. Moser was taught by his grandmother and passed his knowledge on to me.

In net making, a series of loops is tied using a simple knot. A gauge keeps the loops uniform in size and a needle or shuttle holds the twine. These tools can be made from any flat sturdy material (ruler, paint stirring stick, masonite, tongue depressor, heavy cardboard, etc.). The simple needle has a notch cut at both ends and is loaded end over end. It is worth the trouble to make the more difficult traditional needle. The pointed end makes the netting easier and the spine prevents the twine from unwinding until you need it.



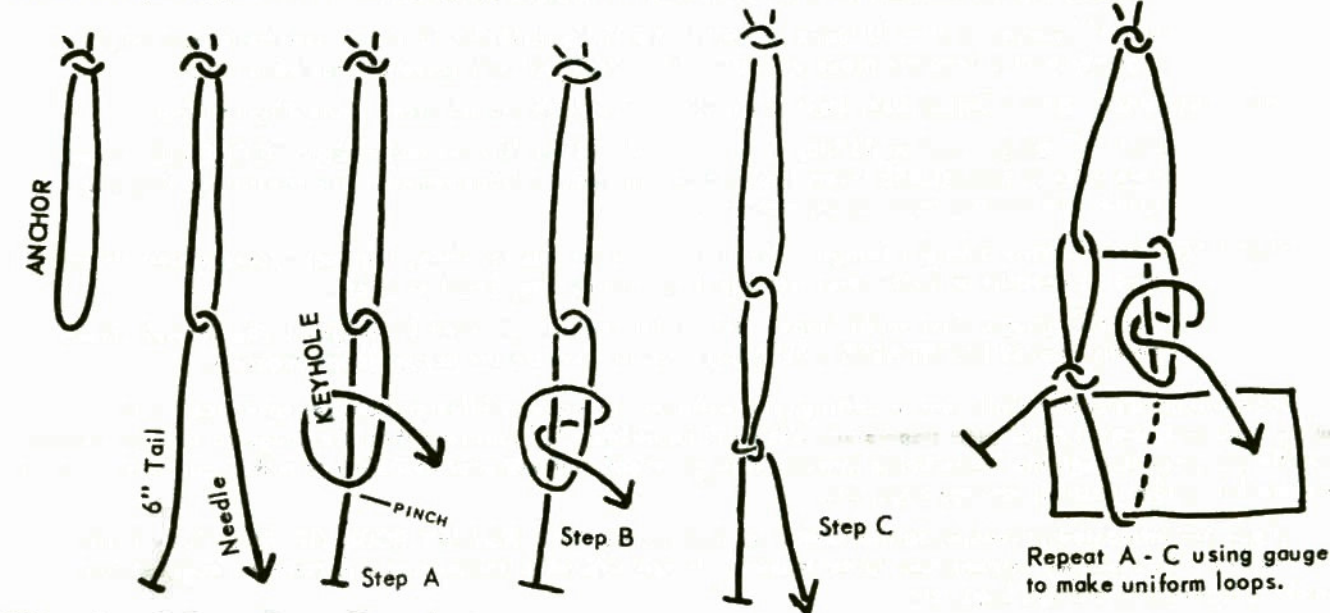
To load the traditional needle
 Hold needle in left hand;
 Guide twine with right hand
 A) Around spine and down to notch; turn needle over.
 B) Around spine and down to notch; turn needle over.
 Repeat A & B until needle is full.

Use cotton mason (seine) twine, available from any hardware store. An ANCHOR is made from a 2' length of twine with its ends tied together to form a loop. The ANCHOR is placed over a stationary object ("C" clamp, hook, door knob, chair back, etc.). The first row of loops is cast onto the ANCHOR which also helps to keep the work taut.

Load your needle and bring it from behind through the ANCHOR, leaving a 6" tail. Pinch the two strands (legs) together 1" below the ANCHOR with the thumb and forefinger of your left hand. At the same time pull-back with your left hand to keep the work taut. The right hand now guides the needle to lock the two legs together with a half hitch knot.

- A. Make a KEYHOLE arc to the left of the two legs.
- B. Bring the needle behind the two legs and through the KEYHOLE.
- C. Draw the knot tight and release the pinch.

The same knot is now tied using the gauge to make uniform loops. The gauge is held in the left hand with the top edge directly below and touching the first knot. The right hand guides the needle Down around the gauge, up through the ANCHOR, and Down to the gauge, forming two legs. Pinch the legs against the top of the gauge, make the KEYHOLE, and complete the knot. Make 10 loops (11 knots) in this manner, remove the gauge, turn the work over so that the needle is on the left (in netting you always work from left to right), and you are ready for the second row. It is not necessary to keep all loops on the gauge until the row is completed. Because each loop is locked into place, you can remove the gauge whenever you want to.



In the second and subsequent rows, you are tying into loops formed in previous rows. The knots are tied in exactly the same manner. The left hand pulls back on the work to maintain tension, and pinches each new loop in place against the top edge of the gauge until the knot is completed. The right hand guides the needle around the gauge, through the next loop of the previous row, makes the KEYHOLE, and tightens the knot. When the half hitch is tied into a loop in this manner it becomes a SHEET BEND or BECKET BEND. The sheet bend is the basic knot of netting and must look exactly as shown. If the knot spills, or is pulled tight below rather than above the "V" of the loop, it is no good and must be retied. Complete the second row, turn the work over, and continue the third row from left to right. Tie a total of 20 rows for this practice piece.

You can make a handy storage bag out of this practice panel. Untie the ANCHOR but don't remove it from the netting. Thread one end through the long legs on one side; through the end loops; through the long legs on the other side, to the top of the netting. Tie both ends of the ANCHOR together to make a Drawstring. The netting will form into a pouch when objects are placed into it.

WHEN YOU RUN OUT OF TWINE - Reload the needle and with the new twine, tie a second sheet bend directly above the last knot tied with the old twine. Continue netting with the new twine.

TO INCREASE Go around the gauge and through the same loop twice before tying the sheet bend. There will be one extra loop in the next row when you do this.

TO DECREASE Go around the gauge and through the next two loops in succession. The sheet bend will lock these loops together and there will be one fewer loop in the next row.

TUBULAR NETTING is tied in the same manner. After the first row is complete DO NOT turn the work. Rather tie into the FIRST loop you tied, joining the two ends together. From here tie into each loop in succession, in a spiral, until the required length is completed. String a piece of twine through the bottom loops and tie the ends together to make the bottom of the bag. The ANCHOR serves as the Drawstring.



First knot of second row



SHEET BEND



WHEN YOU RUN OUT OF TWINE

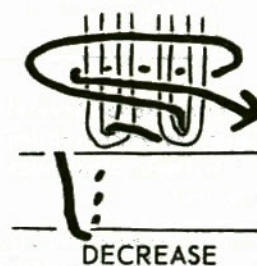
START OF NEW TWINE
END OF OLD TWINE



Incorrect Knot
Untie and Try Again



INCREASE



DECREASE



TUBULAR NETTING
Begin 2nd R

PROJECTS:

SUET BAG - Originally used as Bait Bag for fish trap. Fill with suet (beef fat) in the winter or with stale bread, apples, coconut, etc., all year long. The birds will love it!

Use 1" gauge, cast on 10 loops (11 knots). Net TUBULAR for 12 rows. Tie the bottom loops together with a separate piece of twine. The ANCHOR will serve as the drawstring.

ONION STORAGE BAG - Onions keep best when air can circulate around them. A net bag is ideal.

Use 1 1/4" gauge, cast on 14 loops. Net TUBULAR for 10 rows and make a DECREASE. From here make a DECREASE every fourth new loop until 6 loops remain. Tie the bottom loops together and you are ready to store onions.

FISH BAG - More humane than gill stringer. Put your fish in the bag and hang the bag in deep water. It can also be used as an extra large storage bag, laundry bag, beach bag, etc.

Use 1 1/2" gauge, cast on 30 loops. Net TUBULAR for 30 rows (or longer if you desire). Make evenly spaced DECREASES until 6 loops remain and tie the bottom loops together.

Once you have become proficient at netting, you will want to make needles and gauges in various sizes to make finer and coarser nets. The needle you use must be at least 1/4" narrower than the gauge so that the loaded needle can pass through the loops being formed. Now go ahead and use your new skill to make: curtains, scarves, hammocks, garden netting, storage bags, etc.

If you are interested in reading further about net making, try THE ASHLEY BOOK OF KNOTS, by Clifford W. Ashley. This was my introduction to net making. It explores other techniques and contains suggestions for making hammocks, storage bags, etc.