

BEAUTY & STYLE

Tips, DIY, News



To secure lightweight leather handles, hand-stitch an X on each end using colorful waxed twine.

Cut shorter handles to make a grab-and-go bag, above, or leave the straps long for an over-the-shoulder tote, left.

STRAP HAPPY

It's a cinch to give a plain tote bag a big dose of personality—just add stylish straps. Start with an easy-to-sew bag in any size you like, then add buckles or grommets. From there, the options for strap materials are endless—patterned ribbon, nylon rope, and supple leather are all fair game.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SARAH ANNE WARD

GET A HANDLE ON IT

To make a basic tote, first cut a piece of canvas double the desired length plus 5 inches, and 1 inch wider all around. Fold it in half (wrong sides together) and sew both sides with a ½-inch seam allowance, then double-hem the top by folding the top edge ½ inch, then 2 inches, and edge-stitching all around.

BUCKLE TOTE

Supplies

Sewing supplies
4 buckles, ½-inch
Handleless tote
Rotary leather punch
2 lightweight cowhide
leather strips, each ¾ inch
wide, cut to desired length

HOW-TO

- Using strong thread, sew two buckles each to top edge of bag front and back, spacing as desired (ours are 2 inches from bag sides). Stitch around each buckle's center bar several times to ensure secure attachment.
- Punch holes 1 inch apart in leather strips, starting about 2 inches from ends. Slide ends through buckles and fasten.



GROMMET TOTE

Supplies

Handleless tote
Grommet kit
Craft knife
Ribbon, cord, or leather
strips, cut to desired length
Sewing supplies

HOW-TO

- Mark desired grommet placement on bag front and back by tracing inside of a grommet opening with a pencil.
- Using craft knife, cut an X in marked circles. Set 2 grommets each on front and back of bag, following kit instructions.
- Ribbon handles:** Slide ribbon ends through grommets at bag front. Fold ends under ¼ inch twice; pin to other side of ribbon at bag top. Sew to secure. Repeat at bag back. **Cord handles:** Thread cord ends through grommets; knot to secure.



GREAT LENGTHS

Built to last, these durable materials can all be used for straps.



A trim-store staple, **wovon ribbon** comes in hundreds of colors and patterns.



Lightweight leather strips turn a workaday tote into an everyday luxury.



Braided jute cord lends a beachy feel.



Braided cotton cord brings a pop of color and texture.

Sources

Economy rotary leather punch, \$15; **heavyweight natural cowhide leather strip**, ¾", \$10 for 50 ft.; and **nickel-plated buckles**, ½" (similar to shown), \$2 each, tandyleatherfactory.com. **Eyelets kits**, by Dritz, ¼" and ⅜", in Silver, from \$5 each; and **striped ribbon** (#55102001), 1", \$2 a yd., mjtrim.com. **Diamond-braid poly rope**, ¾", in Blue and White, \$10 for 100 ft., homedepot.com. **Textured leather** (#8901ct), by Shindo, width 12, in color #608, \$10 a meter, 212-868-9311. **Round maple wooden hooks**, lightandladder.com.

▶ marthastewart.com/basic-tote-bag

For full instructions on how to make your own basic tote.