



It takes a
community
 to make Plastic Bag Sleeping Mats for
 the homeless. It takes u.

MAKE PLASTIC BAG SLEEPING MATS

This is all you need to know to start making sleeping mats from plastic bags. There aren't many "rules" so find your comfort level. It's a "labor of love" and it takes many hands working together to collect bags, prepare them into plarn (plastic yarn), crochet and distribute the final product to the homeless and needy.

God bless you for your **Caring Heart and Helping Hands**.

Why make sleeping mats, and why make them out of plastic bags?

- They are a temperature and moisture barrier from the ground and a deterrent to bedbugs.
- They help to prevent bed sores that can become infected and life threatening.
- They are easy to dry if they get wet and easy to clean by rinsing only, as compared to fiber mats.
- They are light weight, portable, comfortable, and durable.
- They keep plastic bags out of the landfill. It takes about 700 plastic bags to create a mat, pillow and carry strap. That's a lot of bags saved from the trash and repurposed for a much greater need.
- One sleeping mat won't cure homelessness, but one mat will make a BIG difference to one person. Many hands working together to provide many mats to the greater homeless population can certainly make a much GREATER difference. It takes a community to make plastic bag sleeping mats for the homeless.

There are basically only 3 rules:

- The sleeping mats must be big enough – whatever that is.
 Adult mats are typically 3' wide x 6' long, but sizes will vary.
- Sleeping mats must be durable.
 There are a variety of ways to make mats but they have to stand up in rugged outdoor use. Crochet seems to be the medium of choice for durability. Using a Q (15.75 -16.00 mm) crochet hook requires you use approximately 3" wide plarn loops. Using a smaller hook will use smaller width loops but this ratio is relevant to keep the mat durable. Adding a crocheted border all the way around the outside, and weaving in all loose ends increases durability.
- Plastic bags must be pretty clean. Don't use bags that have residue on them unless you can clean it quickly with a damp cloth. Don't use any that have obvious food, crumbs, strong odor, bugs, or really large, gaping holes in them. Small holes are okay, just not huge rips.

Although not a rule, all of our mats include a pillow. This serves two purposes: **added comfort**, plus a means to **use up the scraps** of bags left over from cutting bags to make plarn. This makes -0- waste going into the landfill from the bags used in making the mats.

When completed, the mat is folded in half lengthwise, rolled up around the pillow and secured with a carry strap. Finally we attach a luggage tag to each completed mat. The tag front has an image of the American Flag. The back has this imprint: *In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety. ~ Psalm 4:8*, and below that: "Made by **Caring Hearts and Helping Hands**. GOD Bless You."

If you're interested in adding your **Caring Heart and Helping Hands** to this project, or even if you prefer working on your own to help the homeless, this document will tell you how to flatten, fold and cut bags, string plarn, and includes basic crochet instructions. This document includes patterns that we use for the mat, pillow and basic carry strap. There are many carry strap options. Check YouTube or Facebook mat groups for other options. For those who are local and want to continue to work on this project at our workshops, we meet regularly and would be more

than happy to have you join us. We support and encourage one another and also learn from one another. We can also assist you through each step until you feel comfortable with the techniques. Bring a friend if you wish! You do not have to be a member of our church to participate in any of our workshops.

We meet weekly at Southern Oaks Baptist Church, 601 E. Amherst Dr., Tyler, TX.
 Meetings are held weekly on Wednesday mornings from 10 a.m. to noon
 and on the 2nd Saturday of each month from 1 to 3 p.m.

(Call to confirm meeting dates as actual dates may change and more workshops may become available.)

If you would like to get a group started at your own church, group, or organization, please contact us. Mentoring other groups is what we are about in order to get more mats to the homeless.

Maybe you don't want to crochet, but still want to help. There is a great need for hands to collect bags, prepare and cut bags, and string plarn. It all becomes much easier with practice, but you don't have to do it all.

Some do Part. Everyone Some do All!
Some do Part. can do Some do All!
 something.

Even when you help a little, it helps a LOT!

* NOW, LET'S GET YOU STARTED *

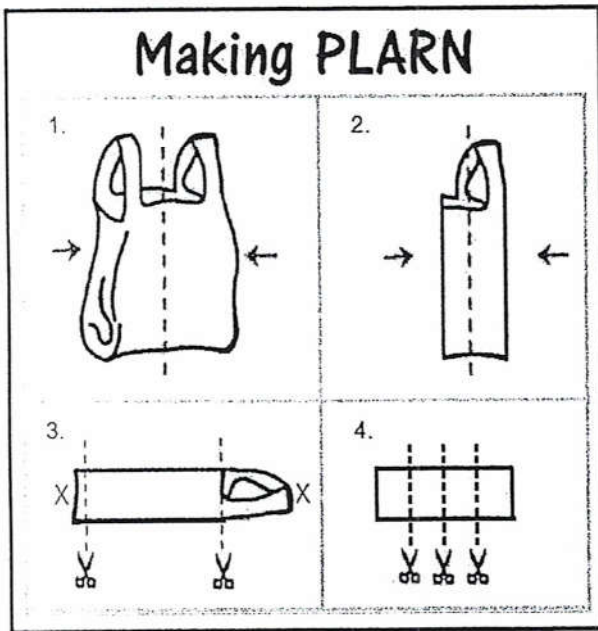
The first step is getting bags. You will need 600-700 to complete your project. You can ask your friends, neighbors, teachers, churches, and even stores to help you get the bags needed for your project. Explain what you are doing and why you are collecting bags. Most people will be more than happy to help. You can use any clean plastic grocery store bag, department store bag, etc. as long as it isn't too crunchy. The hard, crunchy bags are hard to crochet and not as comfortable for sleeping. Use only bags that are pliable and not stiff.

STRAIGHTENING BAGS

Most bags are crumpled and/or tied inside other bags. Begin by straightening and smoothing out the bags to their almost new position with the "tee shirt" handles on top, the sides tucked back in (if they have tee shirt handles and tucking sides of course), bottom seams straight, and lay them down flat in a pile until you get enough to start folding and cutting. The more wrinkles left in each bag, the more jagged edges in the plarn which can be burdensome when crocheting. Strive for perfection here and you will be glad later on, but don't get too bogged down as you have a LOT of bags to do

FOLDING & CUTTING BAGS

It's best to fold one or two like-sized bags at a time. Fold in half vertically (1 & 2) placing left and right handles together, and press flat with your hand. Fold vertically once more so the two sides of the bag are now touching the first folded edge. You should now have a strip the length of the bag and 1/4 the width of the bag, with the handles on one end and the bottom seam on the other end. If you're working with a bag that is much wider than a standard "tee shirt" bag, you may want to repeat folding until you get it narrow enough to handle while cutting.



Once the bag is folded, (3) cut off the seam on the bottom end so that end is completely open. Then cut off the handles at the lowest point where they join the bag. You want the edges of each end of the bag to be the same throughout all thicknesses of the bag. (Save the handles and the ends for stuffing your pillow later.)

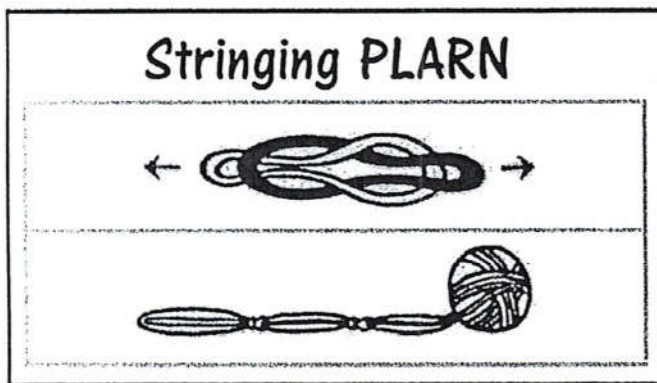
Now that you have a long, even strip you are ready to make your final plarn cuts to make plarn loops for crochet.

Making Plarn (4): Cut the strip in half. Then cut the two remaining pieces in half. This will give you 4 pieces close to the same size. You can eyeball this or use a ruler or a marked mat for measuring. It doesn't have to be perfect. This is typical of a standard grocery "tee shirt" bag. Your pieces will be from 3" to 3-1/2" depending on how much of the handle and base you cut off.

- For larger or smaller bags (like JC Penney's or Home Depot) follow the same guide as in Diagrams 1-3, but on the width of your loops, measure them each 3" and keep cutting loops until you run out of bag.
- For thicker bags (that aren't too crunchy) you can use a smaller width. Typically the thicker bags should be cut 2" to 2-1/2" wide.
- For thinner bags such as produce bags, they can be cut 4" wide or you can use 2 loops at the same time when stringing your plarn.

STRINGING PLARN

Now you've gone from bags to plarn, it's time to string your plarn by connecting your plarn loops. You need to make a decision before you start to string plarn. What is your desired pattern? You can do a random choosing of whatever plarn loop you pick up and string totally at random. OR you can string all of one color and do an entire mat in one color, OR alternate making stripes in your mat of brown or white or yellow, etc. OR you can do variegated which is done using a repetitive pattern of 2 or more colors during the stringing process. (A nice pattern is to string one white loop and one brown loop throughout.) You can always "unhook" the ball of plarn and change colors as you go.



Now you are ready to string your plarn. Take your "pieces" and unfold them, stretching them just a bit to be sure you have no areas that are tearing or ragged and pinching the ends between your thumb and forefinger as this is where your knots will be. You want the ends small.

Place one loop on top of the other as shown in the diagram to the left. Pull with both hands in the direction of the arrows until the loops join in an "infinity loop" and pull snug to make a knot in the center. Then add another loop to the end and repeat as you go until you have made a string of plarn. You can roll it into a ball or just place the entire string of plarn in a bag until you're ready to use it.

Stringing plarn takes a little practice. Holding the loops between your thumb and forefinger on each end will crimp the ends into a smaller width to make a smaller knot as you string the loops together. Don't pull too tight until you're sure the knot is not going to be too big. If it is too large a knot, loosen and try crimping the ends again to make a smaller knot. Pull snug to secure the loops but not so much as to break your plarn. If this method seems too complicated, refer to the YouTube video below. Keep practicing. It often helps to practice with a friend.

Some advice if you're having trouble with big knots:

- Plarn is much like 2-ply yarn to some extent once you have it joined and knotted on each end. Both ply's have to be the same length, This means if you take a knot in one hand and go to the knot on the other end of that section and pull until snug, there should be no slack. Both sides should be the exact same length, being equally spaced from knot to knot. If they aren't, you will need to loosen one knot and readjust before pulling your knot tight.
- If your knots are too large, you can loosen them and squeeze both ends of the plarn that are going to knot together and tighten them once more. Again, make sure there is no slack in that piece of plarn from knot to knot. Don't over tighten and weaken the plarn as it may tear while you are crocheting, but small knots are much easier to crochet. Bigger knots can be crocheted but are burdensome to pull through and the mats are not as comfortable.

I highly recommend viewing this YouTube video. There are many out there but I found this one to be the easiest to follow to learn the plarn making process and the crochet instructions:

https://youtu.be/yr_WHW_tGSE

*Special thanks to Donna Colosio Holmes for the use of the Making Plarn and Stringing Plarn diagrams. Please visit or join her Facebook Group: Plastic Bag Sleeping Mats at:

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/279133385820275/>

We have a Facebook Page where we post all of our events, news, photos and tips at "Caring Hearts Helping Hands" page. You can search Facebook for @CaringHelping to find our page. Join other Facebook groups that make mats, too. It's good to network and you can learn a lot from others!

* NOW ~ LET'S CROCHET! *

Crochet Abbreviations:

ch	chain
sc	single crochet
sl st	slip stitch

Most of these are demonstrated on YouTube if you haven't acquired crochet skills and are still learning. The single crochet is the most basic of all crochet stitches and is used throughout for the mat, pillow and carry strap. If you attend our workshops or any local workshop in your area, you will discover that you encourage and learn from one another.

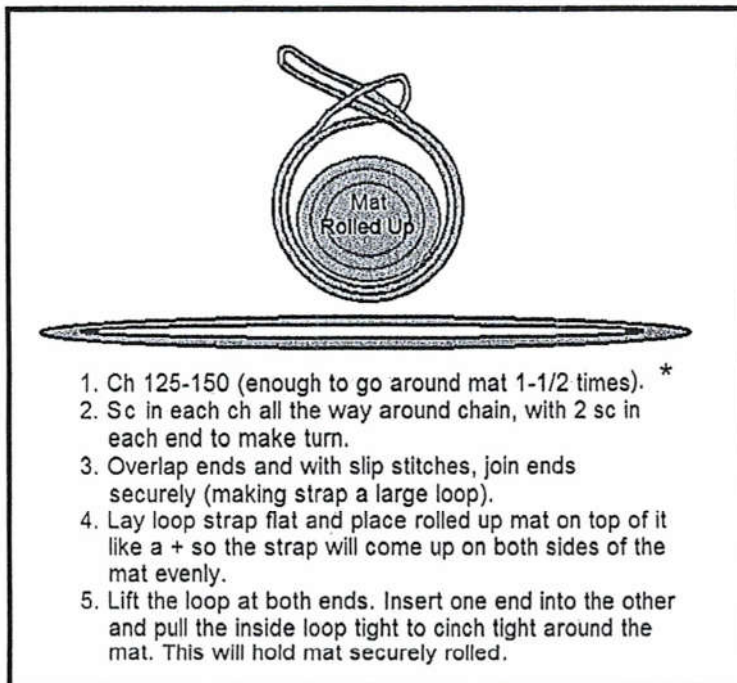
SLEEPING MAT:

This is done with a Q crochet hook and 3" plarn. Make a slip knot. Keeping your chain stitches uniform and loose, make an initial 44 ch + 1 turn ch (mat width of 30-36"). Turn, sc into the 1st stitch from the hook and into each ch (44 sc total per row), ch 1 and turn. This is your foundation. The entire rest of the mat is done with sc in each sc to the end of the row, ch1, and turn. (Be sure to sc through both the front and back loops of each sc for durability.) Repeat until the mat reaches the 6' length. Finish with 1-2 (optional) border rows of sc. This adds to the durability of the mat. After last stitch, ch1, then pull plarn through and tighten knot. Weave in all loose ends.

PILLOW:

This is made exactly like the mat, using a Q crochet hook and 3" plarn. Make a slip knot, then make an initial 18 ch + 1 turn ch, then sc throughout until you reach 22" long. After last stitch, end off same as in mat by ch 1, then pull through and tighten knot. The pillow is then folded in half for a 14-15" wide x 10-11" tall pillow. Put the two ends together in the middle of the back of the pillow. Whip stitch the top and bottom edges together, then with the whip stitch seam in the middle of the back of the pillow, sl st one end closed. Put a good plastic bag inside, large enough to stuff into all the corners of your crocheted pillow. Then fill with scrap bag pieces (handles, ends, etc.). You've used the rest of the bags and now have ZERO waste! Overstuff your pillow as it will compress after it is put in the rolled up mat. Tie the bag securely and then sl st remaining end closed. Weave in all loose ends.

BASIC CARRY STRAP:



*Once it is formed into a loop as shown, it should be long enough to go around the mat 1-1/2 times. this makes it long enough to cinch the mat securely, and to have enough left over to use as a shoulder strap.

1. Ch 125-150 (enough to go around mat 1-1/2 times). *
2. Sc in each ch all the way around chain, with 2 sc in each end to make turn.
3. Overlap ends and with slip stitches, join ends securely (making strap a large loop).
4. Lay loop strap flat and place rolled up mat on top of it like a + so the strap will come up on both sides of the mat evenly.
5. Lift the loop at both ends. Insert one end into the other and pull the inside loop tight to cinch tight around the mat. This will hold mat securely rolled.

*** REMEMBER THIS ***

- ☺ Stay positive. If you're frustrated stringing plarn, take a break. Or if you're in a group, do it with someone else and learn from each other. Watching. Practicing. It will get easier. Find a YouTube video. You have "pause" and "rewind" capabilities at your fingertips. Follow and copy what they do on the video.
- ☺ If you are frustrated with your crochet, NEVER judge your mat based on the first 15 rows or less. Once you have completed 15 rows or more, you can block and stretch the mat and almost ALL of the "odd stitches" will even out. A border or two of single crochet will also help hide most flaws.
- ☺ It helps to count your stitches every 2-4 rows in the beginning until you are comfortable with your project. If you lose a stitch or gain a few, don't sweat it. Just add or decrease a stitch or two in the next few rows until you are back to the original stitch count. Don't rip it out and start over! It's not going to matter if it doesn't "look" perfect, because as long as you're doing this with the right heart, no one is going to judge it except Jesus and He has already judged it to be PERFECT. ♥
- ☺ If you truly don't want to crochet, it takes many hands to make a mat. Not everyone crochets. Others can certainly use your hands in the bag preparation process or the plarn making process. Find your comfort zone, even if it's just collecting or flattening bags. Those who do crochet will LOVE you.
- ☺ Don't get discouraged. It takes many hours and many bags to go from bags to mat, pillow and carry strap. It truly is a labor of love, involving up to 700 bags and up to about 80 hours of work including bag prep.

Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whatever you do for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

~ Matthew 25:40

For more information or questions, please contact:

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Facebook: Sleeping Mats with a Purpose