NEW DESIGNS IN MATTING BASKETS: BY FRANCES KERR COOK

The baskets here illustrated are all made with a combination of floor matting and raffia. The matting is separated into strands and sewed together with the raffia. As many as twenty-five or thirty strands of matting are held together as the coil is made so the work progresses rapidly and a medium sized basket may be completed in one afternoon.

All of these designs except those which have cretonne bottoms are started from a "coil button" in the center. To make this coil button take several strands of matting and after binding them with raffia for a short distance at one end, coil into a circle. Fasten with raffia which has been threaded into a large eyed needle. (The raffia will be rendered more pliable if soaked for a few minutes in water just before using). Hold this coil, which we will call the first row, in the left hand with the loose ends up and pointing left. For the second row coil the loose matting ends about this button and secure them by sewing them with the raffia (Bring the needle through the center hole of the circle with each of these stitches). When you have bound this second row introducing contrasting colors in the raffia. A new row may be started with another color, simply fastening the old raffia as though it were thread.

New stitches should be inserted between the old rows when the distance between the stitches has grown too great. Otherwise your basket will become wobbly.

To make the sides of the basket flare or rise up perpendicularly, simply hold the new roll of strands up above the preceding one, instead of on its edge as before.

Candlestick. Diameter, base, 3½ inches; top, 1½ inches; height, 3½ inches. The bottom of this candlestick was made as described above for the starting of any coil basket. When the diameter of the base had reached 3½ inches the rows were brought up to form the sides. After three upright rows the strands were drawn in tighter with each row until the top was reached, where the strands were gradually cut away under several successive stitches. Matting of the natural shade was used in this candlestick, with raffia in two colors, brown and natural.

The handles were made by wrapping with raffia two rolls of matting with a reed inserted. They were then sewed to the candlestick with the same shade of raffia as used for the wrapping.

The tin candle holder was taken from the top of a common 10-cent candlestick, and simply inserted and sewed in with the raffia.

Fruit Basket. Dimensions, outside measurement 9½ by 10 inches. A small pane of window glass 8 by 10 inches was used for covering the bottom of this basket. Two thicknesses of heavy cardboard were cut the exact size of the glass and covered on each side with Japanese towelling with a grapevine design in three tones of blue. Brown matting was used with raffia of the natural shade. Matting strands were then bound directly to this covered cardboard with the
same stitch described above. Holes may be made with an embroidery stiletto or hatpin if there is difficulty in passing the needle through the cardboard.

This first row of matting containing from fifteen to thirty strands (according to the coarseness of the matting) should be bound to the outside edge of the cardboard, the next two rows directly above the first row. Care should be taken to make the corners square so that the glass will fit in easily. The last or top row of matting was bound solid with the raffia. This was done by wrapping the raffia around the roll between each stitch instead of simply carrying it across from one stitch to another.

The glass was then laid in the tray and bound in by placing a roll of matting just above it around the edges of the basket and securing it to the sides with raffia.

The handle was made by wrapping a long roll of matting and reed, shaping it into a loop at each end, and sewing it to the ends of the basket. Wire or willow could be bound with the matting instead of the reed if desirable.

*Star Pattern Tray.* Dimensions, 12 inches in diameter; handles, 8 inches. This attractive star pattern is an adaptation from an old Indian design. The center is started like the other baskets. The distinctive design begins with the fifth row, which is wrapped solid with raffia between stitches. The sixth row is also wrapped solid. On the seventh row a short space was left at five equal intervals about the circle (these should be measured off and marked before commencing the row). On each successive row the spaces are repeated at the same intervals, but widened a little with each row. This causes the star points to form and to gradually taper toward the outside of the tray. A few stitches must be added between

The star points in order to hold the work firm. At the completion of the star, a row is wrapped solid with the raffia. Three more rows are made with the regular stitch, then the final upright row, which also forms the handles, is wrapped solid and a reed or two included to give added strength. The odd but attractive handles are shaped out to points while the reed is wet, and when dry retain their shape. The space left under the opening of the handles is then wrapped solid with the raffia, with an over and over stitch. Natural colored matting and old blue raffia were used in this tray.

*Indian Arrowhead Basket.* Dimensions, diameter of top, 5 1/2 inches; diameter of bottom, 4 1/2 inches. The little basket with the Indian arrowhead design was started with a coiled center as described before. When the eighth row was reached an extra stitch was introduced between the regular rows. These extra stitches formed the points of the arrowheads. On the ninth row three stitches were grouped together about each one of these extra stitches. On the tenth row five stitches, eleventh row one stitch, twelfth row three stitches, thirteenth row three stitches, fourteenth row one stitch, fifteenth row three stitches, sixteenth row five stitches, and on the seventeenth row seven stitches, which completed the
basket, and the matting strands were cut away.

Brown matting was used with a deeper shade of brown raffia forming the straight rows of stitches radiating from the center, with the last four rows of raffia of the natural shade. The arrowheads were put in with orange colored raffia.

*Mother Goose Work Basket.* Dimensions, cardboard foundation, 6¼ inches; diameter of entire base, 8 inches; height, 2½ inches. For this basket cretonne in a nursery pattern was used to cover the 6¼ inch cardboard foundation. The first four rows of matting were then bound to this foundation in a horizontal position in order to enlarge the base. Eight rows were then slanted upward for the sides.

Illustrations show the coil button or first row, second row complete and making the ornamental stitch. This stitch is begun with the beginning of the third row when the raffia has been wrapped twice around the row bringing the needle from the back of the work up through the center hole with each of these stitches. The needle is then brought up under the loose strands instead of through the center. The raffia is crossed over the two stitches and the needle inserted on the opposite side of the stitches between the new row and the old. In the fourth the stitch is shown complete with the raffia drawn tight thus knotting the two stitches together. The fifth illustrates the method of making the ornamental stitch and is the same as that made on the third except that the needle is not brought up through the center each time.

With these suggestions as helps the basket maker could go on indefinitely making designs, enjoying her work and letting poetical fancy dictate shapes and colors. The American Indians looked about them for designs and took from a flock of birds, a reed, or feather from an eagle a motif for the design of their basket. By coloring their own reed and rushes, introducing a bright bead, or the feather of a bird, they have made baskets which are models in color, form and poetical feeling that will endure for all time. The work is well suited for a woman’s deft fingers, and there is no reason why we of this generation could not create baskets as interesting and beautiful as those made by the first Americans. Are we to be outdone in delicacy of thought and skill of fingers by those first women?