

How to Make a Straw Mattress



This mattress design is basically like an old-school baggie – the kind with a sort of pocket at the top that flips over and keeps the baggie closed.



I've flipped the mattress over so you can see the flap on the underside. I even lifted it up so you could peek at the straw inside :)



The first thing to decide is how big you want your bed/mattress to be. I wanted to make twin sized mattresses so I could buy cheap garage sale sheets to fit and not have to worry about mud etc.

The cheapest fabric I could find was from PeriodFabric.com. I used their neutral cotton duck cloth which is a very heavy duty 60 inch wide fabric. To make 2 twin sized mattresses, I ordered 11 yards. (Less than \$40!) Wherever you get your fabric, wash it on hot and dry it on hot BEFORE SEWING YOUR MATTRESS!. That way, after a grubby, stinky event, you'll be able to dump out the straw and wash the mattress tick without worrying about it shrinking.

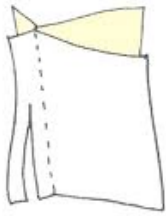
Twin/Single	39×75 in (99×191 cm)
Twin/Single XL	39×80 in (99×203 cm)
Double/Full	54×75 in (137×191 cm)
Double/Full XL	54×80 in (137×203 cm)
Queen	60×80 in (152×203 cm)

My original design was gotten from feather ticks and involved fancy corners that gave the mattress depth. However, I've since come to realize that no matter how tightly you lace a rope bed, it is inevitably going to sag in the middle (at least a little bit). So if you instead sew the mattress with simple corners (like the old school sandwich baggies), it will tend to be fatter in the middle than on the edges. Ideally, the puffy mattress and the saggy rope bed will cancel out and equal a mostly flat sleeping surface :)

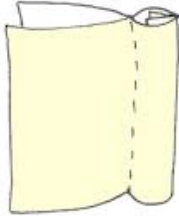
For twin sized mattresses, cut your fabric 42 inches wide by 194 inches long. This allows for a 40 inch wide mattress plus 2 inches for seam allowance (1 inch on each side). The mattress length was 76 inches. I needed twice that, so my mattress could have a top and a bottom. I also needed enough for my baggie flap, not to mention the hem at the two short ends of the fabric, bringing my total length to 194 inches. In order to keep straw from leaking out, you can either make a really long baggie flap, or button/fasten a shorter flap. I find that making sure the flap is on the upper side when I carry the mattress between the trailer and the tent

really helps to minimize straw leakage! Try using a carpenter's chalk line to snap nice straight cutting lines to follow. It worked great for me -- I wish all my sewing projects had straight lines so I could use it all the time :)

The weakest part of your mattress is the seams, so here's how to strengthen them: Go to the store and purchase upholstery thread (buttonhole thread would work too). It's a pain in the butt to work with (keeps trying to unroll itself as you wind the bobbin thread) but it's not going to break (you could probably use it as fishing line). Use a fairly short stitch to sew your seams.



Step 1: Sew wrong sides together and trim seam allowance.



Step 2: Turn so right sides are facing and stitch close to the seam.

First, hem both short ends, then fold the fabric, right sides out, to make a baggie with a pocket that is 78 inches long (since the straw will make it poof out and become shorter) and a flap that is about 36 inches long. Fold the flap back over the baggie (closing the mattress as it will be with straw inside) and sew up the sides using about a $\frac{3}{8}$ inch seam allowance. Then flip the whole thing inside out, and sew up the sides again, with a $\frac{5}{8}$ inch seam allowance. That way, your raw edges will be trapped inside the seam.

Flip the mattress right side out. Leave the flap inside out, so it's not covering the opening. Stuff lots and lots and lots of straw inside, till it's totally full and looks like a bean bag. Now beat the straw, and lie down on the mattress and roll around. You'll notice that it flattens out remarkably and you might even want to add some more straw. In order to balance comfort and manageability, you might start with half a large (3 string) bale of straw for a twin sized mattress.

Speaking of the straw, I used 1 (3 string) bale of straw (total) to stuff 2 twin sized mattresses and had straw left over. (Less than \$10 at the local feed store!) I spread the straw out in the sun first, and sprayed it with some essential oils** mixed in with rubbing alcohol (in the hopes of making it unattractive to bugs) and stirred and sprayed and stirred and sprayed and let it all dry out before stuffing my mattresses :)

The verdict: A success! I got a prickly straw rash on my arms from filling the mattresses, but the straw doesn't poke through once inside. It's very comfortable and the essential oils smell nice :) I'll probably need to fluff the mattress every day or two to even it out, but it's warm and comfortable to sleep on :)

** My "recipe" was 1 cup of rubbing alcohol to 5 drops each of lavender, citronella, cedarwood, rosemary, eucalyptus, and peppermint, scaled up and mixed in a big spray bottle. FYI, 8 ounces = 1 cup (my spray bottle has ounces marked on the side).