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# Do it Yourself

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## *reweave a chair seat*

**e**arly American straight-back chairs were often finished off with rush seats. Made from cattails, rush was a naturally strong fiber that could be woven into chair bottoms that offered both comfort and durability. And, rush seats had the added advantage of being easily replaceable when they wore out. Weaving a new seat onto an old, bottomless chair is still a beautiful and satisfying way to recycle furniture and, at the same time, keep the design integrity of the piece intact. If you're not inclined to make your own rush from cattails—something of an undertaking—simply buy commercial fiber rush, which is composed of a tough grade of paper twisted into strands like those used on the seat shown here. Or, you might want to experiment with jute or sisal rope as an alternative if you don't mind a coarser quality to your chair seat.

1 Remove any old rush from the seat and glue any loose joints. Refinish the wood chair frame, if necessary, or clean it by rubbing the wood with a soft cloth and denatured alcohol. If the chair is wider at the front than the back, use a pencil to mark on the front rail the area that will need to be filled in to square up the open space. Fill in these two corners first.

2 Start by using twine to securely tie the end of the cord to the left-hand side rail at the midway point. Bring the cord over and under the front rail, then up, across the cord, and over the left-hand rail (locking the cord in position). Now, wrap the cord around the outer edge of the left-hand rail, then under it, across the chair seat opening, and up over the right-hand rail. After stretching the cord over the right-hand rail, pull it around the outer edge of the frame, then under it, then up over the front rail (again locking the cord in position—at this point it's as if you've wrapped the cord in a figure 8 across the front of the frame). Finally, wrap the cord around the outer edge of the front rail, then under it, pulling it back to the midpoint of the right-hand rail, and tying it there with twine. Be sure to pull the cord taut as you work.

Give a garage-sale bargain new life by replacing a rush seat—the steady rhythm of the weaving will soothe you

3 Tie the second length of cord just beyond the first one (closer to the back of the chair on the left-hand rail) and repeat the pattern above: over and under the front rail; across the cord and over and under the left-hand rail; across the seat; over and under the right-hand rail; across the cord, and over and under the front rail, tying off just beyond the first cord on the right-hand rail. Continue this process, adding lengths of cord, until the corners are filled in and the chair opening is a regular shape with the opening at the front and back ends measuring the same width.

4 After wrapping about seven or eight rows, pack the cords in the corners together by pushing them, lever fashion, with a wooden spatula inserted between the top and bottom layers of cording. To fill the space that develops between the upper and lower layers of cord and help support and pad the seat, fold or crush kraft paper or brown paper into compact wads at least eight layers thick and stuff them between the top and bottom of the seat.

5 To fill in the remaining space, again start at the back of the left-hand rail and repeat the process above, but this time, instead of tying off the cord, continue on, going over and under the back rail on the right-hand side. Passing the cord up, across the cord adjacent to the right-hand side rail and over the right-hand rail, then under the rail, and up over and under the left-hand rail. Finally, pull the cord up and across the back rail, then pull it under the back rail and up toward the front rail to repeat again. Pull the cord taut at each turn, and continue this over, under, across pattern, joining lengths of cord, as necessary, with a square knot on the underside of the chair. If you wish, use spring clamps to hold the cords in place as you work.

6 After completing every seven or eight rows, pack additional brown paper padding between the top and bottom layers of cording. If the front and back of the chair fill before the sides, continue weaving the cord from side to side, keeping to the over, under (figure 8) pattern and weaving through the middle strands. Finally, tie off the cord and tuck any loose ends into the cording on the underside of the seat.

## materials

- Old chair with open seat frame
- Wood glue and cleaning or refinishing materials (if necessary)
- Soft cloth (if necessary)
- Denatured alcohol (if necessary)
- Ruler
- Pencil
- 2-lb. ball of fiber cording, either  $\frac{1}{2}$ " or  $\frac{3}{8}$ " thick
- Ball of cotton twine
- Wooden spatula
- Kraft paper or brown paper bags
- Two spring clamps (optional)

