

Weaving a Cane Seat

More comfortable than wood, less expensive than upholstery

by Judy Warner

Tools and technique are simple. Caning doesn't require many tools, and this octagonal pattern is easy to reproduce.

Caned seats are versatile. Though this traditional pattern is at least 300 years old, it goes well even with contemporary furniture styles.



I had two reasons for wanting cane seats on the breakfast-nook stools that my husband had made. First, I love the light, airy pattern of traditionally woven cane, a pattern that's been around for more than 300 years. Second, I was tired of sitting on the hard wooden seats of the old stools. We've been very pleased with the results; the pattern blends well with the contemporary stools (see the photo at left), and the firm yet flexible cane is more comfortable than wood and less expensive than upholstery.

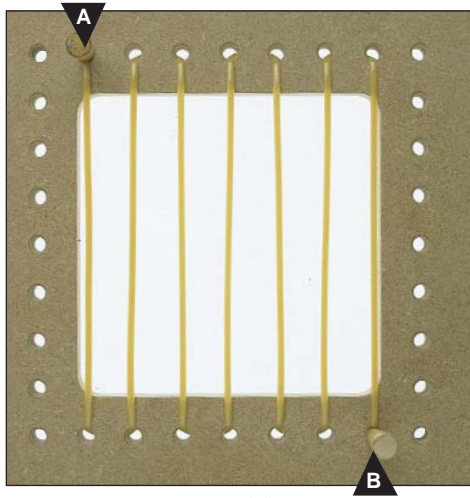
Cane and equipment

Cane for chair seating comes from rattan, a vine-like plant that grows up to 300 ft. in the jungles of Indonesia, China and India. The foliage and outer bark are cut away

from the 1-in.-dia. main stem, which is cut into strips to make the cane.

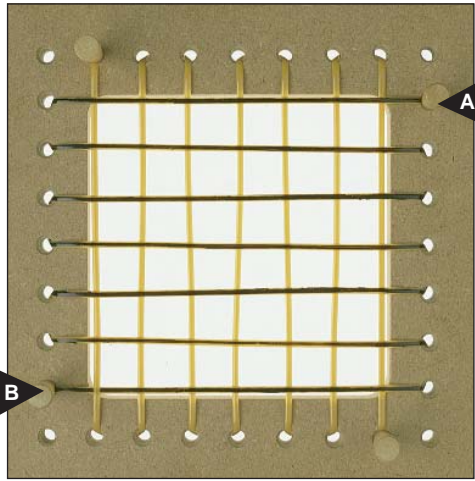
Cane is readily available from several weaving supply stores and is usually sold in metric widths (see the sources of supply box on p. 47). Cane is supplied in hanks of 500 ft. and 1,000 ft. or in a coil of 250 ft., which is enough for one 12-in.-sq. seat. If this is your first seat, I suggest ordering at least 500 ft. of cane and weaving a practice seat. An easy way to make a practice frame that requires no joinery is to cut it from $\frac{3}{4}$ -in.-thick plywood.

Tools needed for the caning job are minimal, and they usually can be obtained from the same source as the cane. You'll need caning pegs (golf tees also work), an awl, scissors, clothespins and a dish pan to soak and soften the cane. If you're a begin-



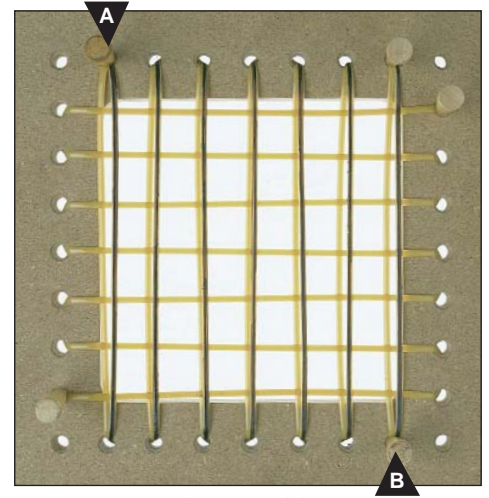
Step 1: First vertical layer

Starting at hole A, peg the cane, pull it across the seat and then weave it down through one hole and back up through the adjacent hole. Keep the glossy side up. Peg the last hole at B, leaving about 5 in. extra for tying off. The cane should be slightly slack because the grid tightens with continued weaving.



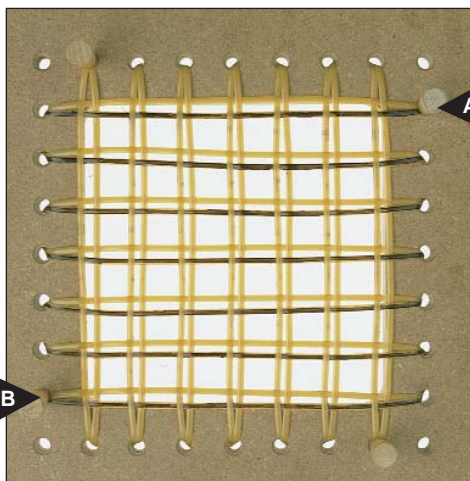
Step 2: First horizontal layer

This is a repeat of the first layer, except this layer fills in from side to side. Start at hole A, leaving about 5 in. of extra cane, and tap in a peg. This layer also should be slightly slack and lay on top of the first layer. Continue from side to side to the finish point at hole B. Peg the cane, leaving an extra 5 in.



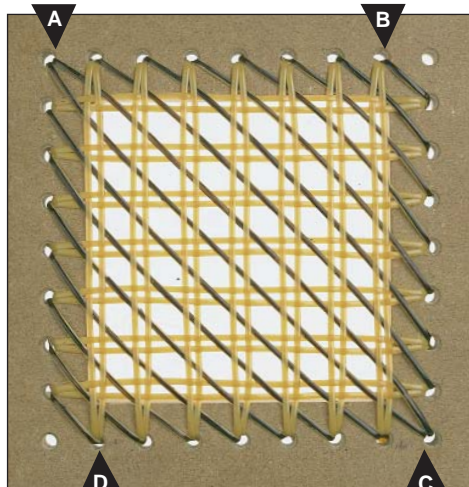
Step 3: Second vertical layer

Begin another layer in the same manner as Step 1, using the same holes, starting at A and ending at B, as in Step 1. This layer sits on top of Step 2's horizontal layer, with the cane slightly to the right of the cane in the first vertical layer. Again, leave about 5 in. at each end, and peg the ends in place. The cane still should be slightly slack.



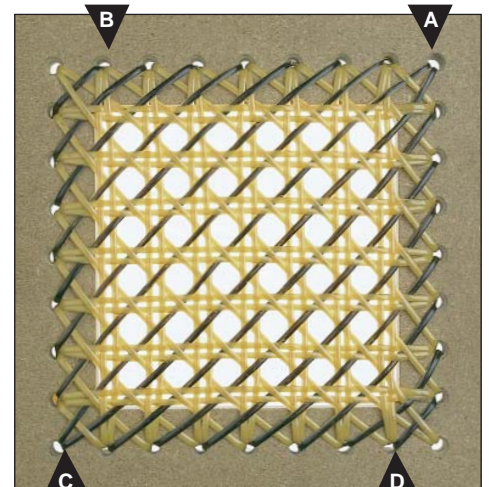
Step 4: Second horizontal layer

Work from right to left, starting at hole A, but this time, the cane is woven under strands in layer 1, over strands in layer 3 and in front of strands in layer 2. I weave about one-third of the way across the seat and pull the strand taut before weaving the next third. The cane pulls through more easily if you keep it moist.



Step 5: First diagonal layer

The diagonals are woven with two separate strands. The first strand starts at hole A and ends at hole B. The second starts at hole C and ends at hole D. Weave under vertical and over horizontal pairs of strands as you go. Leave an extra 5 in. of cane at the ends, and then peg the loose ends as you go.



Step 6: Second diagonal layer

This layer, which runs perpendicular to the first diagonal layer, will complete the pattern. This time, the cane is woven over the vertical pairs of strands and under the horizontal strand pairs. Complete as in Step 5. To tie off loose cane on the underside of the seat, make an overhand knot as shown in the drawing at right.

ner, you might want to consider plastic cane. Plastic cane is easier to weave, doesn't require soaking and holds up to heavy use. Another option is to use prewoven cane panels held in a groove around the seat opening with a reed spline.

Preparing the seat

For a new seat, I lay out and drill holes for the cane based on the look I want. For example, for a light, delicate look, I'll use narrower, 2mm- to 2.5mm-wide cane (roughly $\frac{3}{32}$ in. wide) and size and space

holes according to the chart on the facing page. I chamfer the top and bottom of each hole to ease the stress on the cane as it wraps around the frame. I also lightly chamfer the top inside edge of the seat frame, so the cane doesn't wear at that point. A rabbit routed around the bottom side of the seat frame helps hide the knots that hold the cane in place, as shown in the photo on the facing page.

To prepare an old seat that I'm repairing, I cut the caning away just inside the frame and save this piece for a pattern reference

when weaving the new seat. After cleaning out all the old cane and any other residue left in the holes, I make any necessary repairs to the chair. Now's the time to clean up and refinish the chair, if necessary. It's much harder later.

Caning a seat

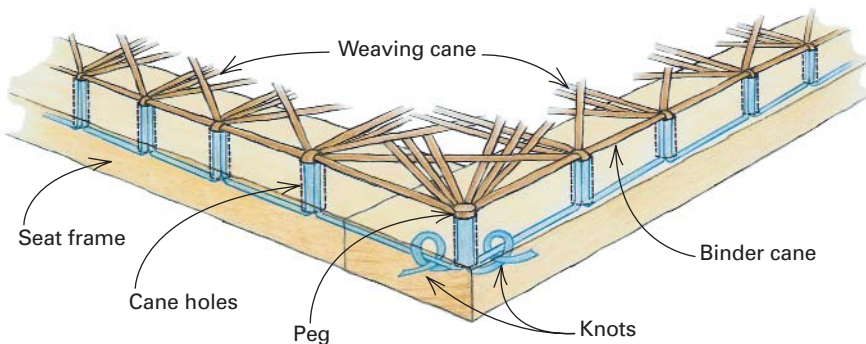
I use the seven-step approach, a standard caning technique, as shown in the photos above and in the top drawing on the facing page. This method is suited to the simple, square seats that my husband makes for

Selecting cane

Hole diameter	Space between holes	Size	Width of cane
1/8 in.	3/8 in.	Superfine	1.75mm
3/16 in.	1/2 in.	Fine-fine	2mm-2.5mm
7/32 in.	5/8 in.	Fine	2.5mm
1/4 in.	3/4 in.	Medium	3mm
5/16 in.	7/8 in.	Common	3.5mm
		Binder	4mm-6mm

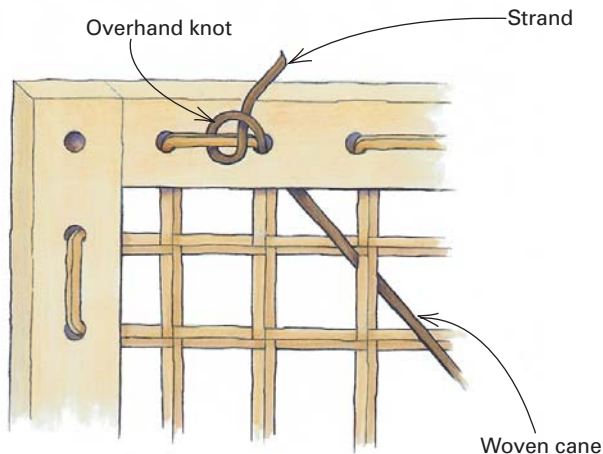
Step 7: Binder cane

For a finished look, install a binder cane. Cut a length of binder to fit one side of the seat, leaving about 5 in. extra on each end for tying off. Pull the binder through corners and peg in place. Secure the binder with regular cane by pulling the cane up through the first hole, over the binder and down through the same hole, continuing to the next corner.



Tying off loose ends

(Bottom view of seat frame)



Sources of supply

The following companies manufacture or supply caning equipment and materials.

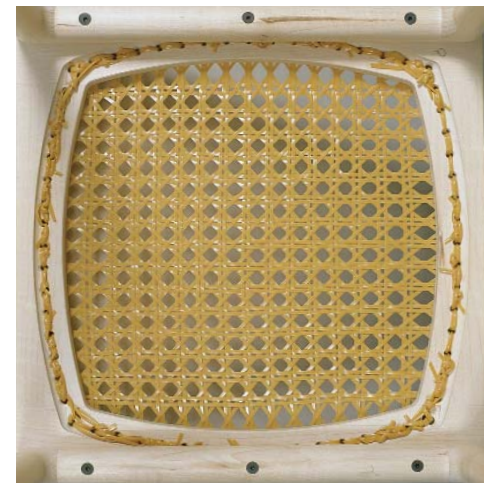
Cane & Basket Supply Co.,
1283 S. Cochran Ave., Los Angeles,
CA 90019; (800) 468-3966

Constantine, 2050 Eastchester
Road, Bronx, NY 10461; (800)
223-8087

Earth Guild, 33 Haywood St.,
Asheville, NC 28801; (800)
327-8448

H.H. Perkins Co. Inc.,
10 S. Bradley Road,
Woodbridge, CT 06525; (800)
462-6660

The Woodworkers' Store, 21801
Industrial Blvd., Rogers, MN
55374-9514; (800) 279-4441



Keeping the knots neat—A rabbit routed into the underside of the seat frame helps hide the mass of knots and cane endings. Chamfering the top and bottom of each hole and the top, inside edge of the frame helps prevent undue wear on the cane.

his stools (see the bottom photo on p. 45). It's a technique that has been around for more than 300 years and is a good starting point for learning more advanced designs later. Whether weaving a new seat or replacing the broken cane in an existing seat, the first step is to determine the appropriate cane size from the chart above. I used medium cane (about 1/8 in. wide) in 10-ft. to 15-ft. lengths on this seat.

Before weaving, the cane must be soaked in water for at least 10 minutes to make it pliable. If the cane dries out while

weaving, a quick dab with a damp sponge will help the cane slide a little more smoothly. Another thing to keep in mind while weaving is that the top side of the cane is smooth and shiny and somewhat convex, and the bottom is flat and rough. Be sure to keep the shiny side up. Use a continuous pattern of down through one hole and up through the adjacent hole. Hands should be positioned one above, one below, as shown in the top photo on p. 45. Note that no actual weaving takes place until the fourth step.

Finish the seat by tying off all the loose ends with overhand knots, as shown in the bottom drawing above, cutting away any extra fringe and trimming the ends to leave about 1 in. Try to keep the knots equally spaced around the underside of the seat frame.

I like the natural, glossy look of cane, but it can be stained or finished with shellac or varnish if you prefer. □

Judy Warner is a weaver in Escondido, Calif.