

## Preparing and cutting pile fabrics

Heather explains her method for preparing fabric for use in a rug.

I wash everything before it comes into my studio. This is especially important with recycled fabrics, both to improve the smell and to wash out any moths. Washing new fabric is important because it removes the dressing and softens the fabric. The mechanical action of washing will also mat the fibers of new fabric a bit, binding them together slightly so the fabric is less likely to fray when you cut it into strips. Everything is washed on a normal warm wash, not boiled.

People often phone Heather to ask for advice on cutting a particular type of fabric and her answer is nearly always the same: "cut it and see—you can't tell otherwise." As was explained in Chapter 5, *The Evacuees*, you must cut all woven fabrics except tweed on the grain—along the warp or the weft—that

is, the direction in which you can tear it. Tweed is different because it can shred and drop to bits if cut on the grain. To overcome this, cut it on the cross, the bias, to get a stretchy piece with a wavy edge.

Heather would not normally use woven cottons, especially in floor rugs, because they flatten and get dirty very quickly, but she does use knitted cotton T-shirts that can be cut in any direction. Heather observes that Australian rug-makers use a lot of cotton T-shirts in their work because they do not have access to a good supply of wool sweaters. As a result, Australian rugs are always brightly colored and vibrant. In the Rug Aid workshop in The Gambia (see Chapter 18, *Origins and Identities*), trainees make use of whatever fabrics are available including donated tailor's scraps. There are often T-shirts for sale in the local market, although the stall-holders are always surprised when they find out how Heather plans to use the shirts.



This corner of Heather's garden studio in Reeth houses a chest of drawers stuffed with strips.