

Recycled Denim & Patchwork Tote Bag Tutorial

Turn old denim jeans and colorful cotton scraps into a beautiful handmade tote bag with crocheted handles and a decorative tassel! This project combines sewing, patchwork, and a touch of crochet to create a durable and stylish everyday bag. This detailed tutorial follows the graphic pattern closely so you can recreate the bag from start to finish with confidence.











STEP 1: PREP DENIM
(Remove seams from old jeans)



STEP 2: CREATE PATCHWORK
(Sew fabric squares in columns)



STEP 3: ASSEMBLE BAG BODY
(Sew denim panels to gusset)



STEP 4: ATTACH LINING
(Remove and seams from old jeans)



STEP 4: ATTACH LINING AND INTERFACING
(Apply to inside panels)



STEP 5: EMBELLISH
(Add tassel, button, and hand-embroidered flower - see detail)

CROCHETED HANDLES



1 CORE



2 SINGLE CROCHET (SC)



CHAIN (CH)



CHAIN (CH)

HANDLE DETAIL:
Work over a core. Use US Terminology

CROCHET TERMS (US)



CH
(Chain Stitch)



SC
(Single Crochet)



HDC
(Half Double Crochet)



DC
(Double Crochet)

TASSEL



Wrap with yarn



Apply a small jump ring

MATERIALS & TOOLS

- **Main Body:** Upcycled Denim fabric.
- **Patchwork:** Assorted cotton fat quarters (Floral, Swirls, Geometric).
- **Handle Core:** 1/2" diameter cotton rope (approx 48" total).
- **Yarn (Handles/Tassel):** Worsted weight (Size 4) cotton yarn in yellow-gold (approx 100 yds), plus small amounts of colorful cotton for the tassel.
- **Crochet Hook:** Size H/8 (5mm) recommended.
- **Sewing Needle:** Universal needle for sewing machine; hand needle for embroidery.

Finished Bag Size

Approximate finished size:

- 14 inches wide
- 12 inches tall
- 4 inches deep

This size is perfect for shopping, books, craft supplies, or everyday use.

Skill Level

Intermediate

You should know basic sewing skills and beginner crochet stitches.

Materials & Tools

Main Fabric

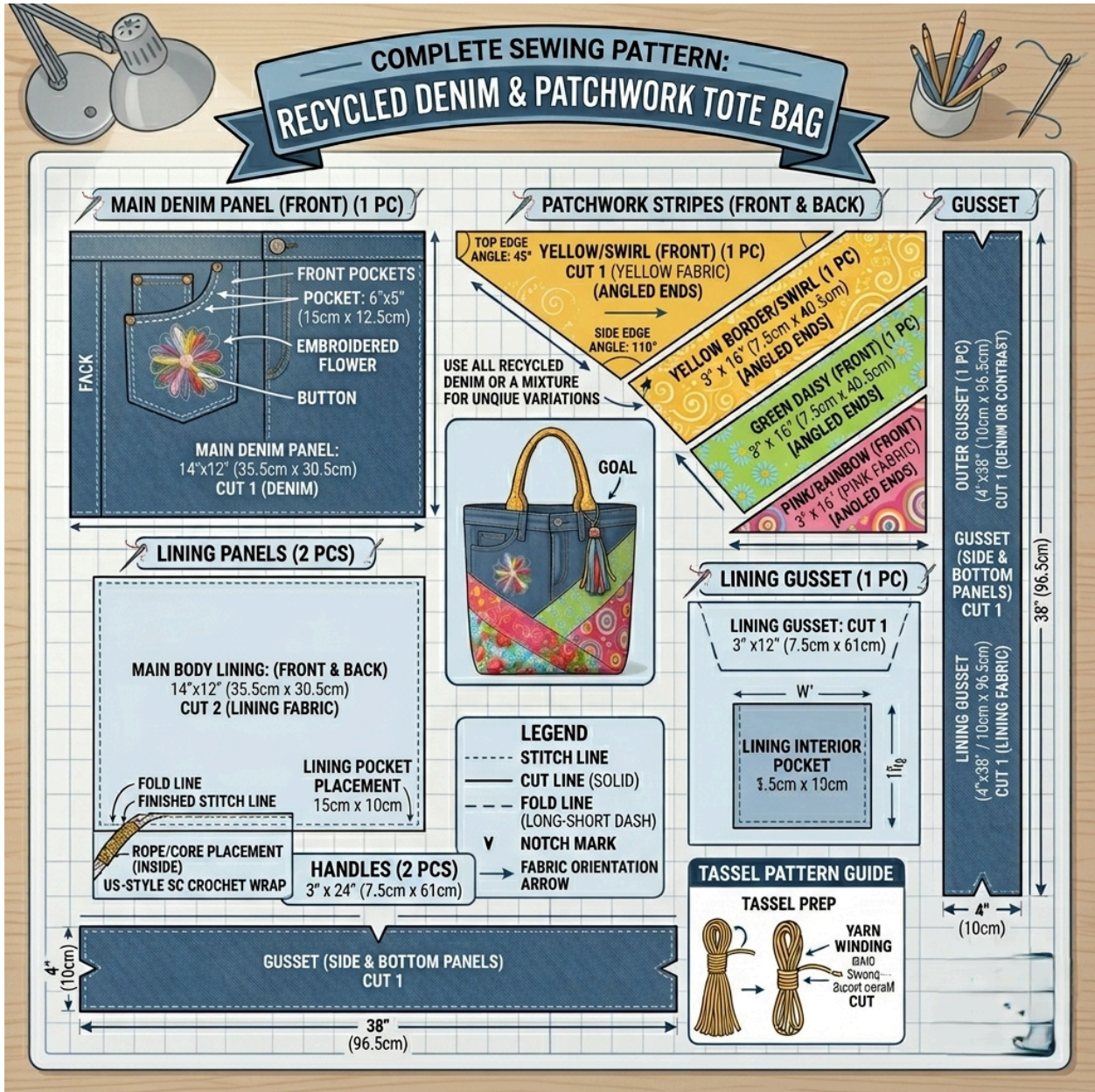
- Old denim jeans or recycled denim fabric
- Assorted cotton fabric scraps or fat quarters for patchwork

Crochet & Handle Materials

- Cotton rope or thick cotton cord (about 1/2 inch diameter)
- Worsted weight cotton yarn in mustard yellow or gold
- Small colorful yarn scraps for tassel

Sewing Supplies

- Sewing machine
- Denim sewing needle
- Hand sewing needle
- Matching sewing thread
- Fabric scissors
- Rotary cutter and cutting mat (optional)
- Pins or clips
- Measuring tape
- Iron and ironing board
- Interfacing (medium weight)
- Fabric marker or chalk



Crochet Supplies

- Size H/8 (5 mm) crochet hook

Crochet Abbreviations (US Terms)

- CH = Chain
- SC = Single Crochet
- HDC = Half Double Crochet
- DC = Double Crochet

Cut List

Cut the following pieces from denim:

Main Body Panels

- 2 pieces measuring 14" x 12"

Gusset Pieces

- 2 pieces measuring 4" x 38"

Handles

- 2 strips measuring 3" x 24"

Lining Pieces

Cut the same size pieces from lining fabric:

- 2 body panels
- 2 gusset panels

Patchwork Fabric

Cut assorted cotton squares in equal sizes.

A good size is:

- 3" x 3" squares

You will need enough squares to create decorative diagonal patchwork sections on the front of the bag.

Step 1: Prepare the Denim

Start by selecting old denim jeans with sturdy fabric. Jeans with minimal stretch work best because they hold shape better.

Lay the jeans flat on a large table.

Using sharp fabric scissors, carefully cut:

- Along the inseam
- Along the outer seam

- Around bulky pockets if needed

Remove thick seams if they are too bulky for your sewing machine.

Press the denim flat with an iron so the fabric becomes easier to measure and cut accurately.

Using your measuring tape and chalk, mark the following:

- Two 14" x 12" rectangles
- Two 4" x 38" strips
- Two 3" x 24" strips

Cut all pieces carefully.

If your denim has decorative pockets, you may keep one and include it on the outside panel for extra character.

Step 2: Create the Patchwork Panels

Choose colorful cotton fabrics in floral, geometric, or bright prints.

Arrange your squares on a table before sewing. Mix colors evenly so the design feels balanced.

The graphic shows diagonal patchwork sections crossing the denim panel, so you will create strips that can later be sewn diagonally onto the bag front.

Sewing the Squares

Place two squares right sides together.

Sew using a 1/4-inch seam allowance.

Continue adding squares until you create rows.

Join rows together carefully, matching seams.

Press every seam flat after sewing. This step makes the patchwork look professional and keeps bulk reduced.

Once your patchwork section is large enough, place it on top of the denim panel diagonally.

Trim the edges neatly.

Repeat for any additional patchwork sections you want on the front of the tote.

Step 3: Attach the Patchwork to the Denim

Place the patchwork pieces onto the front denim panel.

Pin in place securely.

Topstitch around all edges about 1/8 inch from the edge.

Because the design uses overlapping diagonal strips, layer them one at a time.

This creates the artistic crisscross look shown in the guide.

Take your time arranging the strips until you like the composition.

You can also add:

- Decorative machine stitching
- Embroidery
- Appliqué flowers
- Extra denim pockets

The sample bag includes a small embroidered flower near the top center area.

Step 4: Assemble the Main Bag Body

Now you will attach the gusset to create depth.

Attach the Gusset to the Front Panel

Take one long gusset strip.

Start at the top corner of the front panel.

Pin the gusset around:

- One side
- The bottom
- The opposite side

Keep right sides together.

Sew slowly using a 1/2-inch seam allowance.

Clip corners slightly so the fabric curves smoothly.

Attach the Back Panel

Pin the remaining edge of the gusset to the back panel.

Sew carefully around all sides.

Turn the bag right side out temporarily to check the shape.

You should now see a structured tote bag with boxed depth.

Step 5: Add Interfacing

To make the bag stronger and more stable, apply interfacing to the lining pieces or directly to the denim interior.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Usually this means:

- Place the rough adhesive side against the wrong side of fabric
- Press with a hot iron
- Hold for several seconds without sliding

Allow everything to cool flat.

This step helps the tote stand upright and carry heavier items.

Step 6: Sew the Lining

Using the same construction process as the outer bag:

- Sew the lining panels to the lining gusset
- Leave a 4-inch opening at the bottom for turning later

Press seams flat.

Keep the lining inside out for now.

Step 7: Create the Crocheted Handles

These handles are made by crocheting around cotton rope.

This creates sturdy handles with a beautiful handmade texture.

Prepare the Rope Core

Cut two pieces of cotton rope approximately:

- 24 inches long each

You may slightly adjust length depending on how long you want the straps.

Begin Crochet Covering

Using your crochet hook and cotton yarn:

Make a slip knot.

Begin with a small number of chains.

Wrap the crochet stitches tightly around the rope core.

Work continuous single crochet stitches around the rope.

The stitches should fully cover the rope so no white cord shows through.

Continue crocheting until the entire rope is covered.

Important Tips

- Keep tension firm
- Push stitches close together
- Rotate the rope as you work
- Maintain even stitch size

The finished handle should feel dense and sturdy.

Repeat for the second handle.

Step 8: Attach the Handles

Position the handles evenly on the front and back panels.

Measure carefully so both sides match perfectly.

A good placement is:

- About 3 inches from each side seam

Pin or clip in place.

Sew a reinforced box stitch at each handle end.

Because denim is thick, sew slowly and backstitch several times.

For extra durability:

- Sew an X inside the square stitching

This reinforcement is commonly used on tote bags.

Step 9: Make the Decorative Tassel ✨

The tassel adds a fun handmade touch.

Wrap the Yarn

Take colorful yarn and wrap it around your hand or a small piece of cardboard about 25–30 times.

Carefully slide the loops off.

Tie the Top

Cut a separate piece of yarn.

Tie tightly around the top section about 1 inch from the top edge.

Cut the Bottom

Cut through all loops at the bottom.

Trim evenly.

Add Hanging Loop

Attach a small jump ring or yarn loop at the top.

Tie the tassel onto one handle.

You can combine multiple yarn colors for a brighter boho style.

Step 10: Attach the Lining

Place the outer bag right side out.

Place the lining inside out.

Insert the outer bag into the lining so right sides face together.

Match:

- Side seams
- Top edges
- Handle placement

Pin around the entire top edge.

Sew carefully around the opening.

Pull the entire bag through the opening left in the lining.

Sew the lining opening closed using:

- Ladder stitch by hand
- Or machine stitch close to the edge

Push the lining inside the bag.

Press the top edge neatly.

Topstitch around the upper edge for a professional finish.

Step 11: Final Embellishments

Now personalize your tote.

Ideas include:

- Hand embroidery
- Buttons
- Lace trim
- Decorative stitching
- Iron-on patches
- Beads
- Additional denim pockets

The sample design features:

- A floral embroidered detail
- Bright patchwork strips
- A colorful tassel
- Golden crocheted handles

Helpful Sewing Tips

Sewing Thick Denim

Use:

- Denim needle
- Longer stitch length
- Slow machine speed

If layers become too thick:

- Use a hump jumper or folded scrap fabric behind the presser foot

Press Frequently

Ironing after each seam dramatically improves the final appearance.

Secure All Stress Points

Reinforce:

- Handle attachments
- Side seams
- Gusset corners

These areas receive the most weight.

Washing Instructions

Because this bag combines denim, cotton, and crochet:

- Hand wash or gentle cycle
- Cold water only
- Air dry flat

Do not use high heat drying because it may shrink the patchwork or distort the handles.

Customization Ideas

You can easily modify this pattern by:

- Using different patchwork colors
- Adding zipper closure
- Including interior pockets
- Making longer shoulder straps

- Using leather handles instead
- Adding magnetic snaps
- Creating larger tote dimensions