

# Bertha Frey Crackle Towels in Sustainable Cotton

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My quest for soft towel yarns resulted in the discovery of American Maid natural cottons. The cotton is grown in the American West and spun in the United States. The farmers use modern sustainable farming practices in the production process, making these truly eco-friendly yarns. The unmercerized yarns are all naturally colored in light brown, dark brown, light green, and dark green, as well as natural, and will become slightly darker when washed in alkaline water. Noticeably soft to the touch, they are a joy to weave with, from winding the warp to weaving and finishing. The yarns are available from Lunatic Fringe Yarns in multiple sizes.

The fascination with twentieth-century weaving greats and the crackle weave structure continues; thank you, Susan Wilson (see Resources). Working my way through Berta Frey's book *Designing and Drafting for Handweavers*, I discovered an interesting crackle variation using three blocks as a broken twill design and not treadled as drawn in. This draft eliminates block D in the threading which, as Berta Frey says, makes a more interesting pattern. She

commented, "Crackle is best when pattern and background are of nearly equal color value and when pattern is subordinated to texture." This influenced my choice of the American Maid natural, softly colored cottons for these towels. I adapted the draft to include a darker, defining thread that separates the block designs in both the warp and weft. Using 8/2 light and dark browns as warp created a neutral palette for trying all five colors in the weft in different combinations. In addition to being eco-friendly, these towels are incredibly soft and make a wonderful addition to my collection of handwoven towels.

## RESOURCES

- ♦Frey, Berta. *Designing and Drafting for Handweavers*. New York: Macmillan, 1958, p. 163.
- ♦Wilson, Susan. *Weave Classic Crackle & More*. Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer, 2011.



**1** Wind 478 warp threads 6½ yd long in 8/2 cotton, using the color sequence indicated in the warp color order, Figure 1. Use your preferred method to warp the loom, and thread following the draft in Figure 2. Sley 2 threads per dent in a 10-dent reed, centering for a weaving width of 24". Measure 2 floating selvages, sley them in empty dents at each side of the warp, and weight them over the back of the loom.

**2** Wind one bobbin of each of the 8/2 weft colors and the coordinating 20/2 or sewing thread colors for the hems. If you have a small shuttle, you can just put the sewing thread spool in a shuttle and use it right off the spool. A good trick I've found to separate pieces in your

weaving is to use fusible thread, available at fabric stores. Weave 4 picks of fusible thread between the hems of each towel.

**3** Begin by weaving 1½" of plain weave in your chosen hem color of thread or 20/2 cotton. Follow the treadling order of the crackle blocks; no tabby pick is necessary. Weave the treadling sequence 7 times plus balance as shown in Figure 2 and finish with another 1½"

## STRUCTURE

Crackle.

## EQUIPMENT

4-shaft loom, 24" weaving width; 10-dent reed; 2 shuttles; 6 bobbins.

## YARNS

**Warp:** 8/2 unmercerized cotton (3,200 yd/lb; American Maid Naturally Colored Cotton; Lunatic Fringe), Light Brown, 1,300 yd; Dark Brown, 1,755 yd. 8/2 unmercerized cotton (3,360 yd/lb; UKI), #18 Light Brown, 65 yd.  
**Weft:** 8/2 unmercerized naturally colored cotton; Light Brown, 610 yd; Dark Brown, 636 yd; Light Green, Dark Green, Natural White, 416 yd each. 8/2 unmercerized cotton (3,360 yd/lb; UKI), #18 Light Brown, 62 yd. 20/2 unmercerized cotton (8,400 yd/lb; American Maid Naturally Colored Cotton; Lunatic Fringe), Natural White, or cotton sewing thread, 238 yd.

## WARP LENGTH

480 ends 6½ yd long (includes floating selvages; allows 10" for take-up, 32" for loom waste and sampling).

## SETTS

**Warp:** 20 epi (2/dent in a 10-dent reed).  
**Weft:** 20 ppi in pattern, 18 ppi in hems.

## DIMENSIONS

**Width in the reed:** 24".  
**Woven length (measured under tension on the loom):** 192".  
**Finished size after washing and hemming:** 6 towels, 20" x 24" each.

plain-weave hem at the end of each towel. Use the color combinations in the weft color sequence in Figure 3 or devise combinations of your own.

**4** Remove the fabric from the loom. Using a pressing cloth on both sides of your weaving and a hot iron, press the fusible thread areas until they are sticky on the pressing cloths.



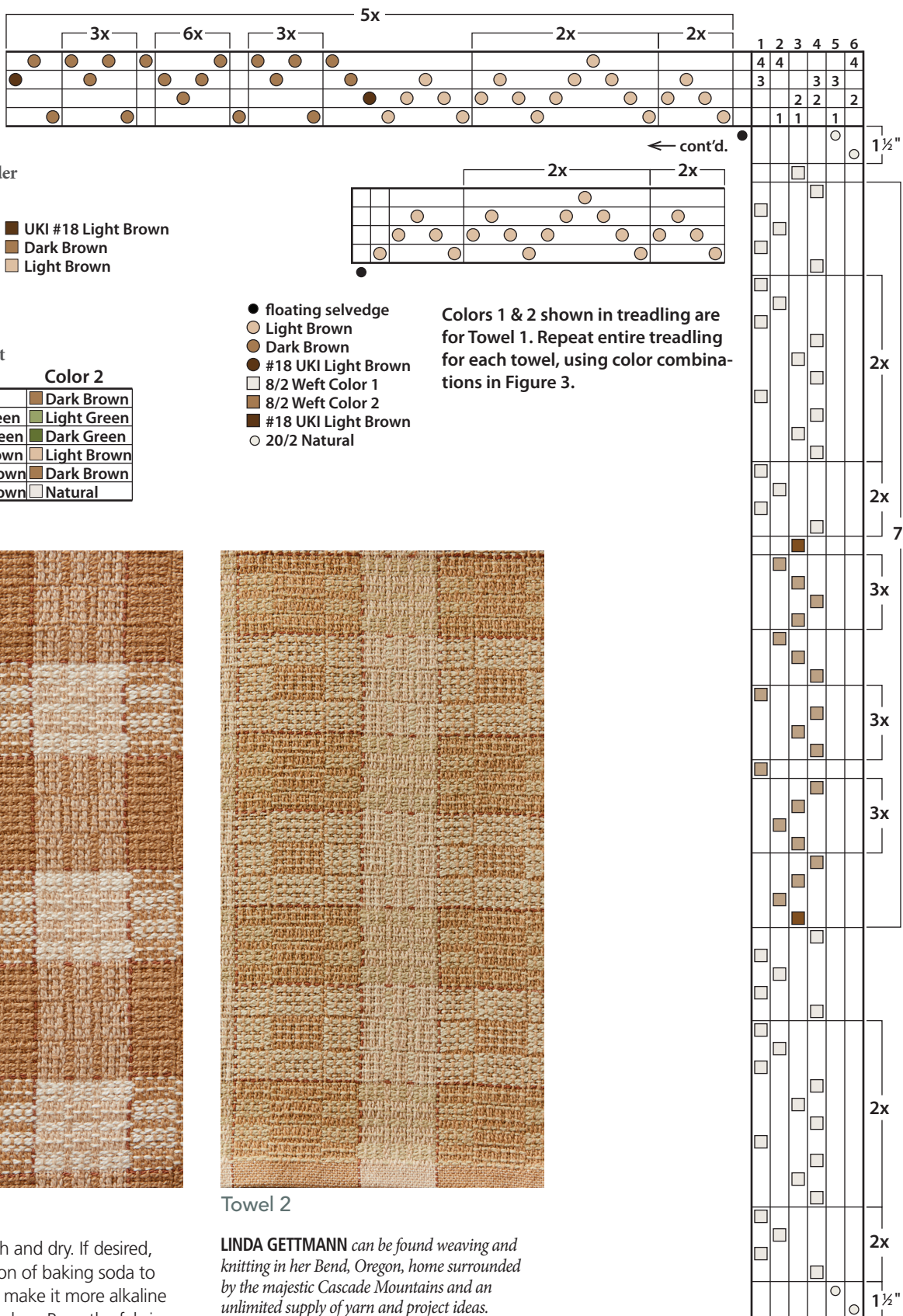




## 2. Draft

### Heddle count

Shaft 4 117  
Shaft 3 154  
Shaft 2 119  
Shaft 1 88  
Total 478



Towel 1



Towel 2

**5** Machine wash and dry. If desired, add a teaspoon of baking soda to the wash water to make it more alkaline and enhance the colors. Press the fabric and cut apart in the middle of the fusible thread strip. Turn the hems under twice and sew by hand.

**LINDA GETTMANN** can be found weaving and knitting in her Bend, Oregon, home surrounded by the majestic Cascade Mountains and an unlimited supply of yarn and project ideas.