

Microwave Heating Bags by-Kris Driessen

This is the season to make reusable microwave heating bags, also called rice bags or heat packs. These bags are terrific, by adjusting the size, for:

- Hand warmers for anyone who wears gloves in the cold (hunters, skiers, you as you get into your car in the morning)
- Neck wraps to ease sore muscles caused by hunching over the sewing machine • Easing the pain of fibromyalgia and arthritis
- Helping breastfeeding moms lower their milk and comfort sore breasts
- Cold feet in bed
- Keeping food warm on the table or while being transported. Just put the dish on top of the heating bag. Or freeze the bag(s) for keeping foods cool during transport or serving.
- These bags can also be frozen, and used as an ice pack for cold therapy.

For the Rice Bags

Filler: Regular (not instant) Rice or So, how do you make them? Easy! A microwave heating bag can use rice or feed (deer) corn. Since these bags are being sent home with each patient, rice is fine to use.

Start with a 9 x 22 piece of scrap fabric. Fold it in half, right sides together, so it measures 9 x 11. This will be your inner pocket. Sew three sides, leaving a little opening to fill, and turn it inside out. A fat quarter will make 2 bags.

Fill with approximately 2 to 2.5 cups of rice. Sew the opening closed, and it is ready for donation.

Fill with 2 to 2 1/2 cups (up to about 2 pounds) of the rice. Be sure to use whole uncooked rice, not instant. When you are done, sew the final section closed. The bag is ready for donation.

Alternative: As an alternative, the bags can be made with feed corn. Feed corn is recommended. Why corn instead of rice, beans or buckwheat? Corn stays cleanest the longest, won't have problems with humidity, mold and mildew and generally won't provoke allergies. You can purchase field corn by the pound where bird food is sold -- it is the whole kernel corn. Be sure to use whole corn, not cracked corn. However, the corn needs to be sanitized To both sterilize the corn and help it to dry out, place the newly made bag on a paper towel in your microwave and heat it for 2 - 3 minutes. Let it cool for at least two hours, shake it up, and do it again on a dry paper towel. If your paper towel or the inside of your microwave is still showing moisture, do the heat/cool cycle one more time.

Examine it closely as you fill the bag and remove anything that is not corn, like husks or leaves and the occasional bug.

Start with a 9 x 22 piece of scrap fabric. Fold it in half, right sides together, so it measures 9 x 11. This will be your inner pocket. Sew three sides, leaving a little opening to fill, and turn it inside out.

After it has completely cooled, place your pocket inside a plastic zippered storage or freezer bag. (Sandwich bags are not thick enough.) This will keep the corn bag itself clean and dry. This bag-in-a-bag is what you will put in a pillowcase. The pillowcase instructions are basically the same as the pillowcases we made last year.

Here are some other suggestions for the pillowcase and *Now the fun begins! When making the pillow case, let your imagination run wild.* Use your orphan blocks, a discarded appliqué, or maybe a scrap of flannel. Make a ruffle or add piping to the edges if you like. Have fun with it, but keep in mind it will be microwaved so you may not want to use metallic threads or threads that melt.

The 9 x 11 size may not be practical for all applications. For example, hand warmers should probably be smaller (6 x 6), to fit in the person's glove. Or larger (18 x 18), to use over your feet when you are sitting on the couch, or to drape over your hands like a muff as you stand at a cold bus stop. If you do make an alternative size, remember to keep the amount of corn in the bag loose and either increase or decrease the amount of time you microwave your heating bag according to how large it is.

Be careful not to leave your bag in the microwave too long! Both the bag and the filling will catch on fire if you leave it in too long.

Are you giving your bag as a gift? Here is a little poem you can use:

The Rice Bag

This little pillow filled with rice
Is such a comforting device.
Microwave for 2 minutes on high
And kiss those aches and pains goodbye.
Apply it to the troubled spot,
The heat will ease the pain a lot.
Or warm those little toes so cold,
You'll find this nice to have and hold.
Or freeze it for a little while,
And fix that booboo up in style.
Instead of a compress made of ice,
Use this pillow filled with rice.