



COLOURFUL “cuddly” animals, realistic or decorative, small or large, are quickly and easily made and are a universal favourite with children and almost equally popular with adults. Felt from old hats or new art felt is a fabric from which almost any soft toy can be made cheaply. This article by Eirene E. Unwin, Rural Sociologist, Department of Agriculture, Dunedin, deals mostly with the making of felt animals, but other materials can be used successfully for most of them. Patterns for a number of toys are given, but for people who would rather use original designs directions for drawing them are included.

EVEN the person without artistic pretensions should not be afraid of attempting to draw her own patterns. A great deal of enjoyment can be had from it and some delightful and original results produced, and the satisfaction and pride of achievement are justifiably much greater from creating a new animal than from copying one from someone else. However, anyone but an experienced toy maker would be well advised to make up some of the tested patterns given before attempting to draw her own. That is the only way to be sure of producing not only a good drawing but a drawing of a good toy, for not all animal drawings will make up into good toys. Only experience in the craft of toy making and a careful study of the make-up of tested patterns will bring ability to judge a drawing and to know whether it will make a good toy. Similarly, only careful observation of real animals or good illustrations of them can teach whether a drawing for a toy will make up into a good animal.

Unfortunately, too many of the commercial soft-toy patterns on the market make up into extremely poor and

unattractive animals. Animal toys, or indeed any toys for children, should not be grotesque or ugly. Distorted they may be if the distortion is pleasant and there is some reason for it. Colours and decoration may be quite unrealistic but still be pleasant to look at and attractive to children. Human-looking eyes and smiling mouths can add a great deal to the appearance of a toy, though the animal on which it is based may have a very unsmiling expression in real life.

If a round, cuddly toy is wanted for little children, the choice should be a round, cuddly creature like a duck or chicken or sitting rabbit. No attempt should be made to make a dog cuddly by shortening its legs to mere buttons and turning its head into a shapeless ball with eyes. Older children appreciate more complicated animals, such as elephants, bears, dogs, and horses, with longer legs and other realistic details. Only adults appreciate complete caricatures of animals suitable as mascots, and even these need not be ugly.

Materials

Felt is probably the best and cheapest all-purpose material for soft toys. Discarded felt hats may be steamed over the spout of a boiling kettle, stretched, and pressed reasonably flat. Art felt may be bought by the yard or in small squares at any large draper's shop and usually provides a better choice of colours than hat felt.

Woven materials may be used instead of felt, and the rag-bag may contain something suitable. They must be strong and closely woven, as there is considerable strain on them at the seams and the stuffing must not be able to be seen through them or to leak out. Velvet, woollen coating and suiting, firm dress fabrics, gingham, other strong cottons, plain or fairly plain furnishing fabrics, and strong fur fabrics are all suitable. Thick towelling is quite good, but gets dirty very quickly with use.