

# Making a Target Using Tatami Omote

First you should decide whether you will be making half, full, or multiple mat targets. We have found that for most of our tameshigiri we prefer to use targets made from a half-mat. The smaller diameter targets show us more about the quality of our technique because they bend slightly if something is not correct. Full targets are less frustrating to use, but if you want to see your mistakes, half-targets will tell you more. An added bonus is that you can do twice as much cutting, or spend half as much money.

As a reference for people who have used beach mats for tameshigiri; a target made from one full piece of our tatami is equal in diameter to three or four beach mats rolled together. However, the tatami omote targets will be stiffer than the beachmat targets.

For horizontal target cutting techniques we recommend the standard practice of using full-mat targets.

For checking your power we recommend two or more full pieces of tatami omote rolled together to make one target.

**Please Note:** We **do not** recommend using a full-length piece of bamboo or dowel through the center of the target during cutting practice unless you have prior experience cutting hard materials. **Serious damage to your sword may occur if you cut incorrectly!**

It is important that you make sure the area where you roll your targets is completely free of dirt, rocks, or other abrasive materials. If one grain of sand or grit is rolled into your target and your sword strikes it, you will scratch the polish, dull the edge, or both. One big advantage of our **new tatami omote** is that you don't have to check for staples or worry about embedded grit. **Always** shake out tatami omote before you roll a target whether it is new or used and **carefully check for staples in used tatami**.

**The technique for rolling a target is the similar no matter what size, or how many mats you use.**

- 1) Take your half, full, or double/triple/etc. mat, and lay it flat on the clean floor or tarp.
- 2) To make rolling much easier you can use a long dowel (40"- 48") that is **1/8 of an inch smaller in diameter** than the peg you use on your cutting stand. Place the dowel along a short edge of the mat and start rolling the mat around the dowel toward the opposite end. You can make targets without a dowel, but you should check the fit of the peg from your cutting stand when you are done to be sure it fits into the center of the target snugly. The peg should slide in and out with a little resistance but not be too hard to pull out. It is very important to push firmly as you roll the target, making sure to keep all the layers of the tatami rolled together as tightly as possible. A target that has air gaps and is rolled loosely will lack stiffness and be difficult to cut.  
**For targets made with two or more mats, roll the mats tightly all the way to the far end and continue with step 4.**
- 3) When you have rolled the mat to within 14-18 inches of the loose end, grab the far edge, bring it back towards you, and slide the loose end of the mat under the section you are rolling. Continue rolling the mat tightly until you have no more to roll. At this point, with the mat rolled as far as possible, you can flatten the end with the heel of your hand or a wooden peg.
- 4) Keeping the mat rolled tightly, tie a string approximately 2-3 inches from the end of the target and repeat the process at the other end. With the two ends tied, you can tie a third string around the center of the target. For a more traditional look tie the target between the center tie and each of the end ties. Carefully remove the dowel making sure the tatami stays in place.  
**Don't forget to remove the dowel before you soak and cut the target!**
- 5) When it is dark green our tatami omote draws up water very quickly. If you are in a hurry, 4 hours should be a sufficient **minimum** time for soaking, if the targets are fully immersed. Using warm water will help. For better results we normally soak our **new tatami omote** targets for at least 10-12 hours. Increased soaking time does not hurt the tatami and will produce a heavier, more dense, target. Maximum density is reached in about **30 hours**. Our new tatami omote can be soaked continuously for at least 5 or 6 days without softening or losing any stiffness or density. Multiple mat targets should be soaked for 24 hours, or longer, depending on the number of mats used. As the tatami ages, the color lightens, and the targets may require longer soaking times. Stand all targets up vertically in a shaded area for 30 to 60 minutes before cutting to drain off excess water. When draining the targets keep them out of the direct sunlight or strong breezes or they may dry out.

**WARNING!** Test cutting can be dangerous for the practitioner and those nearby. Do not attempt to do any test cutting without first getting qualified guidance from a trained instructor. Make sure that your equipment is in good working order every time you cut and be sure that the area is clear of people and obstructions. **ALWAYS** check to make sure that the mekugi (peg) in the sword handle (tsuka) is in good condition and firmly in place. We strongly recommend the use of two pegs for an additional margin of safety. Please read and follow all instructions. Store your unused tatami omote in a dry area out of the direct sunlight.

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