

Easy Petticoat



Skirts worn during Colonial times were called petticoats. These instructions for a petticoat (long skirt) is not historically accurate but rather a simple way of creating a ruffled skirt that can be worn as a costume on Early Guilford Days. It does not require a lot of sewing (only two seams). These instructions also include an **advanced option** for a historically more accurate pleated petticoat.

You need:



- 1 queen, king or full sized flat bed sheet (100% cotton) (if you use other cotton or linen fabric you need to sew a bit more)

© 2020 Hyland House Museum, Guilford CT, hylandhouse.org



- 40" sewing elastic, ½" wide or 6' ribbon or binding tape (chose binding tape if you chose the advanced option in step 2.1)
- 1 pair of scissors
- 1 measurement tape
- Sewing pins or paper binder clips
- Sewing machine or needle
- Sewing thread
- A safety pin

Note on the fabric choice: Avoid small floral prints. Those were not around in colonial times and became popular in the mid 19th Century. Small floral prints are typically associated with settlers in the American West.

Use plain fabric, striped fabric or large floral prints. Petticoats were not trimmed unless they were part of a fancy gown. For everyday uses, an apron would typically be worn over a petticoat.

Measure:

Use measurement tape to measure for the width and length of skirt:

Waist measurement: measure the natural waist where the skirt will sit

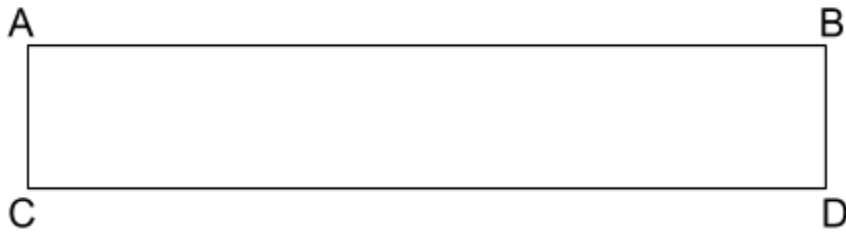
Length measurement: measure from the waist to about 2" above the ankle or other desired length for skirt.

Step 1: cut fabric

You need a rectangle using the length of the bed sheet and the width of the measurement for the skirt length. The sides AB, AC and BD should already be hemmed on the store bought the flat sheet.

Choose the sides AB, AC and BD to be the sides that have finished ½" wide hems already. Don't use the side with the wide hem. AB measures in full sized bed sheet about 85", in a queen sized bed sheet 90" and a king sized bed sheet about 104". This already hemmed long side will be the bottom of your skirt.





Measure the side length AC: AC measures the skirt length plus 2" (for the hem).

Measure down from point A to find point C (about 28"+2" for girls size 10-12) - see picture below. **Advanced option:** If you do the advanced option, you don't need the extra 2". In this case you would make the cut at 28".

Make a $\frac{1}{2}$ " cut at point C perpendicular to AC, which is parallel to AB.



Then rip the fabric across to point D. The ripping method is quite accurate if you use a store bought cotton bed sheet. If you use other fabric, ripping might not work as well. In that case you need to measure and cut more accurately.





Step 2: Sew the skirt

1. First, sew the waist tunnel where the elastic band or the ribbon will be threaded through. To do this, fold the side CD with the unclean edge 1" inside and then another 1" inside to create a clean edge. Pin the whole length.

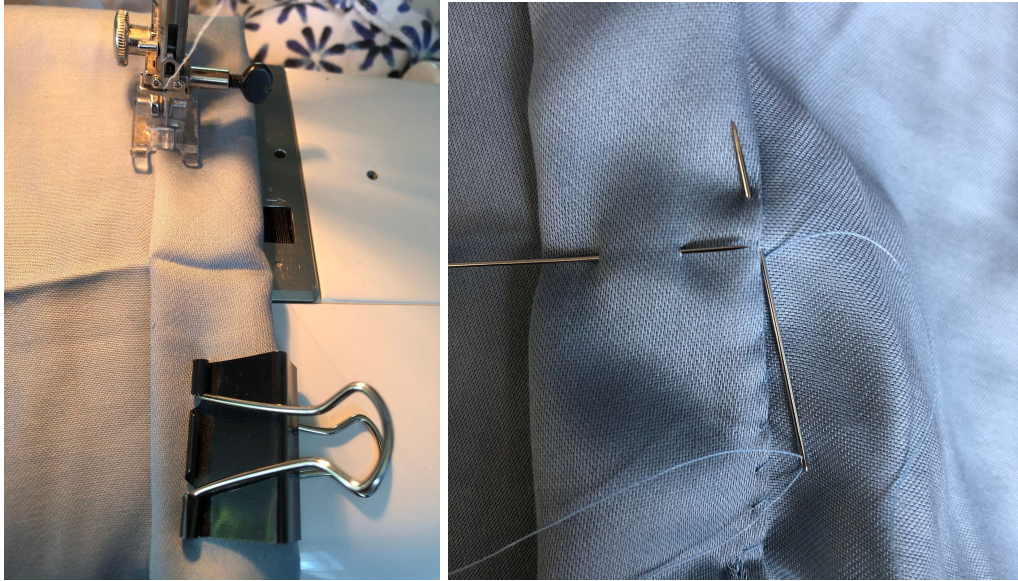




Then sew either with a sewing machine or by hand using a hem stitch.

© 2020 Hyland House Museum, Guilford CT, hylandhouse.org





Advanced option: If you want a more historically accurate pleated skirt, pleat the long side as described at the end of the instructions.

2. If you want to wear a colonial pocket under the skirt or if you do a pleated skirt, leave 10" at the top open to access the pocket.

Advanced Option: The 10" opening for the pockets is not optional but needed. Otherwise the petticoat might not fit over the hips.



3. Then, sew the side shut. Sew along the already hemmed stitches. Sew with machine or by hand using a back stitch.

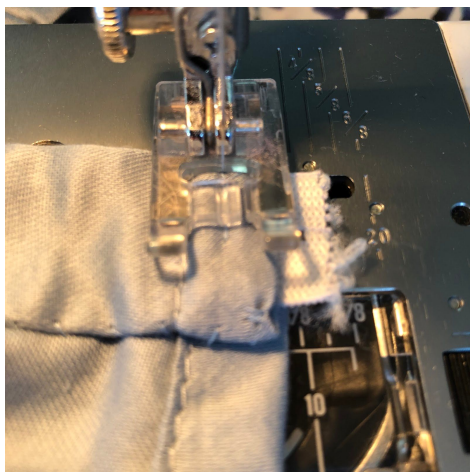


Step 3: Finishing the skirt

Put a safety pin at the ribbon, binding tape or elastic band and thread it through the tunnel at the top of the skirt and close as described below:

If you use a normal elastic band: Cut the length of the elastic band according to the waist measurement plus 1". Thread it through the tunnel and sew the ends together with $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam allowance or knot together.

If you use an elastic band with button holes: Cut the length of the elastic plus 2". Thread through the tunnel. Sew one end of the elastic to one end of the tunnel.



Sew a button to the inside of the skirt where you have sewed the end of the elastic to. Close the skirt with the other end of the elastic band using the button.



If you use ribbon or binding tape: Cut about 5 feet and thread through the tunnel. The skirt is being closed by binding the ends together.

Advanced option: if you pleat the petticoat, you need to use binding tape to secure the pleats.

If you have a pocket opening, when you wear the petticoat, match the pocket opening to the side where you wear the pocket.

Advanced option:

Step 2.1.: Pleating the Skirt:

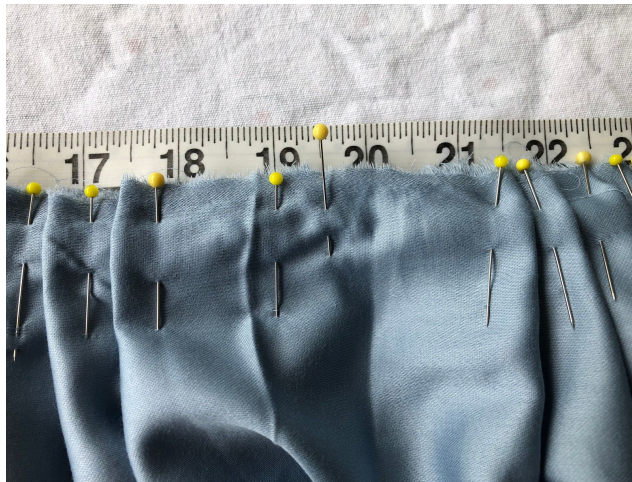
- a. Mark the middle of the skirt with a pin or clip. Each half is pleated differently as one is the front and one is the back.
- b. Pleat the back: Find the middle of the front and fold an inverted box pleat. Then, knife pleat the back folding the knife pleats towards the center back until the pleated back measures half of the waist measurement. For example, if the waist measurement is 26", pleat to the length of 13".
- c. Pleat the front: Find the middle of the front and fold a box pleat and pin the fabric. Then, knife pleat to the sides until the pleated front measures half of the waist measurement as well. If the waist measurement is 26", pleat to the length of 13".



Finished pleats: Center Back at 6.5", Center Back at 19.5":



Box pleat for Center Front:



Inverted box pleat for Center Back:

© 2020 Hyland House Museum, Guilford CT, hylandhouse.org





d. Sew the binding tape over the pleats to secure them.

Step 2:

The 10" opening for the pockets is not optional but needed. Otherwise the petticoat might not fit over the hips.

Step 3:

Cut about 5" of binding tape and bind over the skirt. The skirt will close on the side.

