

Sew a Historical “Huswife”



A “housewife”, “huswife” or “hussif” is a small wallet made of fabric and used to store sewing supplies. Today we would call this a sewing kit. “Huswives” became very popular in the 1700s and were often elaborately embroidered. Many “hussifs” as they were nicknamed as well, were given to soldiers who could store the small item in their haversacks or in other bags. Soldiers as well as sailors or really anybody needed sewing supplies constantly as clothes were mended rather than replaced. “Huswives” were used throughout the 1800s up until the 1940s. Sewing kits today usually come in cheap plastic boxes, but you can sew your own pretty “housewife” with a bit of leftover fabric and a couple of hours of time.

What You Need:

- Assorted leftover fabric or leftover packets from a sewing store: cotton, silk or wool
- Printer to print out the pattern, paper scissors
- Scissors to cut the fabric or ruler, cutting mat and cutting roller
- Binding tape, woven tape or ribbon for finishing
- Optional for pincushion: stuffing material from an old pillow
- Optional for woolen needle flap: pinking shears
- Sewing needle and yarn or sewing machine
- Commercial sewing kit or other sewing tools



1. Preparation:

When designing your “huswife” consider how you want it to be organized. A simple but effective way to design it is with two pockets and one pin cushion or pin flap to store the needles. The pockets can be used for scissors, thread and other sewing supplies. The picture above shows a design with a pincushion, a pocket and cording to hold sewing scissors.

The base of the “huswife” in this tutorial consists of two pieces of fabric that look like a long rectangle with a round top. This will be rolled together and fastened with ribbon. Alternative fastening is possible. The inside of the “huswife” is individually designed and can consist of pockets and needle holders. Below are different options or designs.

Pattern:

Print out the pattern on the last page of this document and cut out the pieces for the base, the pocket and the pocket flap. The pattern for the pocket is also the pattern for the pincushion and the needle flap. The pocket can be made smaller if desired. In any case, cut two pieces of the base pattern.

2. Sewing The Options:

Design: Pocket and Pocket Flap

For a simple pocket cut two fabric pieces of the pocket pattern. Place fabric pieces right sides together and make a seam on both long sides of the rectangle. If you sew by hand, use a backstitch. This seam won't be seen and therefore it is a good time consuming step to sew this seam with the machine. Turn fabric over to the right side and press.



For the optional **pocket flap**, place both fabric pieces right sides together. Sew around using a back stitch and leave open a 1 ½" opening at the top. Sew $\frac{3}{8}$ " from the edge. Trim the seam allowance to $\frac{1}{8}$ " and turn around so the right sides are showing. If you have tweezers you can use them to work out the edges.



Design: Needle Flap

Place both fabric pieces right side together and sew on the wrong sides along the long and one short side. Then trim the corners and turn around to the right sides and press.



If you are using a thicker fabric, e.g. wool, you can use one piece of fabric and either hem the edges or cut with pinking shears



Design: Pincushion

The pincushion is sewn like the pocket. Place two fabric pieces right sides together and make a seam on both long sides of the rectangle. If you sew by hand, use a backstitch. This seam won't be seen and therefore it is a good time consuming step to sew this seam with the machine.



3. Sewing the designs to the base:

In this step, use only one of the long base pieces. Place your designs on to the base and pin.

Placing the needle flap:

Place the needle flap onto one piece of your base fabric. Sew using a back stitch or running stitch along the pinned side as shown below:



Placing the pincushion:

Sew the long sides to the base where the pins are shown in the picture below. Use a hem stitch.



Then stuff the pin cushion and close the short sides with a back stitch or running stitch.



Placing the pocket and pocket flap:

Sew on both short sides with a running stitch and on the long side and is not the opening with a hem stitch.



Place the pocket flap about 1/8" from the opening of the pocket and attach to the base with a hem stitch:



Add a button to the pocket flap if desired.



Placing the cording for the scissors:

Place the scissors on the base and pin where you want the cording to go. Sew the ½”-1” cord where the scissor blades are supposed to be and the long cord on the place under the handles. See the yellow pins in the picture below:



4. Sewing The Back:

To finish the base, place the second fabric piece of the base wrong sides together and baste together, using a running. This step can also be done with the machine. Use a ¼" seam allowance for the basting.



5. Finishing:

To finish the “huswife” sew a piece of ribbon or binding tape around the edges. As a binding tape you can use any tape with a width between $\frac{1}{2}$ ” - 1”. It looks better if you sew by using a hem stitch and sew the inside and outside separately.

Start at the inside at the round top. Pinning is not necessary but the pins shown in the pictures below show where to sew. Sew around the base then turn around and sew the other side. When you get back to the round top, leave a tail of approximately 10” to wrap around. If you like to close with a bow, attach another shorter piece of ribbon.





To fill your newly finished “huswife”, use the interior of the store bought commercial sewing kit.



"Huswife" Pattern

Fabric: Linen, Cotton, Silk or Wool

Seam Allowance (SA) included

Cut 2 of each

Base: cut 2

$SA = \frac{1}{4}'' - \frac{1}{2}''$ incl.,
depending on
width of binding

Pocket Flap: cut 2

$SA = \frac{3}{8}''$ incl.

Pocket: $SA = \frac{1}{2}''$ incl.

Pincushion: $SA = \frac{1}{2}''$ incl.

Pin Flap: $SA = \frac{5}{8}''$ incl.

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