

Tips for Sewing Cloth Dolls

Sewing Supplies

In addition to your basic sewing supplies (thread, pins, scissors, seam ripper, tape measure, marking tools) you will find the following items helpful in making cloth dolls:

- Hemostats—for placing stuffing in small places and tiny parts.
- Hairpin lace loom—for making curly doll hair.
- Stuffing forks—helps move the stuffing into hard to reach places
- Turning tubes—help turn pieces (arms, legs) right side out after stitching.
- Sculpting Needles—for shaping the face, hands and other body parts.

Seams and Seam Finishes

- 1.5 stitch length—I have found that the tinier the stitches, the easier it is to make smooth, rounded seams. The shorter stitch length also makes a stronger seam.
- 3/8" seam allowance—I use a little wider seam allowance for dolls than I use for doll clothing to make the seams more durable. Measure the distance from the point of your needle to the edge of the presser foot. Move the needle position until it is exactly 3/8" wide. You can use the edge of the presser foot as your stitching guide. If your machine needle position will not move to the correct measurement, re-measure the seam allowance and place some blue painters tape across your machine throat plate to give you an exact fabric guide marking to follow.
- Stitch and then zig-zag the edges together for extra strength.
- Reinforce by stitching a second time 1/8" away from the first stitching on stress point areas...neck edges, arm and leg attachment areas, etc. after the sewing has been clipped.
- You may want to use paper underneath your fabric when stitching to act as a stabilizer for a smooth, non-pucker seam. Simply pull the paper off after the seam has been sewn. This is especially true for light weight fabrics.
- Sharp points are difficult to clip into the corner. I recommend sewing up to the point, turning your fabric 90°, taking 1 stitch, then turning your fabric once again, and continue stitching.

Fabrics and Stuffing

- I prefer to use muslin for my cloth dolls. They give you an 'old fashioned' look.
- Muslin comes in white and natural colors, and can be tea dyed for different skin tones. You may dye the entire fabric piece prior to cutting out, or you may cut and sew the doll, then dye and dry it prior to stuffing it.
- You may purchase different colored cottons for different skin tones as well.
- Other fabrics can be used, just stay away from stretch fabrics. Tightly stuffing a doll made from stretch fabrics will cause it to lose its intended shape.
- You will want to stuff your doll tightly to avoid dimples and wrinkles in the wrong places. Polyester batting works well for a softer doll, use a cotton stuffing for a harder pack.
- You will find needle forks, and hemostats of great help in stuffing your doll.

Construction of Doll

- Cut out, and press all fabric pieces flat before constructing the doll.
- Read the directions all the way through before beginning your doll. You will be using a very short stitch length, and mistakes are difficult to take out. It's easiest to read ahead and get it right the first time.

Construction of Doll (continued)

- Clip and notch all corners and curves, no matter how gentle the curve.
- Every time you stitch, press your stitching flat to set the stitches before turning right side out. This will make your seams lay much smoother after turning.
- Reinforce stitch where the arms and legs attach, as well as the neckline. A much loved dolly tends to break down sooner in these areas, so stitch extra protection into them now.
- Once stitching is completed, steam press one last time prior to turning; **Be sure to let the doll body dry completely.**
- Add shape to the eyes by indenting them, prior to applying the hair. Use a long needle with quilting thread for extra strength as you go in from the back of the head to pull the eye area in.

Stabilizing the Neck

- Necks need to be stabilized to keep them from bending, becoming wobbly or floppy. There are several ways to accomplish this:
- Place a 1/4" dowel rod the length of the neck plus extension above and below the neck. Wrap it with several layers of stuffing, insert, and fill in with stuffing packed tightly all around it.
- Cut a strip of Warm and Natural cotton batting about 2" wide and 20" long. Start at one end of the strip, rolling it up very tightly. Keep rolling until the diameter of the roll is the same as the diameter of the neck hole. Hand stitch through the batting to hold it together, and stuff the neck.
- Another alternative combines the above two by using a Q-Tip or Popsicle stick as a base on which to wrap strips of batting. It is not as stiff as a dowel rod, but supplies a bit more support than just batting.
- Whatever you use for support, be sure it extends above and below the actual neck length.

Yarn Hair for Your Doll

- I like to make a scalp (head) cap the color of the dolls hair, to hand stitch onto the muslin head. This keeps the light color from showing through and makes the hair look thicker.
- Use a Hair Pin Lace Frame to make curly hair from yarn, floss, or other string, in any length from 1/2" - 4" width.
- Use a piece of cardboard to wrap longer strands around for long hair to tie into pony tails, braids, or leave long.
- You can 'unravel' an old sweater to achieve kinky yarn hair. Looks great!

Nice Extras

- You will be thanked many times down the road if you begin signing the dolls you make. Be sure to include your name, the date you completed the doll, and give your doll a name. You can embroider the information on, or use a fabric safe permanent marker on the body portion of

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