

If You Care to Sew...

How to Turn an Old Shirt Into a Pretend Colonial Shirt

Time to complete: 30 minutes

Supplies:

- Men's old dress shirt: Choose an old shirt that is white, brown, blue, red, checked, or striped. Don't choose any really bright or neon colors.
- Scissors
- 3 Buttons: In the 18th Century a working man's buttons would have been made of horn, bone, wood, or pewter. A dress shirt might have had thread buttons. Choose buttons about 5/8" wide in brown, off-white, or white metal. Eighteenth Century buttons usually had 2 holes, not four, or were metal with a loop on the back.
- Fabric glue or fusible web, a sewing machine, or a needle and thread.



Colonial Shirt

Background:

In the 18th Century, shirts were used the way shirts are today, but they were also



Note: The fabric which has been cut from the shirt is in this photograph to give a rough guide as to how much has been removed - and from where

used as underwear, and to sleep in. Dress shirts were white and made of fine bleached linen or cotton. They might have ruffles made of lace or linen at the neck and on the cuffs. Work shirts were made of coarser, cheaper material. They were usually white or the color of unbleached linen, but they were sometimes dyed, or checked, or striped.



Directions:

1. Remove pockets, buttons, and any labels.
2. Cut the points off of the collar to make it rectangular. Colonial collars were often rectangular. Sew or glue the cut edges of the collar together.
3. Cut the rounded edges off of the bottom of the shirt to make it straight. Leave the tails as long as possible. Colonial shirts were long. They came down to the middle of a man's thigh. Glue or sew the hem at the bottom of the shirt.

4. From the bottom of the shirt, cut 5 or 6 inches up each side seam. There is no need to finish the edges if the cut is made between two rows of stitching.
5. Cut the cuffs to a width of about 1 ½ inches. Glue or sew the edge of the cuff.
6. Glue or sew the front opening shut from the bottom up to the second button hole. Do not let the front button holes show.
7. Sew a button on each of the cuffs and at the neck. Clip the buttonholes if necessary to make them a little larger.
8. Tie a kerchief around the neck loosely, and wear the shirt out to hide the front of the trousers.

How to Turn an Old T-shirt into a Pretend Shift

Time to complete: V-necked undershirt - 10 minutes.

Round-necked undershirt - 20 minutes.

Supplies:

- Men's white round or V-necked, short-sleeved undershirt
- Scissors
- Glue
- Needle
- 2 2/3 yards of tape, string, or ribbon.
- Fabric glue or fusible web or a sewing machine or needle and thread (for round necked undershirt only).
- Paper clip, safety pin, or large-eyed needle.

Background:

In the 18th century, the shift was a girl's or a woman's most important undergarment. She would wear it below all of her other clothing. (Underpants were not usually worn until the 19th century.) Shifts were also worn to sleep in. The shift was made of white cotton or linen. The sleeves came down just below the elbow, and the hem came to below the knee. A very nice shift would be made of fine cloth, and might have lace or ruffles at the neck. A poor woman's shift would be made of coarser material.

Directions for a very easy shift using the V-necked undershirt:

1. Remove any labels or pockets.
2. At the bottom of the fabric binding of the V-necked collar, snip a small hole on either side. Be sure to cut through only the first layer of cloth.
3. Attach the tape, string, or ribbon to the safety pin or paper clip, or thread it through the needle. Work it through the seam binding of the collar. Gather the collar slightly and tie in a bow.
4. Snip a small hole through one layer of the finished edge of each sleeve. The hole should be on the outside edge of the sleeve.
5. Thread the tape through the hem of the sleeve. Gather the sleeves and tie in a bow.



Directions for an easy shift using the round necked undershirt.

1. Remove any labels or pockets.
2. Cut the collar off of the shirt.
3. Turn down the edge of the neck hole about 1 inch and sew or fabric glue the edge down to create a casing. If glue is used, let it dry thoroughly.
4. Snip a small hole through only the first layer of cloth in the casing at the bottom front of the neck.
5. Attach the tape, string, or ribbon to the safety pin or paper clip, or thread it through the needle. Work it through the seam binding of the collar. Gather the collar slightly and tie in a bow.
6. Snip a small hole through one layer of the finished edge of each sleeve. The hole should be on the outside edge of the sleeve.
7. Thread the tape through the hem of the sleeve. Gather the sleeves and tie in a bow.



How to Turn an Old Dish Towel Into an Apron

Time to complete: 15 minutes if a dish towel is used.

Supplies:

- Towel: Old dish towel or a rectangular piece of cloth. Our cotton dish towel is 16 inches wide by 24 inches long. The linen fabric for our example is 39 inches wide by 27 inches long. Functional aprons should be made of cotton or linen -- white, natural, solid color, checked, plaid, or vertically striped. Fashionable aprons would be of finer material, embroidered, or perhaps have a print floral pattern. An embroidered towel would be wonderful if the girl is portraying a wealthy colonial lady.
- Scissors
- Ribbon: Ribbon or twill tape enough to go around the girl's waist with her clothes on and make a
- bow. The apron string on our example is 1 ½ yards of 3/4 inch tape.
- Paper clip, safety pin, or large-eyed needle.
- Fabric glue, fusible web, a sewing machine, or a needle and thread



Background:

This is a pattern for the kind of apron that would have been worn by a woman or a child. Men also wore aprons to protect their clothing when they were working. Most aprons in the 18th Century were practical while some were intended to be simply fashionable. Practical aprons were made of washable fabric, gathered on a narrow tape, and tied around the waist. Fashionable aprons were decorative, and were not intended to get really dirty. They might be embroidered or edged with lace. The apron is shorter and narrower than the petticoat, and not too full. The gathered apron should be at least as wide as the girl's breadth and the hem should extend to below the knee. Sometimes an apron would have a bib which pinned to the bodice. This was called a pinner. In the 18th Century people did not usually have as many clothes as they do now, and they valued their clothes more. An apron kept their clothes from becoming stained and wearing out.

Directions:

1. If desired, hem the bottom and sides of the apron. The edges can be sewn or glued. It is not necessary to hem selvages.
2. At the top edge of the apron, waistline, make a casing about 3/4 inch wide. To do this, fold over about 1/4 inch of fabric, then fold over 3/4 inch of fabric and sew or glue down the folded edge to the body of the apron.
3. Attach the tape, string, or ribbon to the safety pin or paper clip, or thread it through the needle. Work the tape through the casing.
4. Gather the apron to fit, and tie it on with a bow.

An authentic looking 18th Century style apron is also made this way. However, it must be all hand stitched, not glued or machine stitched.