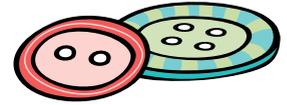


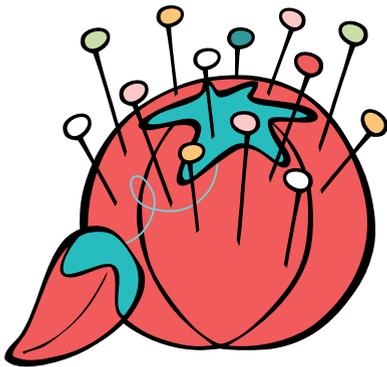
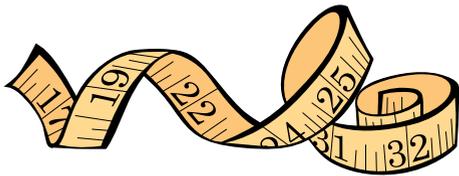
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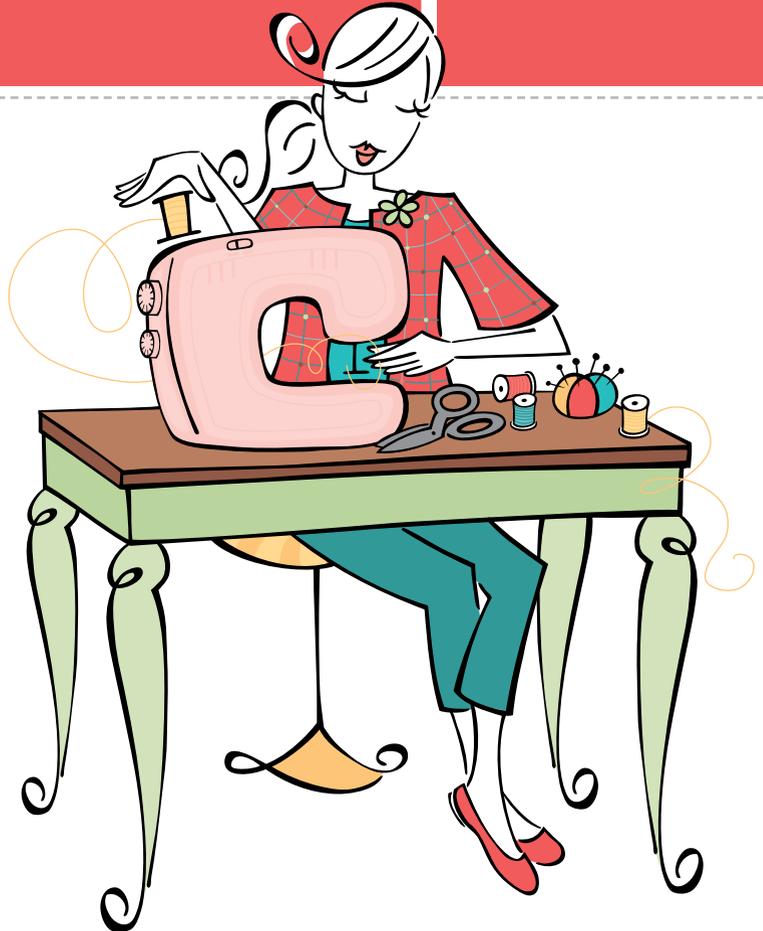
# sewing

The Essential  
Guide to Teaching  
Yourself to Sew

# made simple



Editors of **Threads**



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# dedication

For people who love to sew

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# pattern-free projects

Sewing without a pattern is the perfect way to get your feet wet without having to follow too many instructions and guidelines. With some basic tools and fabric, you can sew a garment with little fitting and no fuss.



This chapter is divided into three sections: “Good to Start With,” “When You’re Getting Comfortable,” and “If You’re Feeling Inspired.” You can work your way from the simpler projects to the more challenging ones, or just dive into the first one that catches your eye.

All sewing projects, no matter how easy or complex, require the same basic stuff. We call these supplies “The Usual Suspects.” You won’t use every tool for every project; read ahead, as you would with a recipe, to see what’s needed.

## the usual suspects

- Fabric
- Matching thread
- Measuring tools (ruler, measuring tape, seam gauge, yardstick, French curve)
- Cutting tools (shears, scissors, rotary cutter and mat, seam ripper)
- Needles and pins (thimble, pincushion, beeswax)
- Iron



· good to ·  
start with

# sundress

## what you'll need

The Usual Suspects (see p. 65)

1½ yards of fabric

Fitting buddy or dress form

Interfacing

This versatile sack dress starts with just a tube of fabric, then adds pleats, tucks, and wide straps. Printed cotton is a great choice, but the dress also looks great in softer, drapery fabric—just cut a little wider and use more pleats to create volume.

**1 Measure bust, waist, and hips.** With a measuring tape, measure your bust, waist, and hips. Note the largest of these measurements, and cut a rectangle of fabric approximately 20 inches wider than that measurement. Piece your fabric as necessary to get this final width.

**2 Sew a tube.** Measure from right above your bust to the dress length desired, and trim to this length, plus a little extra (so you can tweak the hem later, if needed). Sew the fabric into a tube, as shown below left.

**3 Pleat on a dress form or body.** Try the tube on or place it on a dress form that is your size. Pleat out the fabric at the front and back of the tube until it fits snugly against your body or form. The dress pictured sports a wide box pleat, but you can pleat any way you like. Mark the edges of the pleats with pins.

**4 Add a top band and straps.** Measure along the top edge of the pleated dress. Cut two strips of fabric that length, plus seam allowances, by 6 inches deep. These are the bands. Cut two 5-inch-wide straps, sew into tubes, and turn. Sandwich the straps between the bands on the front and back, and sew through all layers. Align raw edges with the pleated edge and sew, wrong sides together.

**5 Sew on a wide hem band.** Cut one 6-inch- to 8-inch-wide hem band the length of the hem circumference plus seam allowances. Sew the short ends of the band, right sides together, forming a ring. Fold in half lengthwise and press. Stitch to the dress's hem edge, then press the band down.







· good to ·  
start with

# placemat purse

## What You'll Need

The Usual Suspects (see p. 65)

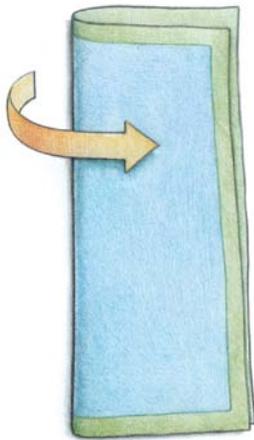
Placemat

1½-yard-long cord

Size 16 or 18 denim needle

A button or other embellishments

Fashion-forward and adorable, these little purses take just a few hours—or less—to sew. Starting with a ready-made placemat gives you finished edges and lining, which saves a ton of time (you can find cool ones at an import store). Choose a placemat that can be folded easily and doesn't have stiff or thick edges, as you'll have to sew through four edges and a cord. Use a size 16 or 18 denim needle; sewing through all those layers can break a smaller needle.



**1** Fold the placemat in half lengthwise with wrong sides together, as shown. Press the fold.

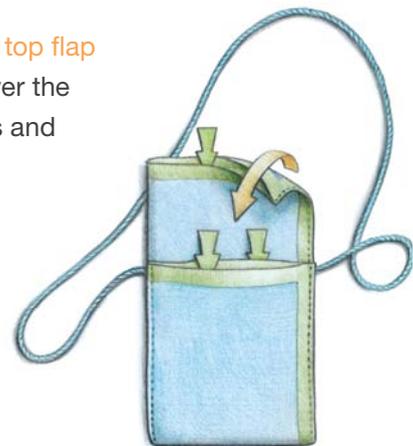


**2** Fold one short end toward an imaginary line located about one-quarter of the total length of the placemat. Press the fold.



**3** Knot the cord ends and bury them inside the seams; topstitch the sides of the purse to close them, as shown. Reinforce the stitching at the cord and the corners.

**4** Fold the top flap down over the inside pockets and press the fold.



5 Add buttons, snaps, tassels, or other embellishments as desired.







· when you're ·  
getting  
comfortable

# reversible chair covers

## What You'll Need

The Usual Suspects (see p. 65)

$\frac{3}{4}$  yard decorative fabric for  
the main side

$\frac{3}{4}$  yard decorative fabric for  
the reverse side

Want to give your dining area a unique style for any occasion? A reversible chair cover lets you go from breakfast chic in pretty cotton to dinner elegant in gold satin. Easy to sew, with just a few seams, chair covers are a quick and economical way to transform a room. Choose a unique brocade for an elegant celebration, a whimsical cotton print for a day of make-believe, or a modern home décor fabric for everyday style.

## Choose, measure, and cut the fabric

Reversible chair covers enable you to get two looks in one. The two sides can be different materials but should be close in weight. Prewash the fabrics before cutting if you want them to be machine washable after construction.

**1** Select two middleweight to lightweight fabrics. The materials should not be too lightweight (you don't want show-through) or too heavy (to avoid bulky covers). The cover is completely reversible, so the two sides do not have to coordinate in color.

**2** Determine the chair back width. Measure the chair back's widest point and add the chair back's depth (see right). Add 2 inches for seam allowances and ease.

**3** Measure the chair back height. Starting at the bottom of the chair back, measure from the seat to the top of the chair and add half of the chair back depth, plus a 1-inch seam allowance.

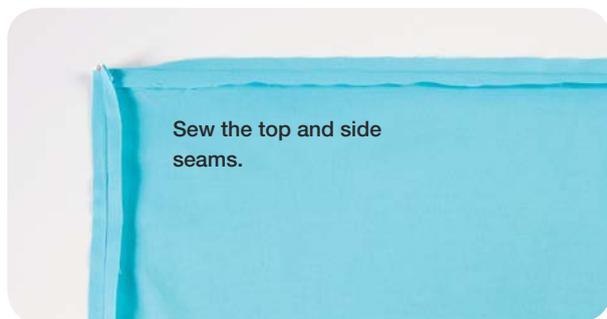


**4** Cut the covers. Cut two rectangles on grain from each fabric, using the height and width determined in steps 2 and 3. If the fabric has a motif, be sure to center it.

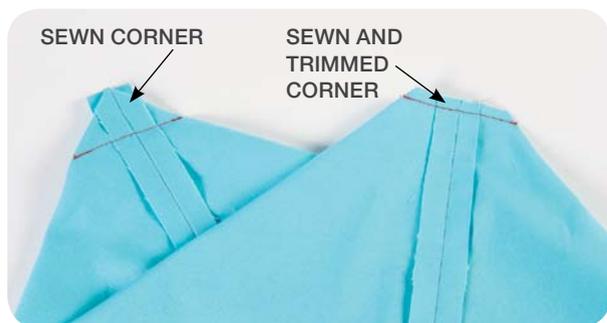
## Sew the covers

A few simple seams make these stylish and practical covers. The seams are enclosed, so they are left unfinished. All seam allowances are ½ inch wide.

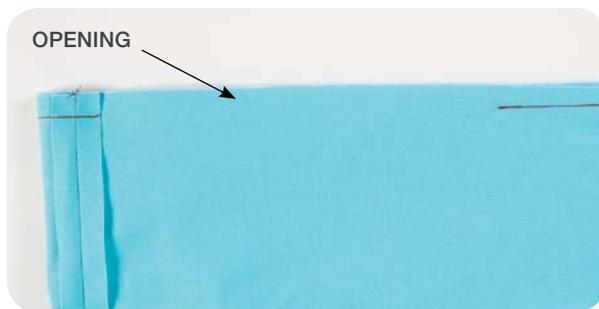
**5 Sew the seams.** With right sides together, align, pin, and sew the top edge of the first fabric, then press the seam allowances open. Repeat this for the second fabric (the cover's reverse side). Next, with right sides together, align, pin, and sew the side seams on the first fabric. Repeat on the second fabric. Press open the side seam allowances.



**6 Sew and trim the corners.** At each corner, align the top-edge seam with the side seam. Sew perpendicular to the seams the depth of the chairs. Press and trim the seam allowance.



Sew the corners the length of the chair depth. Trim the seam allowance.



Sew the lower edge, leaving a 7-inch to 10-inch opening.

**7 Sew the covers together.** Turn one cover right side out and place inside the other cover, so the covers are right sides together. Align and pin the lower edges. Sew three-quarters of the way around, leaving a 7-inch to 10-inch opening for turning (see photo above).

**8 Through the opening, turn the chair cover right side out.** Press the seam allowances to the inside. Hand-sew the opening closed (A) or topstitch around the lower edge (B). Press all the seams.



Turn the cover right side out, and hand-sew the opening.



Finish the cover by topstitching around the lower edge.

## decorative options

These covers are the perfect canvas for showing off your home-decorating style.



**Piece it together.** Give your covers an artistic look by piecing together fabrics before constructing the covers.



**Add a ruffle.** Before sewing the lower edge, insert a ruffle trim made from one of the fabrics or a coordinating fabric.



**Tie it up.** Before sewing the side seams, add self-fabric or ribbon ties. This is especially helpful to give the cover shape if the chair back is much wider at the top than at the bottom. Note that if the ties are large, they may be difficult to hide inside, so you may want to use only one side and have the other side serve as a lining.



· when you're ·  
getting  
comfortable

# flouncy tee

## What You'll Need

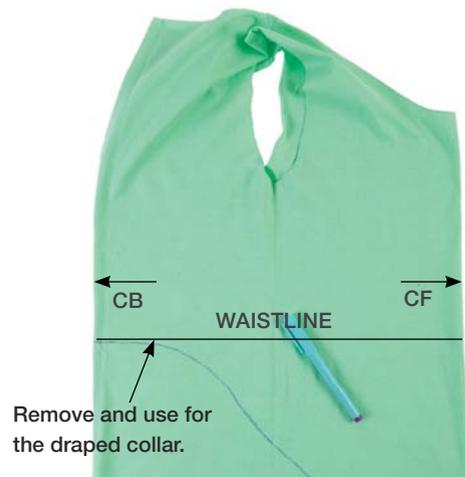
The Usual Suspects (see p. 65)

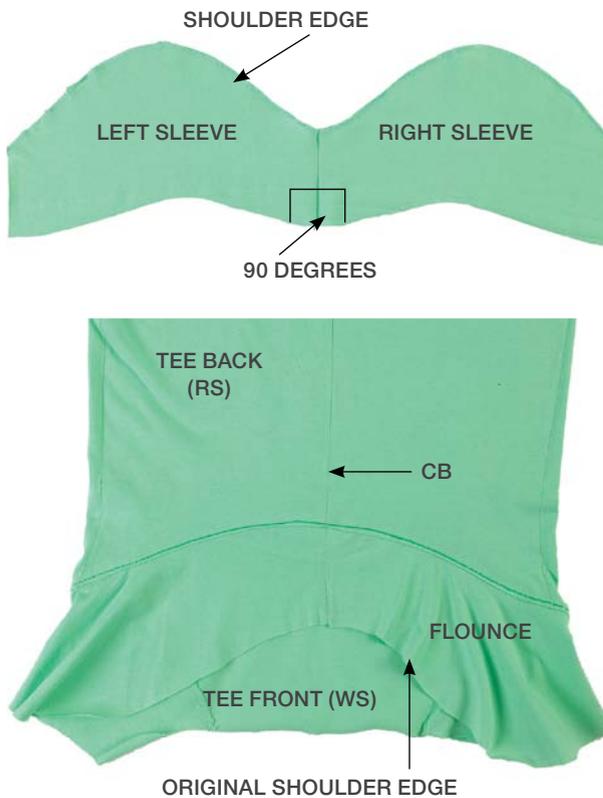
T-shirt

You can take a T-shirt from baggy and unisex to fitted and flattering with just a few snips and seams. This style uses a curved peplum ruffle (made from the sleeves) to add interest to the sides and the back, and a draped collar to soften the tee's hard edges. You'll need a shirt that fits or is a little big. You can leave the edges raw (most jerseys won't ravel) and let them curl, or you're free to hem them if you prefer. This garment works best with T-shirts made of 100 percent cotton jersey. A stretch straight stitch or a narrow and short zigzag stitch is your best bet for seaming knits, unless otherwise indicated. This draped-collar tee is made from only one shirt, but you can combine two recycled tees to create a contrasting peplum and collar.

**1 Prepare the shirt.** Remove the sleeves and neckline. Be careful not to cut into the sleeves, as you will be using them for the ruffle. Trim off the bottom hem, or remove the stitching if the shirt is short. To reshape the bottom hem, fold the shirt in half, with the center front (CF) to your right and center back (CB) at your left. Mark the waistline on the shirt's CB fold with a

pin. Draw a line from this point, perpendicular to the CB, 3 inches to 4 inches long before curving it gradually, to the bottom edge of the shirt. Be sure your line crosses the side seams and stops 3 inches to 4 inches from the CF. Compare the width of your sleeve to the length of the revised hemline. If the hemline is longer, shorten it to match the length of the sleeve. Cut on the line you drew; this piece will become the draped collar.





Join the removed sleeves, and attach them to the hem for a flounce.

**2** **Make the peplum ruffle.** Open the underarm sleeve seams, and remove the hem with a seam ripper to maximize the length. Fold each sleeve in half, and reshape the bottom edge into a gentle curve. Sew the two sleeve pieces, right sides together, along one of the underarm seams to make one continuous ruffle (see photo above, top). With right sides together, align the ruffle seam to the CB along the shirt's bottom edge, and continue to pin the ruffle to the curved T-shirt edge. Sew the curved seam.

**3** **Make the draped collar.** Measure the circumference of the neckline. Then measure the length of the collar piece cut from the bottom of the shirt. Cut off the pointed ends so the collar piece length equals the neck



circumference plus 1 inch. Sew the two ends, right sides together. Match the collar seam to the CB and align and pin the collar's straight edge to the neckline. Stitch around the neck circumference.



Attach the collar piece to the neckline to create a draped look.





when you're  
getting  
comfortable

# one-rectangle dress

## What You'll Need

The Usual Suspects (see p. 65)

1 yard of 60-inch-wide fabric or  
1 $\frac{2}{3}$  yards of 45-inch-wide fabric

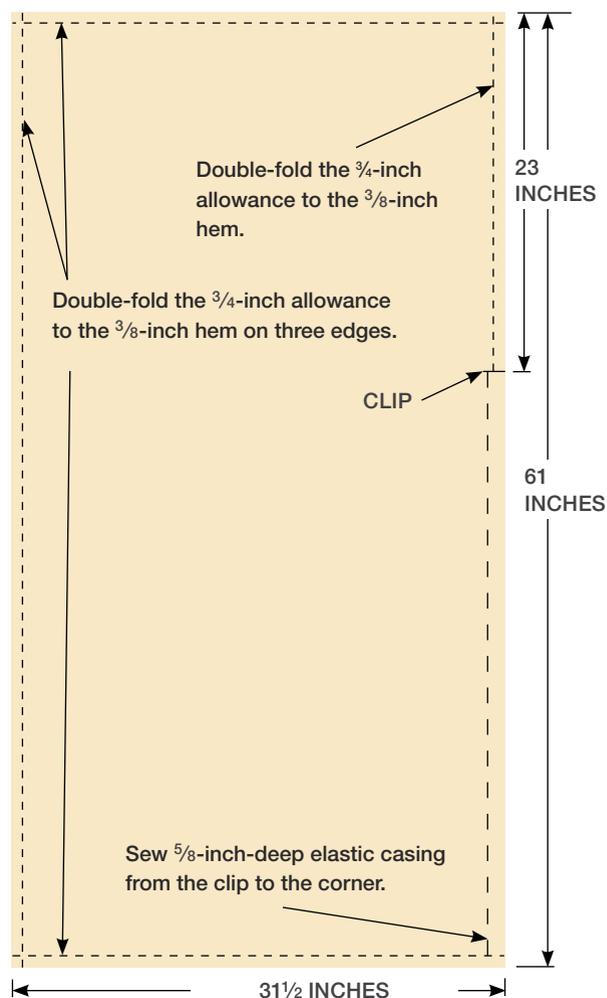
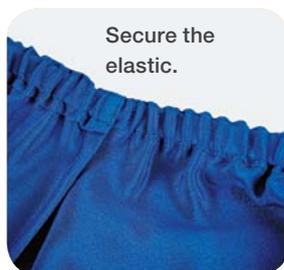
Safety pin or bodkin (a tool for  
threading elastic through a casing)

Point turner

$\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-wide elastic cut 2 inches  
shorter than your waistline

This kicky strapless dress, which you can also wear as a skirt, is made from one rectangle. Use a drapery fabric such as 3-ply or 4-ply silk, rayon crepe, or lightweight wool. The garment shown is medium size, based on a 36-inch bust measurement. Add or subtract 2 inches from the width measurements for each size change. Lengthen or shorten as desired.

- 1 **Double-fold a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch hem allowance.** Sew  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch finished hems on two short edges and one long edge of the skirt.
- 2 **Finish the remaining top edge if it is not the selvage edge.** Sew a 23-inch-long, double-fold,  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-wide hem. Backstitch at the inside end of the hem. Clip to the last stitch so the remaining fabric is able to lie flat.
- 3 **Topstitch the remaining upper-edge section into a  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch casing for the elastic.** Feed the elastic through the casing and stitch it at each end to secure.
- 4 **Overlap the casing ends to form the waistband.** Stitch them together, allowing the nonelasticized edge to drape.





· if you're ·  
feeling  
inspired

# convertible dress

## What You'll Need

The Usual Suspects (see p. 65)

About 4 yards fabric with two-way or four-way stretch (look for at least 20 percent stretch; the size 10 dress shown here required about 4 yards of 53-inch-wide fabric)

Safety pin or bodkin  
(a tool for threading elastic through a casing)

1/2-inch-wide elastic (long enough to fit around your waist)

Pattern paper

Foamcore

In less than an hour, you can make a dress to wrap, roll, and twist any way you like. This dress has two extra-long, wide straps sewn into the front waistband. Wrap and twist the straps to form sleeves or straps, and a sash around your waist. Shift the waistband above your bust for tunic options, too. You've never seen so many styles for so little sewing. The dress is made from four geometric shapes with dimensions based on your measurements: a skirt, a waistband, and two long fabric rectangles that wrap, twist, and tie to become a bodice, straps, or sleeves. If you leave the edges unfinished, it can be a two-seam project, with only a waist and a skirt seam to sew.

The version shown here has rolled serged edges.

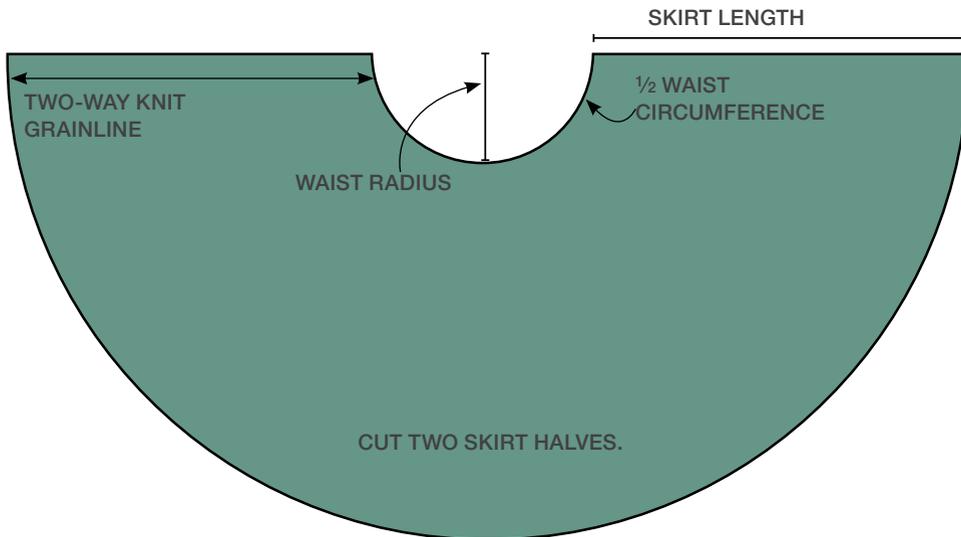
## Plan the dress, cut the pieces

Simple geometric shapes are the basis of this dress. Use the illustration for guidance as you apply your own measurements to design the pieces.

**1 Plan the skirt.** The skirt is two half-rings of fabric, like two doughnut halves. Divide your waist circumference by 3.14 to find your waist diameter. Divide the diameter by 2 to get the radius. Use the radius to draw the inside (waist)

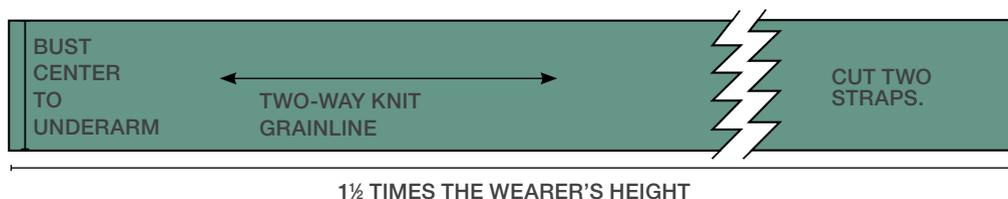
semicircle, then add the desired skirt length for the outer hem semicircle. To make a "compass," lay pattern paper over a sheet of foamcore board, and stick a tack or pin in the middle. Place the eyelet end of a tape measure over the pin, and extend the tape measure out to the required length. Rotate the tape measure around the pin, marking the desired circle as you go. Add a 1/2-inch seam allowance to the edges.

### Skirt





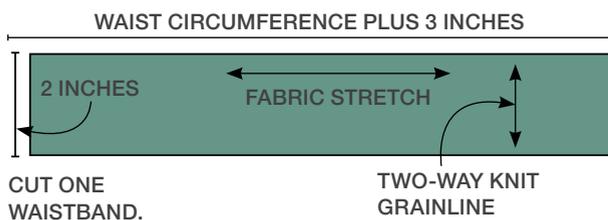
## Strap



**2 Determine the strap size.** The two straps are identical rectangles. For the strap width, measure from the center of your bust to just under your arm. The strap length is one and a half times your height (add a few inches to the length if you're fuller-figured than average). The straps are cut so the stretch is parallel to the short ends.

**3 Cut a waistband casing.** Cut a band about 2 inches wide and a few inches longer than your waist measurement. Cut the band to stretch lengthwise.

## Waistband (not to scale)



## Sew it together in three seams

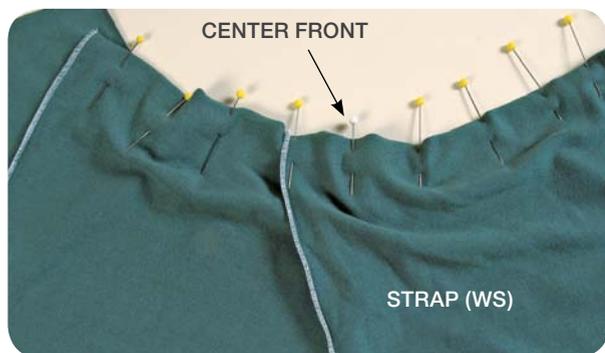
To construct the dress, sew the skirt side seams. Then overlap the straps at the center front. Sew on the straps and a waistband in a single seam. Sewing the waistband and straps to the skirt is easier if you sew with the skirt wrong side out.

**4 Finish the strap edges.** Use a rolled serged edge or a narrow hem on the long edges of each strap.

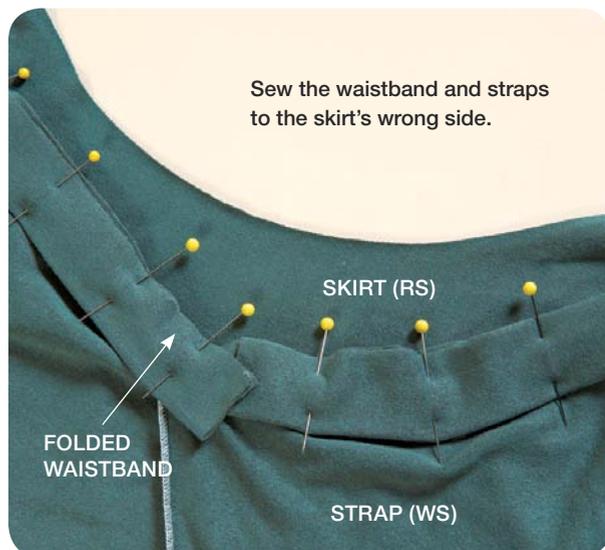


**5 Sew the skirt seams.** Pin the skirt's vertical edges together with right sides together, and serge or sew the seams. Fold the skirt to align the seams, then find and mark the center front and center back.

**6 Place and pin the straps to the skirt waist.** Align the straps' raw edges with the skirt waist, right sides together. Place the straps to overlap 3 inches to 4 inches, with the middle of the overlap at the center front. Pin or baste the straps in place; the waist curvature will cause the overlap to form a deep V-shape.



**7 Sew the waistband casing to the skirt.** Fold the waistband in half lengthwise, right side out. Align the band's lengthwise raw edges with the waist and straps' raw edges (the waistband should sandwich the straps against the skirt's right side). Serge or sew through all layers. Overlap the casing slightly when you complete sewing the waist.



**8 Add waist elastic.** Cut an elastic strip to fit your waist, plus 1 inch. Run it through the waistband with a safety pin or bodkin. Sew the strip ends together and overlap the fabric to cover the elastic.



**9 Start wrapping and wearing.** Both straps are sewn into the waistband seam. Wrap them over your shoulders and around your waist to achieve many possible styles.



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CRAFTS & HOBBIES



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