

Wren ★ Feathers

The guide to pleats

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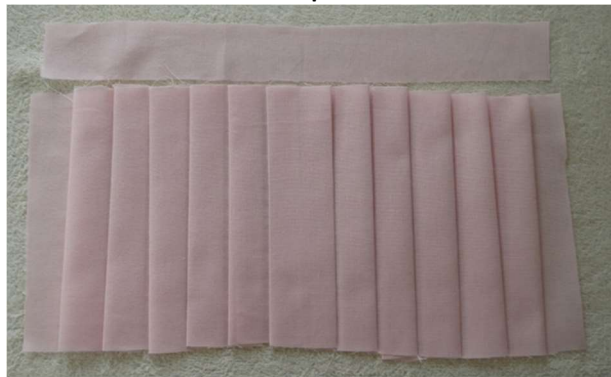
I assume you have basic sewing knowledge and the explanation should suffice, but if you need help please email me!



It's easy to see changes in fashion in retrospect, and through that lens, the Edwardian era seems like a pendulum swinging in the opposite direction of the enormous leg-o-mutton sleeves and voluminous skirts of the Victorian era. With the new, slimmer silhouette, design interest and fullness for ease still needed to be added somehow, and pleats and tucks fulfilled that role well. Although the overall silhouette was less fussy and complicated, often with a whole bodice being cut in one piece, the placement of pleats and perfection of tucks still required skill to execute well.

Let's look at the pleats we'll see during this year's summer sew-along:

Knife pleats



This is probably the most common way of pleating skirts and ruffles. There's a tutorial on an easy way of doing this here: <https://jenwrenne.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/steampunk-ensemble.pdf>

Box pleats



Unlike the knife pleats, which are single folds of fabric, box pleats have the layers brought underneath the pleat equally on both sides. These are very versatile and can be used on everything from A-line dresses to jackets to skirts. Either side can be the "right" side; the opposite of the view above is called an inverted box pleat.

Stitched-in pleats



Stitching in a pleat can take up fullness and add a decorative look. It doesn't allow any ease for movement like those above.

Tucks



These are a variation of stitched-in pleats, also shown here on the bodice. They are usually seen at hemlines of skirts and sometimes sleeves, and historically they may have been put in during construction and taken out to allow for a child's growth. Another variation of this is pintucks – very tiny stitched-in tucks that are decorative only.

Marking and sewing:

If you browse around on the blog for a while, you'll see I often like to just do the pleats in the fabric first and then put the pattern on top and cut it out. For most of the patterns in this collection, that method didn't work so well, so pleats ended up as part of the pattern pieces. When you have a pattern with specific pleats marked on it, it can be challenging to know how to mark and fold them and have your pleats exactly match the lines on the pattern.

Let's talk about marking methods:

1. Ironing

If you printed out your pattern on a non-laser printer, it might be possible to fold the lines in place on the pattern, fold the fabric on top and iron in place with a DRY iron. This works best for straight lines on the straight grain. In those cases, it's usually also possible to just measure the distance from the fold of the pleat to the edge of the fabric, and fold and iron the pleats in place.

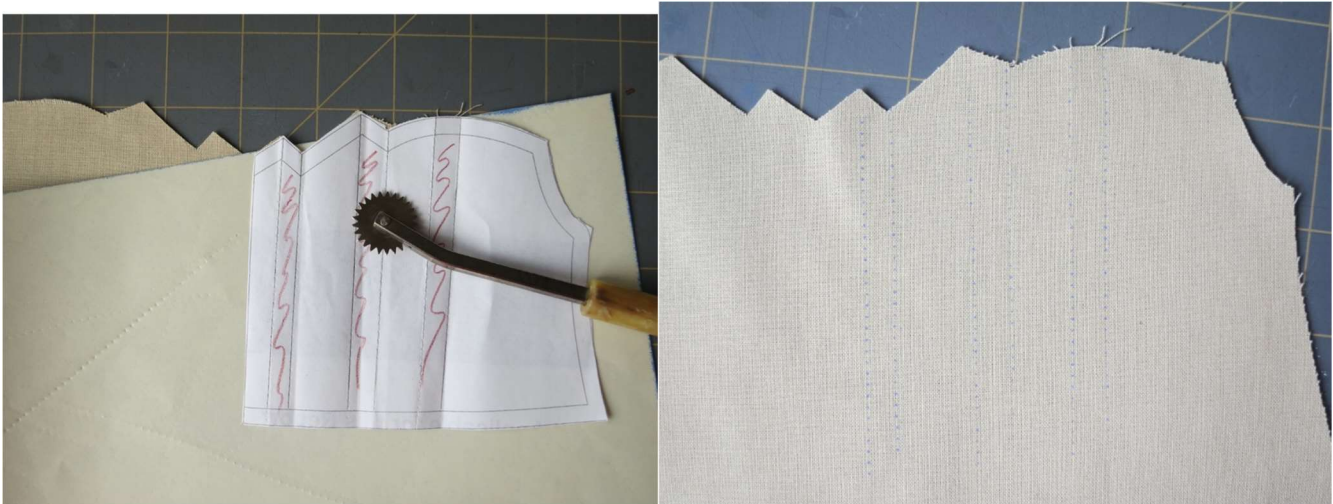
2. Chalk and water-soluble markers

Although these are generally useful for marking, it's important to be careful when pleats are involved because of the possibility of setting the color when ironing. Ironing is probably the most important step in perfect pleats, and many of these have color that will not remove with water once it's been ironed. After a bad experience, I refuse to use the supposedly water-soluble markers anymore. I had used them to mark embroidery placements of a blouse, and after stitching, wetted them and they seemed to have been removed. They then showed up AGAIN after washing it, ruining the blouse. Even though the markers performed well on other fabrics, it wasn't worth the risk to have it happen again.

Another issue is that it's more difficult to mark anything than dots at the edge unless your fabric is transparent enough that lines will show through it. This can be done more easily with a light source, such as a light box that artists use to trace drawings.

3. Tracing wheel and paper

This is one that I use a lot with people-size patterns, but almost never for doll clothes because of their tiny size. It's probably the best method for marking a lot of detailed lines quickly, such as all the darts on a fitted dress, but as with the other methods, it might not be best for pleats because the marks have the possibility of being set by the ironing process. If you're using this method, do the markings on the **WRONG** side of the fabric.



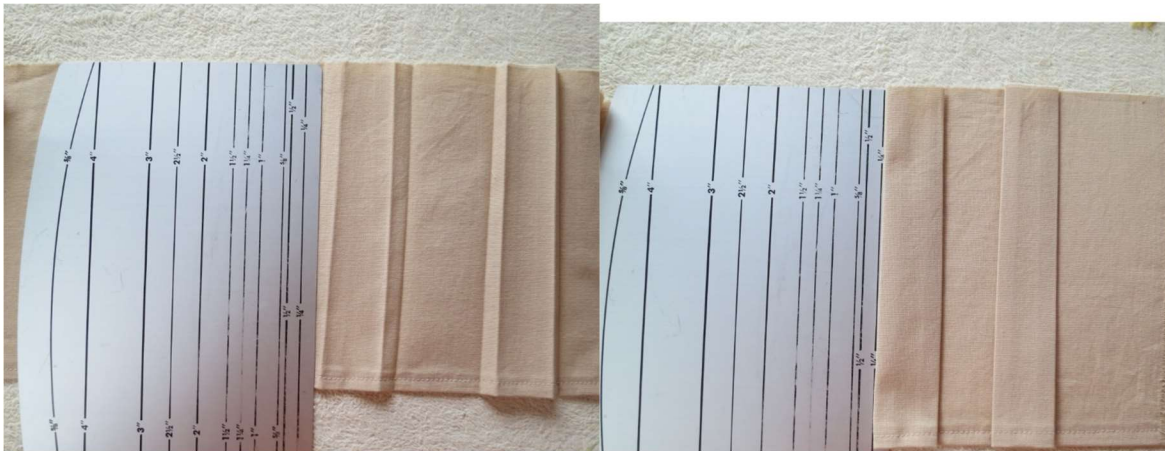
A tracing wheel and transfer paper gives lines of little dots as guides

4. Tailor's tacks

This is more time-consuming initially, but easy to remove and with no danger of marks ever reappearing, unlike with water-soluble markers. It's excellent for tucks that curve a little, as we'll see in the Rainy Day and Boating dresses. Lay the pattern piece on top of the fabric. Thread a needle with contrasting thread, knot the end, take a stitch, knot, cut. The knot version is slightly unorthodox, as sometimes tailor's tacks are just done with a backstitch, but it's harder to remove the pattern without tearing it if you do that. You end up with a little line of thread tufts to fold on – no worries about ironing setting the marks either!



Rulers and hem guides



You can use a hemming device to make nice pleats on flat, square things like skirts. Line up the top of it perfectly with the top edge, then fold the fabric over onto it to the desired measurement you chose for your pleat. Even though it's metal, the markings eventually abrade off with a lot of ironing, so I like to hand press, then remove the device and press with the iron.

Sewing pleats

I'll assume you know that natural fibers are best for pleating, mainly because they will iron well and hold their shape. 100% cotton fabrics or lightweight linen are best for all the designs in this Edwardian collection. Your iron is your BFF when it comes to perfect pleats! Accurate marking is crucial, but precise ironing is just as important. Spend the time at the ironing board matching up markings and pressing the pleats well, and the time at the sewing machine will be far more pleasant. Spray starching is up to you; in most cases it's not necessary for doll clothes unless your fabric just won't behave. When your perfect pleats are in place, head to the sewing machine. There are a variety of ways to make sure your seam allowance stays perfectly constant, the most inexpensive is a little piece of painter's tape on the throat plate, and another way is to use an adjustable quilting foot with a little piece that comes down and touches the right side of your fabric.