

# Make a Basic Mid-19th Century Apron

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If you spend any length of time doing things in living history settings, you'll ruin your dress. You need an apron—really, you'll two or even three aprons. They can be pressed into service as a dish drying towel, hot pad, hanky, basket, or rain cover. They range from fully utilitarian, to fully fashionable frippery—but many of us will find the utilitarian sort most used. Serviceable aprons are made in plain or patterned fabric; white aprons are very good for “better” use, but will also be used for dirty work, if the apron fabric is sturdy enough.

**Your apron should not match your dress or other clothing items.** Avoid a “matchy matchy” look. This can be hard. One option is to swap apron fabric with a friend—individuals tend to settle into color choice ranges, and using fabric bought by another person can help you break out of your rut.

Historic aprons may be “half-aprons” (ending in a waistband), or “pinner aprons”, which have a front bib that is pinned to the dress front. Aprons can hook, button, or tie to close. Teen girls may wear aprons, or may wear more covering pinafore styles held over from younger girlhood.

The hardworking aprons worn for active work tend to be cut fairly long (to the knees, at least), and quite full, to cover most of the front of the dress. If you are a “front wiper”, you need an apron skirt to cover you to the sides of the body. If you are a “side hip wiper”, your apron skirt needs to wrap around to the back of the body. (And if you don't know whether you're a side or front wiper, make bread at home, then check yourself for the flour marks.)

## Materials:

- ☞ 1.5 to 3 yards cotton cloth, 45” width.
- ☞ Thread to blend with ground color of fabric
- ☞ Needles and other basic sewing supplies

## Measure Length

Your apron should cover most of your skirt, to about knee level or just a bit longer. Measure over your dress and skirt supports, then add 2” for a cut panel length (1/4” for a waist seam allowance, 1-3/4” for a hem allowance).

## Cut Apron Panels

**Side Wipers:** If you are a side wiper, cut two width of fabric. One full width will make the front panel; divide the other width in half to make two back panels. You can swap the back panels in order to use the selvages as the back hem of the apron.

**Front Wipers:** If you are a front wiper, cut one width of fabric. You will use the selvages as side hems if they are plain. If there are symbols or words on the selvedge, rip or trim it off, and work a narrow hem along the edges.

## Prepare Waistband

Measure comfortably over your dress and underclothing (including corset). Add 3” for a waistband cutting length (1/2 for turning in the short ends, 2-1/2” for ease and overlap at the closure). Cut or rip a band 3” wide by this length.

Press one long edge to the wrong side 1/2”. Press both short ends to the wrong side 1/4”. Fold in half to mark the center front; place a pin in the fold. Fold each half in half to find the “side points” (these will be slightly behind the side horizon of the body); place a pin in each fold. Set aside the band for now.

## Seam and Hem Panels

Using a 1/4” seam allowance and a running stitch by hand or straight stitch by machine, seam your panels. The edge may be left raw, or finished by hand overcasting the seam allowances together.

At the lower edge, fold 1/4” to the wrong side. Fold again, 1-1/2”. Secure the hem very close to the upper fold with a small running stitch by hand. You may find it useful to whipstitch the side edges of the hem to keep all the layers neat.

## Gather Waist

Work two rows of running stitch by hand along the top edge of the apron. Hand-gathering sits much better, and with less bulk, than machined gathering.

## Attach Band

Lay the raw edge of the band and the waist edge right sides together, matching the center front points.

If you are a front wiper, match the side hems of your apron skirt to the “side point” pins of the waistband. Draw up the gathers to fit.

If you are a side wiper, leave about a hand-span of band at each end of the waistband, and pin your apron skirt on from that point; draw up the gathers to fit.

Stitch the seam with a 1/2” seam allowance. Press all seam allowances toward the band (including along the free ends of the band.) Trim the allowances to reduce bulk if desired.

Fold the waistband in half to cover all raw edges. Topstitch with a small running stitch by hand very close to all edges, or use a small whip stitch to close the band.

## Finishwork

Add a button and buttonhole to close the band at the back.



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