

Make a Pioneer Petticoat (or Skirt)

Petticoats insulate you from outside elements (heat and cold), work together to make movement easier (less wrapping around your legs), and generally just look great! Wearing one or two full-gathered petticoats with your pioneer-era skirt or dress adds to your experience! Construction is simple, and gives you a chance to practice useful period techniques on inexpensive fabric. Use a decent quality white cotton, such as muslin or used white cotton bedsheets.

Determine Length & Yardage

Petticoats are usually cut an inch or two shorter than your dress, and are at minimum mid-calf length. Have an assistant measure from your anatomical waist (just below your lowest floating ribs, at the narrowest part of your torso) to your desired hem at center front, center back, and both hips. To the longest of these, add 1/2" for a waist allowance, and 3" for a turned hem allowance. The total length is your **cut panel length**. You'll multiply the cut panel length by the number of panels you want in your petticoat, add 6" or so to allow for a waistband and straightening the fabric, then divide by 36" to find the yardage you need for each petticoat.

Age	Fullness	# Panels
0-2	45-72"	36": 1-2; 45": 1-1.5
2-12	72-90"	36": 2-3; 45": 2
12-15	90-120"	36": 3-4; 45": 2-3
15+	120-180"	36": 4-5; 45": 3-4

Wash and dry your fabric before cutting; press to remove large wrinkles and creases. Washing helps the cotton fabric shrink and tighten a bit.

Prepare Panels & Waistband

Straighten one edge of your fabric, either by drawing out a thread and cutting along it, or by snipping into the selvedge and ripping across the width.

Petticoats sit at the natural waist. To find yours, tie a piece of elastic around your middle, and bend forward, back, and side to side. The elastic will settle at your natural waist. Measure comfortably around your waist (over your corset or stays), and add 3" for your **cut band**

length. Cut or rip one band, down the selvedge edge of the fabric, 3" wide by your cut band length. Press one long edge to the wrong side 1/2".

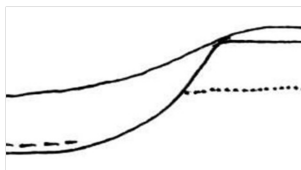
Measure your cut panel length down the selvedge; snip into the selvedge and cut or rip the panel. Repeat for the other panels.

Seam the Panels

Use a running stitch by hand, or a straight stitch by machine, and stitch the panels right sides together with a 1/4" to 1/2" seam allowance. Decide which will be your hem and waist edges (it doesn't matter which, just pick one!) Leave one seam open toward the waist edge, to create a placket (a few inches for babies, a hand-span or length for girls, and up to 10" or so for teens and adults.)

Add Hems

Use a running stitch by hand, or straight stitch by machine. If you have used full widths of fabric, simply sew the selvedge flat. If you have raw edges, tuck them under and secure a hem along the fold. Stitch a few times across the base of the placket to prevent it ripping down with repeated use.



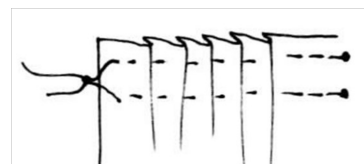
At the hem edge, press 1/2" to the wrong side (inside). Use a hem gauge or ruler to make an even fold. Fold again, about 2.5" deep, and press. Secure the hem with a running stitch or straight stitch along the fold.

Balance & Gather

Fold your petticoat in quarters to find the center front, center back, and "side seam" lines. Measure from the finished hem edge to the waistline; make a mark equal to you initial measurement at each point. Connect your marks with an even slope. This will be your waist stitching line. Add 1/2" beyond the seam line for a seam allowance; cut on the allowance line.

You can machine gather the waist edge of your petticoats, but you end up with a lot of bulk around your waist. Hand gathering gives you a nice full petticoat without a lot of bulk in the band—and, its they way our ancestors did it.

Thread a needle with a doubled thread, equal to your waist measurement plus about 8". Knot the end. Beginning on the inside of the petticoat at one placket edge, rock the needle in and out of the fabric evenly, taking stitches about 1/8" long. They don't have to be precise; close counts.



Work your way around the entire waistline edge, ending with your needle on the inside. Knot the threads securely. Repeat with another thread, about 1/4" away from the first line of stitching. You'll get the best result if you try to line up the stitches as much as possible; close counts. Knot the second thread when you're done.

Add the Band

Find the center point and "side points" of the waistband and match it with the center back point of the skirts, right sides together. Draw up the threads to fit your waistband piece, leaving 1/2" of band extending past the skirt on each end. Stitch the seam.



Fold the band over so the long pressed edge covers all the raw edges. Tuck the short ends inside the band about 1/2". Finish the band with topstitching or a small running stitch by hand.

Add a button and horizontal buttonhole to close.

