

On Making 'Ye Olde Tunic' by Lasair ingean mhicSeóin



Good morrow, dear gentles. I am Lasair ingean mhicSeóin, of the Shire of Wyrmegeist. Being nowhere even close to a seamstress, I recently received a wonderful compliment in that I have been asked to help an acquaintance of mine learn to sew. Needs be that the instructions must be mailed, and as I needed to put my thoughts in print, I decided to make it available for anyone who wanted. And mind you, these are just things that I have learned, be it through the gracious help of my mother, my friends, or through my own trial and errors (LOTS of errors.). I am NOT an expert, I loathe French seaming, and this is written from my perspective as a beginner, to teach the most basic of sewing.

While the absolute best advice that I can give is to just jump in with both feet immediately, I also remember the frustration of learning. Of course, I 'learned' by starting with one of the harder modern patterns. (NO! Not the Elizabethan pattern. I'm still not that desirous of a little white room!!). Fourteen needles, six band-aids, two weeks, and one really good cry on Mom's shoulder and I had a dress! And I was devastated when it got ruined in the rain three days later.

I realize that some of this is still VERY much Greek to some people, and I am going to try to help you at least know how to make a basic tunic. Then you can decide if you really, really want to try to sew that *perfect* outfit you saw in that magazine!

First off is a vocabulary lesson. Here are some definitions, just so everyone knows what I learned these things as. (And I promise to try not to use the word "thingie" too much.)

T-tunic: This is the most basic of shirts. It got it's name because if you lay the tunic out on the table face up, the outline looks like a "T".

Keyhole Tunic: This is the basic T-tunic, with a slit cut in the neck at the front. One of the advantages of this type of tunic is that you can keep the tunic close to the body, and still have enough room to get your head through the top. (In the picture, it's the grey shirt)

T-tunic Dress: This is just a really long T-tunic. (The underdress in the picture)

Selvage Edge: Look at the fabric in the store. Two edges are 'factory - finish smooth', right? (these are usually the long sides) That factory - finish edge is the selvage edge.

Stitch Ripper: No, it's not some weird new serial killer! Just go to the fabric store or the fabric department of your closest Wal-Mart and ask for one! Yes, you need one.

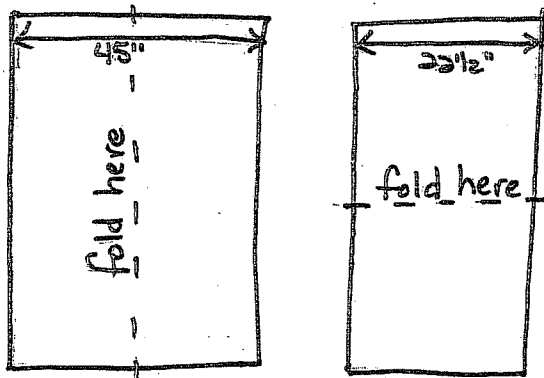
Ok, enough vocabulary, now lets make a tunic! First off, we're going to need some material. I would recommend going to the Wal-Mart (yep, I'm there a LOT) and shopping their dollar material or the clearance tables at the fabric store (whatever's close to you). Get some really inexpensive fabric and use it to make a tunic. This will be your pattern tunic; the one you use for a pattern so you know that every tunic you make is going to fit just like you want.

But, but....how MUCH fabric??? Well, let's see. Get your measuring tape out (if you don't have one, add that to your Wal-Mart list). Put one end on the top of your shoulder, and measure how far down you want the tunic to fall. Add an inch for the seams and now double the total measurement (front and back, remember). Now add a half yard to that. Get at least 45 inch wide fabric (the most common widths are 36", 45" and 60") for this first attempt.

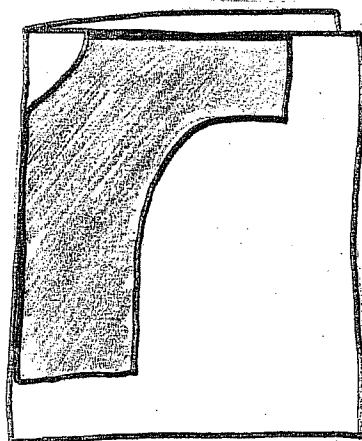
As soon as you get home, wash and dry the fabric (if the material allows, of course). Yes, this is a very important step. If you don't wash the material first, and you sew up this beautiful tunic that shrinks the first time you wash it, you are NOT going to be happy! Yep, I've done it. Definitely got my stamp that day.

When you get ready to cut out your tunic, you'll need a couple of things. A FLAT, HARD surface is one. (Please, please do NOT try to cut out a tunic on your bed! The more uneven your cutting surface is, the more uneven your cuts will be.) And a pair of good sharp scissors is another. Last but not least is a t-shirt. Yes, a regular ol' t-shirt. It doesn't matter if it's long or short sleeved, with or without a pocket, as long as it fits you comfortably. Ladies, do not grab that stretchy shirt that fits so very, very well. You want a t-shirt that fits loosely, but not the huge floppy one that's so comfortable to sleep in. Now, we're ready to get to work.

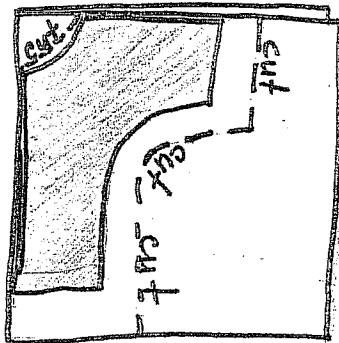
Step 1: Lay out your fabric. Fold the fabric lengthwise (long or selvage ends together), matching up the sides and smoothing out all the wrinkles. You might need to iron the material if the wrinkles are really bad (especially the edges). Now fold the material widthwise (in half the other way), again matching up the sides and smoothing out all the wrinkles.



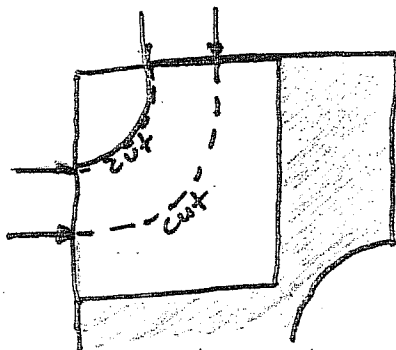
Ok, now you are looking at a rectangle roughly a quarter of the size of the original piece of fabric, and if you were to cut this square in half, you'd be cutting through four pieces of material. Now grab your t-shirt. Fold it lengthwise with the front side of the shirt on the outside of the fold (the fold is going to run from the neck to the bottom, and you'll be looking at the front of the shirt. A good rule of thumb is you want to see the pocket on a pocket tee.) Now, your fabric has one long fold running lengthwise, and your t-shirt has a lengthwise fold. Match these up, with the top of the sleeves on your t-shirt matching up with the widthwise fold in the fabric. (said another way, put the neck of your t-shirt where the two folds in your fabric meet, and match it all up.) Do not hang the t-shirt off the fabric or vice versa. The corners should meet; corner of t-shirt should meet corner of fabric. (The t-shirt is the shaded part in the diagram below.)



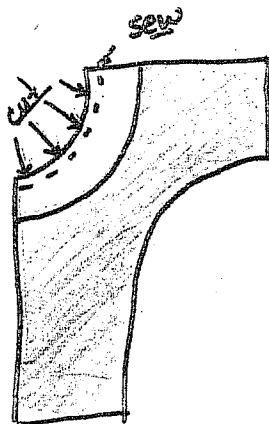
Step 2: Grab your scissors. You want to cut about two finger widths away from the edge of the t-shirt. This will give you a seam allowance, or in other words enough room to sew. Cut around the outline of the t-shirt. You do not need to cut the folds apart. By not cutting the fold, you are saving yourself sewing time. Do not forget to cut out the neck opening. Cut the neck opening actual size. After you finish cutting, try your tunic on to make sure it will fit.



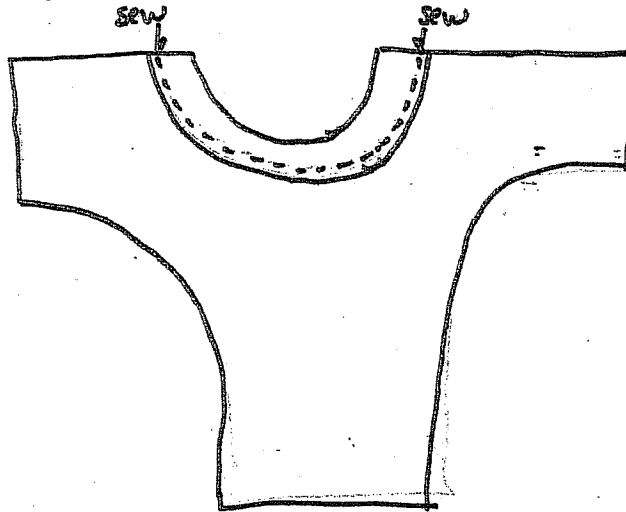
Step 3: Now it's time to cut a facing. You should have some fabric left (remember that half yard we added?) Fold this extra fabric like we did before. Match up the corners, using the tunic you just cut out as the t-shirt. Now, cut the hole for the neck, and cut this line again about 2 inches from the original cut. What you should wind up with is a 2 inch wide strip that curves with the neck of your tunic. Yes, this piece is important! It helps to keep the neck of your tunic from curling and shredding wash after wash.



Step 4: Sewing. And it's not as scary as you think. Sew your facing first. Match up the inside curve (the smaller curve) of the facing to the neck of your tunic. It's a VERY good idea to pin everything together before you sew it! That way you don't have to keep stopping and matching everything up all over again. Sew this part. After you have it sewn, make small cuts all along the seam; the cuts should go from the outside of the fabric to the seam line. BE CAREFUL NOT TO CUT THE SEAM! This will allow the fabric to lie down without bunching up all over the place.



Next, turn your tunic over and pull the facing through. It's a good idea to iron the facing down now. Take the rest of your facing, turn the edge under, pin it down, and sew it. You don't have to sew the second edge of the facing if you don't want to. Some people sew along the inside edge of the neckline also, just to make it look better.



Step 5: More Sewing. Well, now the facing is complete. It doesn't have to be pretty, this is not an A&S entry, and no one is going to see the inside of this tunic....ok, well, at least no one who's going to say anything. Now sew up the sides of the tunic. Make sure that you are sewing with the facing showing. After you finish the sides, then sew a small hem on the arms and the bottom of the tunic. And VOILA! you have a completed tunic!! Congratulations!!

