Quickie Corsets

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A corset can be as complicated and armor-plated as you want—some make them three layers thick out of the stiffest material they can find. But there are times when you just want to whip something up as quickly as you can but still have it be functional and hopefully give you an approximation of the correct silhouette.

I’m going to show you how to create a Victorian corset in a couple of different ways. Now, I don’t have a magic way to create a corset in an hour---I’m sure someone out there has figured out how to do that and god bless ‘em!

**Step One – Get A Pattern:** there are a lot of sources for corset patterns these days. You can certainly draft one yourself but why, when there are so many companies doing some nice corset patterns and save yourself some time.

- Simplicity.com – “B” to the right is their pattern #5726 and comes in sizes 6 through 20. They also have #7215 and #9769.
- McCall's (mccallpattern.com) – they have M3609 in sizes 4-18.
- Butterick.com – one of my favorites for a fast corset is B4254 in sizes 6-22.
- Past Patterns (pastpatterns.com) – #213 in size 8-26 is one of the first corset patterns I found and another one of my favorites.
- Farthingales (farthingales.on.ca) – they carry corset patterns and kits. They have detailed instructions on how to put together the Simplicity #9769 corset. They also have photos of different corsets on the same person to see the different fits. Great site—check it out!
- Custom Elizabethan Corset Pattern Generator: enter your measurements and get step-by-step instructions to draft a corset pattern for yourself at: http://www.elizabethancostume.net/custompat/index.html

**Step Two – Get Some Supplies**

- **Fabric**: for a single layer ‘quickie corset’ get a very heavy duck or twill—it should have a very tight weave.
- **Grommets and Setters**: I have never had any luck with the grommets you can buy at your local sewing store—hate ’em! I now have an expensive heavy-duty grommet setter which is a god-send—but I started out with the grommet setter kit on the left. Farthingales sells kits and grommets. You can also do a Google search to find other suppliers.
- **Hooks and Eyes**: you can do a corset without grommets by using the ‘eye’ side only (shown on the right circled in red) of the metal Coat Hook & Eye sets and use laces to close and tighten.
Making a Corset – Really Fast, Fast, and Not As Fast

Let’s Start with Really, Really FAST

- Purchase a Merry Widow from a thrift store, eBay, etc.
- “Bump up” the boning using single-fold bias fold tape to create additional boning channels (grey lines are added boning channels) all the way around the corset. Replace the current boning with spring steel bones and insert the bones in the new channels you have created.
- The backs of Merry Widows are usually closed with hooks and eyes (see left picture). Cut off the hook and eyes about 1-1/2 to 2 inches. Fold over and sew raw edge. Cut two strips of stiff cotton fabric 4 inches wide and the length of the back of corset. Sew down over the back of the corset along all four sides (pic. below right). What you’re creating is a base to sew eyes on. Sew the ‘eyes’ (from Coat hooks and eyes sets). Repeat for the other side. Be sure to put bones right alongside the back openings where you will sew on the ‘eyes’ to put your lacing through. Use baby ribbon to lace up the corset. If you have a grommet setter you can use grommets instead of the ‘eyes.’
- **Note**: Merry Widows are usually made out of thin, stretchy material. Cutting of the back gives you little bit of room to pull it tighter and get a some-what appropriate shape—but it won’t be totally accurate and more than likely will not last as long as a properly made corset, especially if you have, shall we say, a little bit more flesh to compress. But is it the quickest way to make a corset when you have little time.
FAST

- Buy heavy-weight fabric such as duck, drill, or jean material. It should have a very tight weave. Make it out of one layer of fabric only—no lining.

- Use single-fold bias tape to make the boning channels. Insert the correct size spring steel bones.

- Don’t have a busk for a front closure?
  - Sew the back pieces together and put grommets in the front and lace it up the front. The corset to the right is the Butterick #B4254 and that’s what I did for this one. Lacing up the front definitely has its advantages—especially if you don’t have someone around to help you lace up.
  - OR, use the ‘eyes’ from hooks and eyes sets instead of grommets.

Not As FAST, but Faster than Some…

- Cut “fashion fabric” for the outside of the corset and cut “lining” fabric for the inside. The same type of fabric for both the inside and lining works the best.

- Sew together in ‘fast fashion” which I will demonstrate in class (or see the illustrations that follow on the next page).

- Sew boning channels (using single fold bias tape) right through both the layers of the corset (I sew my channels to the inside of the corset).

- Use lacing in both front and back, or sew up the back pieces and only lace in the front (or vis versa).
Sewing Your Corset the Easy, Quick Way

**Fitting** (if you know your pattern will fit you, you can skip this part)

- Cut out the pattern in scrap fabric—mark at lines.
- Sew together with basting stitch and sew up the front seam.
- Make a Lacing Strip to sew to the back pieces of your corset so you can fit your pattern.
  - You can make this Lacing Strip out of Hook and Eye tape using only the “eye” side.
  - Or, you can cut the eyelet/grommet section off the back of an old corset.
  - Or, you can buy Lacing Tape at Farthingales (http://www.farthingalesla.com/index.html).
- You’ll need to have someone help you do the fitting. Put on your fitting corset, lace it up (not tightly) and start making adjustments. You want to have at between 1-1/2 to 2" gap in the back so you can tighten the finished corset properly.
- After you made all the marks and adjustments take the fitting corset apart. You will use these marked pieces to cut out your corset in your fashion fabric and lining fabric.

**Sewing the Pieces Together**

- I’ll show you how to do this. It will make sense when you see it. Basically you are sewing the lining and fashion at the same time—it goes a lot faster. You’ll sew twill tape in between each piece as you go along. Twill Tape makes the waist stronger!
How to Lace

There are many different ways to lace up a corset. This is just one of them. I use satin ribbon—mainly because I can lace myself up the back and it easily slips through the grommets. You start at the top with several yards of ribbon. When you get to the waist area you will leave long loops—then continue lacing to the bottom where you will tie off the ribbon. You pull on the loops you left to tighten the corset.

For more information on how to insert the busk go to Farthingales website at: http://www.farthingales.on.ca/home.htm and click on the Online Classes link—it’s great!

To see how to set grommets click on the Tips and Tricks link.

This is what a Busk looks like.
Sewing in the bias tape to hold the bones

Putting in the post-side of the busk

Marking the openings for the eye-side of the busk

A couple of my corsets with embroidery by Christine James