

Sewing with fur!

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Supplies:

- X-acto/precision/utility knife
- Scissors
- Pen, marker, or pencil that shows up on the back side of your fur
- Straight edge
- Clips and pins
- Thimble
- Sewing needle (I typically use a regular sharp needle for all steps, but you may also want a glovers needle for thicker hidlers)
- Twill tape (you can use straight pieces of fabric, but twill tape is easiest and provides the cleanest edge)
- Thread (I have only used silk or linen thread, but I am sure regular thread would be OK)
- Fur!
- Garment that you are lining
- Optional: woven (not knit) fabric interlining to back your fur. I have used linen and wool for this step in the past and try to match fabric weight to fur weight, but I frequently skip this step now.

Patterning and cutting:

Transfer your pattern to the back side of the fur using a marker, pen, or pencil. The seam allowance should be as small as you are comfortable with. I usually use 1/4-3/8 of an inch when working with fur. If you are working on a larger piece that does not easily fit on your fur you will want to square off smaller pieces to fit your pattern piece and then join them all together or join them together to create a larger "plate" that your pattern will fit on. Pay attention to fur direction when planning your pattern and garment! **Note: your seam allowance for joining fur to fur will be even smaller and around 1/8 of an inch. The seam allowance noted here is for edges that will attach your fur lining to your garment.**



Image: You are going to see some irregular shapes when dealing with fur unless you purchase pre-sewn plates (pelts sewn together to create large, uniform, ready to use pieces). Pelts should be squared off (irregular bits cut off to create easy to sew straight edges), and shaped garments like jackets and stoles will have pieces that need to be squared off. Larger coats will sometimes yield awesome largely rectangular pieces from the front and back!



Fur should always be cut from the back (or leather) side using a fresh, sharp utility knife (think X-acto). You want to apply just enough pressure to smoothly cut through the leather but not through the fur itself. If you must use scissors (I cannot stress enough that this is NOT recommended), try to cut only the leather from the back side. This will take longer than using the correct tool and will result in losing more fur, but it is possible if you don't have a utility knife on hand.

Sewing:

You will be using a lot of whip stitch and some herringbone stitch! It's that easy!

[Whip Stitch tutorial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pG86hhrDdzQ)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pG86hhrDdzQ>

[Herringbone Stitch tutorial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JyFBXtsO34&feature=youtu.be)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JyFBXtsO34&feature=youtu.be>

1. Use a whip stitch to join two pieces of fur. Use a herringbone stitch to attach twill tape along the edges on the leather side of your fur pieces when joining pieces that will be under stress, such as a gore insert into a slit, a shoulder seam, or a sleeve. You will catch both the leather and the twill tape on both pieces when joining them together. Place fur side to fur side like sewing fabric right side to right side when joining fur pieces. **Note: Do not pin your fur together, because every hole is permanent. Use clips or your fingers to hold pieces together.**



Twill tape secured by herringbone stitch on either side of a seam and on a gore.

Notes for sewing gores: Because you aren't working with a seam allowance, you simply insert the gore point into the slit and set it up against the end of your cut edge- the edge of the gore and your cut should be the same length (again, no seam allowance). Clip one side of the gore to one of the cut edges (fur side to fur side) and whip stitch them together using a very narrow seam allowance. I prefer to sew from the bottom to the point, but you can start at the point and sew to the bottom if that's easier for you. There's no complicated turn, and you simply clip the remaining edge of the gore to the remaining cut edge, fur side to fur side, and sew them together using a whip stitch.



The gore is the same length as the cut- no seam allowance.

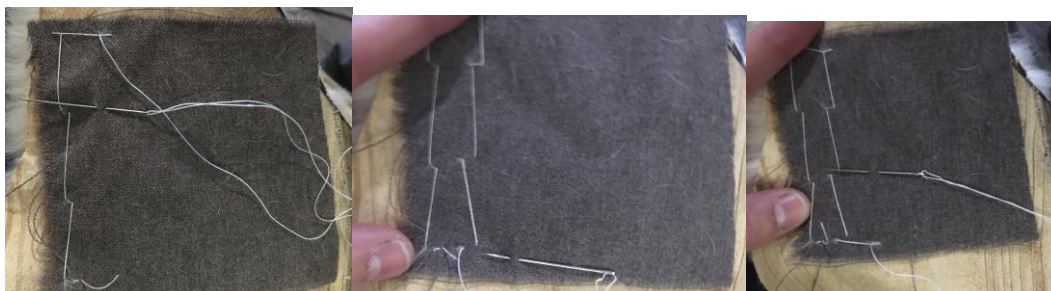
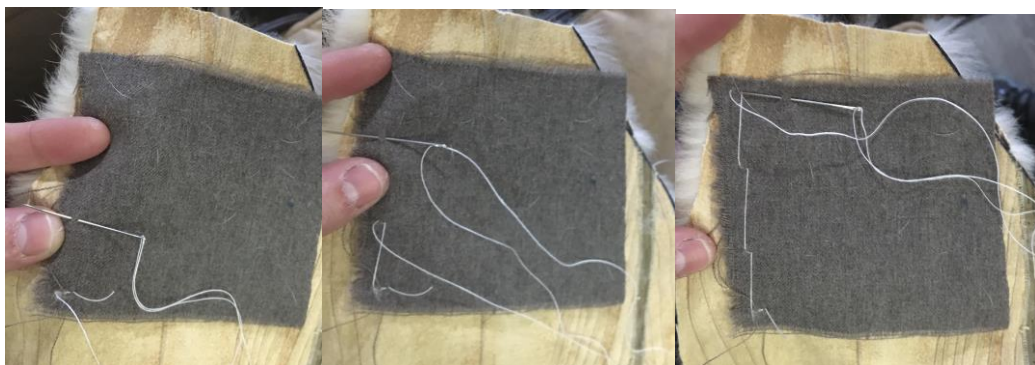
2. Note: I now generally skip this step for smaller pieces, but I have left it in case you are dealing with a used fur that might need a little extra support or maybe want to add some batting to a muff. You might also want to use it on a larger garment to support the fur lining, because leather stretches. This is the step where you will use your optional interlining fabric. Loosely pad stitch the interlining to the back side of the fur. Try to keep the stitches through the leather small, and run the thread under the fur as much as possible. This stitching should be pretty much invisible from the fur side! We're using larger stitches and not shaping the garment with our pad stitching, but this [pad stitching tutorial](#) should get you started.



Secure the thread using a couple of stitches through the same place in the fabric instead of using a knot.



Your thread should pass through the leather with each stitch, but you want to keep it as close to the surface of the leather as you can on the fur side when stitching. The stitches should be invisible from the fur side.



3. Real fur will not fray like the cut edge of a woven fabric, but you do want to finish the raw edges where it will attach to your garment now that your fur lining is finished. This will stabilize the cut edge of the leather and give you a woven piece where you can attach your garment to the fur lining. Place the twill tape on the fur side (like sewing fabric right side to right side), and sew the twill tape to the fur using a whip stitch and a very small seam allowance. I clip together small sections at a time, pushing the fur out of the way as I clip. The seam allowance should be small; this will reduce bulk when we turn the twill tape over and cover the raw edges. Ease the twill tape around corners and curves.



Sewing twill tape to the edge of my fur lining using a whip stitch and a narrow seam allowance.

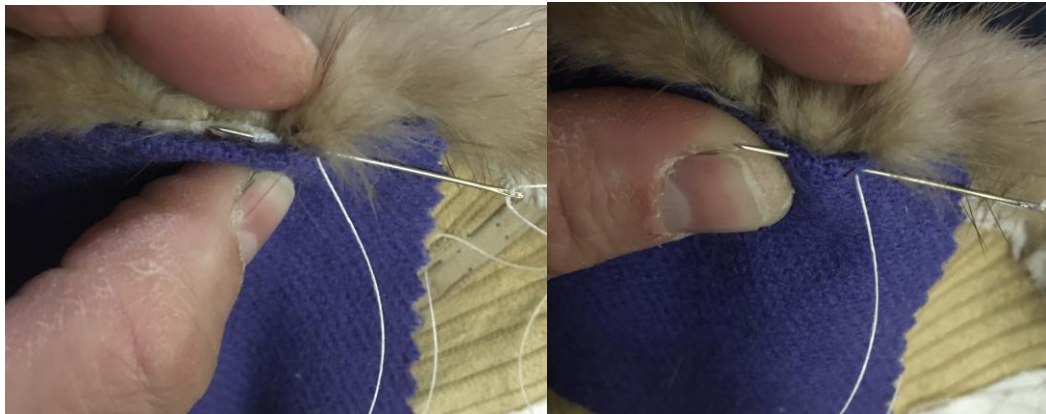
4. Turn the twill tape over and secure small sections at a time using clips. Whip stitch the edges of the twill tape down to the leather or to the interlining if you chose to include one.



5. Your garment should already have finished edges. I use a version of the running stitch to secure the garment to the fur lining. To start, I place the folded edge of my garment's hem just barely past the outer edge of the twill tape and bring my thread up through the fold and secure the knot between the garment fabric and the twill tape. I take a small stitch (count one or two threads through the garment's hem and toward the twill tape, and my needle travels a short distance under the outer edge of the twill tape before I bring it back out through all of the layers. I take another very small stitch over one or two threads on the outer fabric and repeat. I'll show you my methods, but the goal here is to baste the garment to the fur lining with somewhat invisible stitches. Fur and fabrics have very different cleaning requirements, so you want to be able to easily remove the lining when either the fabric or the fur needs to be cleaned. **Note: Photos of this are on the following page.**

But I just want to use some fur as trim... That's even easier than the previous steps for creating a full fabric lining. Pay attention to the direction the fur is running when piecing your trim together. Simply sew twill tape to the edges or add a fabric backing. You will sew through the tape or fabric to attach it to your garment so that the trim can be removed when the garment needs to be cleaned.

Attaching the fur lining to your garment:



Where do you get fur?

Tandy leather, Beck leather, Lyon Fur, online auctions (risky- you can't assess the condition of the fur and might spend money on pieces you can't use), thrift stores (I have seen them starting to price used furs above what I am willing to pay for them when I can buy quality plates and pelts elsewhere).

I very highly recommend purchasing from Lyon Fur. Godefroy du Lyon (MKA Grant Johannes) is a member of the SCA, and he is THE fur guy. He carries a variety of plates and pelts, including real vair! When questions are asked in costuming or fur groups, he has always been willing and quick to answer them. He also created and runs the unofficial SCA Furriers, Tawers, and Skinners group. I first learned about sewing with fur from Mistress Mathilde's now sadly inactive By My Measure website, but Godefroy's expertise has helped me grow my knowledge and skills.

What fur should you use for that project?

Great question! That's going to vary a little depending on the time and place your project fits into. It also depends on your goals. Do you want it to be perfectly period? Or do you just want something snuggly, warm, and luxurious? I have a lot of modern furs in my inventory, and I use them because they fit my budget and goals. I've included a couple of links and books to get you started with your exploration of period furs.

[Facebook group: Unofficial SCA Furriers, Tawers, and Skinners](https://www.facebook.com/groups/152266885402656/?ref=share)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/152266885402656/?ref=share>

[La Cotte simple: A fur primer for 14th and 15th century European clothing](http://cottesimple.com/articles/fur-primer/)

<http://cottesimple.com/articles/fur-primer/>

[Veale, Elspeth. *The English Fur Trade in the Later Middle Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966.](https://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol38)

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol38>

[The squirrel fur trade in 14th century Novgorod](https://www.lib.umn.edu/bell/tradeproducts/squirrel)

<https://www.lib.umn.edu/bell/tradeproducts/squirrel>

[Fur in Birka](http://www.archaeology.su.se/polopoly_fs/1.172791.1396249429!/menu/standard/file/LA8.Ågren.pdf)

http://www.archaeology.su.se/polopoly_fs/1.172791.1396249429!/menu/standard/file/LA8.Ågren.pdf

[7-9th Century Alanic fur lined caftan](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327518)

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327518>

[9th Century Alanian caftan](https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/!ut/p/z0/fYy9DoIwFEZfhaWr9_LT7g0mJAxicBC7kJumQC22Ao36-OILuH3n5OQDBR0oTy87UrTB07zzTYm-kVKkeYl1U_ljyqY987Y8VZgWcDEeaID_o_3F3pdFSVA6-Gg-ETpHD7v1xjN8h9VtSRgSWiPDjB_2oScyYQ6j1TT_vB1lx41hkfNMChi66voFAx2X2w!!/)

https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/!ut/p/z0/fYy9DoIwFEZfhaWr9_LT7g0mJAxicBC7kJumQC22Ao36-OILuH3n5OQDBR0oTy87UrTB07zzTYm-kVKkeYl1U_ljyqY987Y8VZgWcDEeaID_o_3F3pdFSVA6-Gg-ETpHD7v1xjN8h9VtSRgSWiPDjB_2oScyYQ6j1TT_vB1lx41hkfNMChi66voFAx2X2w!!/

[16th Century Ottoman caftan](http://issendai.com/ottoman-turkish/fur-lined-caftan-of-bayezid-ii/)

<http://issendai.com/ottoman-turkish/fur-lined-caftan-of-bayezid-ii/>

Newton, Stella Mary. *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1980.

Ewing, Elizabeth. *Fur in Dress*. London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1981.