

# Make Your Own Split Drawers

Drawers are an optional garment for your historic wardrobe, as not all women of the mid-Nineteenth century wore them. If you use a cage, wear drawers. Properly fitted split drawers will add greatly to your comfort and convenience while wearing historic clothing.

Drawing your own pattern for split drawers is not complex. With a few basic measurements, and a few period sewing techniques, you can make your own, without going to the expense of purchasing a pattern that you'd still have to alter! Techniques used for drawers construction are: straight or running stitch, flat-felled seam, gathering, stitching a band, narrow hemming, facing, and tucks (optional).

Take all measurements over smooth-fitting modern undergarments, and *do not* fudge, fiddle, or otherwise lie in any way about your numbers. Have a trusted friend take the measurements for the greatest accuracy. Remember, you are creating a garment that fits your shape; there is no such thing as size, only fit.

## Measurements Needed:

The letter of the measurement corresponds with a line or length on the drafting chart below.

- A: **Outer Leg Length.** Measure from your waist, over your hip, to mid-calf (or your preferred finished length), plus 2" ( $\frac{1}{2}$ " for the waist seam allowance,  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " for a hem). Add 1" for every  $\frac{1}{2}$ " tuck desired for decoration at the hem. (Jot down how much you are adding for tucks.)
- B: **Width.** If your hips are less than 40"

around, use a 36" width. If your hips are wider, use a 45" width; you can find decent muslin in both these widths. Remember, you're drafting one half of the total garment here, so using a 36" width for each leg gives you a total of 72" in the hips. Drawers are roomy.

- C: **Thigh.** Measure the fullest part of your thigh, and add 5" to 8" for wearing ease, plus  $\frac{3}{4}$ " seam allowance at the front and back. Check for wearing ease: slip the measuring tape round your thigh, holding it at the measurement that includes the ease amount. Now, sit down. Make sure there is no pinching, and adjust the ease up or down.
- D: **Calf.** Measure the fullest part of the calf, and add 4" to 5" for wearing ease, plus  $\frac{3}{4}$ " seam allowance at the inseam edges. The roomier the leg, the cooler you'll stay in hot weather.
- E: **Front Depth.** Measure from your navel to the center of your body depth, plus  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " for seam allowances & ease.
- F: **Back Depth.** Measure from your waistline at your spine to the center of your body depth, plus  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " for seam allowances and ease. This may be a deeper measurement than your front depth. Accommodate for this by adding the difference *above* the waistline, creating a shape that slopes up to the center back.

## Drafting

To create your pattern, lay a large sheet of butcher paper or pattern paper on the floor. Measure down about six inches from the top, and draw a horizontal line. This will be the waist edge of the drawers. Find the

center point, mark it, and measure vertically the length of A. Draw a horizontal line. This will be the calf edge of the drawers. The half to your right will be the front section of each leg; to your left will be the back section of each leg. You should now have two horizontal lines (waist and calf) and a vertical line bisecting them (A).

From the center mark on the waistline, measure out one half of the width measurement B toward the front. For 36" wide fabric, this will be 18"; for 45" fabric, 22  $\frac{1}{2}$ ".

Repeat for the back. Draw a straight line down to the calf line. You should now have a large box with a line in the middle.

On the front (right) side of the pattern, measure down from the waistline for the front depth (E). Mark. On the back (left) side of the pattern, mark the same measurement. If there is a difference between E and F, add that length *above* the waistline, drawing a new, angled waistline to intersect that point.

*This is a good place to stop for a moment and take a look at how the shape of your pattern will change to accommodate different figure needs, and why two depth measurements (front and back) are so helpful.*

*If you have a prominent abdomen and flat behind, your front depth measurement will be longer than your back depth measurement. In this case, you will mark down from the waist line an amount equal to your back depth (F), and add the difference between E and F *above* the waist line in the front. This gives extra depth in just the front of the drawers, so the seat won't be overly baggy. Your pattern shape will look like the reverse of figure 1. If you have a prominent behind and flatter abdomen, your pattern will look similar to figure 1.*

*Because we use the outside leg measurement (over the hip) for the overall length measurement, we have already made room for full hips. Adjusting the front or back depth above the waistline simplifies drawing the inseam portion of the drawers, as the inseams will be the same length and shape, and the lower edge can be cut as a straight line.*

We'll now resume drawing the pattern. Measure down from the depth mark 2"; using the length line (A) as your center point, mark one half of the thigh measurement (C) to the front and back of the pattern. Mark the ends of the line. At the calf line, and using the length line (A) as your center point, mark one half the calf

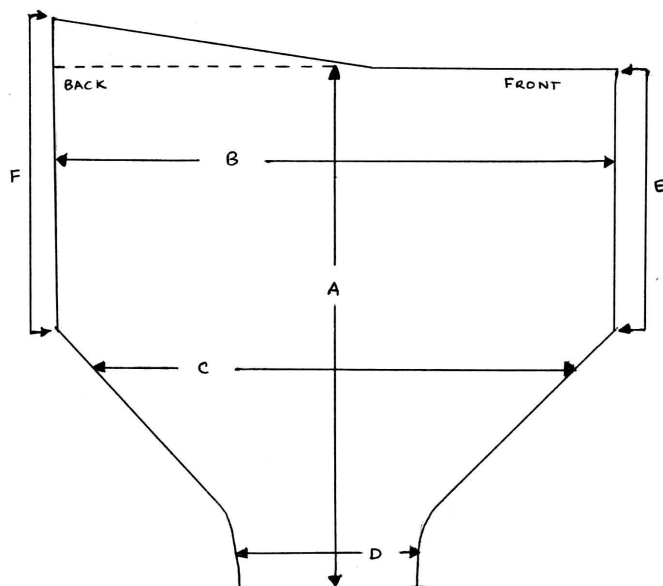


Figure 1:  
Drafting the  
Drawers

measurement (D) to the front and back of the pattern. For tucks to set in easily, the lower part of leg needs to be as squarely cut as possible. Note how many inches you are adding to accommodate tucks, and be sure that at least that much of the calf section is completely square. Drawing as smooth a curve as you can, connect the marks at the depth, thigh, and calf lines, front and back. (You will “true,” or smooth out, this line when you cut out your pattern.)

The basic shape of your pattern is complete. Cut it out and smooth the inseam curve by folding the pattern in half along the overall length line (A), matching the crotch depth marks, and cutting along the inseam curve through both layers at the same time.

Lay the pattern on your fabric, aligning A with the straight lengthwise grain, and cut two shapes for each pair of drawers. For the waistband, tear or cut two bands of fabric equal to your finished waist measurement, plus an amount for overlap at the closure. If your drawers will close in the front, add 4" (for a 1½" overlap at the closure, with a ½" seam allowance). If they will close in the back, add 12" (for a 5½" overlap at the closure, to ensure proper modesty in back!). I suggest a front closure, as this is easiest to manage when dressing alone. The bands should be 2" wide. This allows for a 1" finished band with ½" seam allowances.

#### Facings

Many surviving drawers have a facing applied to the split openings. A facing adds another smooth layer of wicking fabric through the thigh area, which can completely eliminate chafing. It's also fairly easy to cut out the facing and replace it with a new one when it becomes worn. The facing can be as simple as a wide bias binding (use home made bias, not purchased), or as covering as this method:

Using your pattern as a template, measure in 5" along the waistline from either side. Draw a line straight down, intersecting with the leg on the inseam. Cut your facings, front and back, for each leg of each pair of drawers. After you have stitched the leg inseams, but before finishing the waist, you will attach the facings. With right sides together, join the front and back facings along their inseam edge with a simple seam. Press. Press under ½" on the longest edge of the facing, mitering the inseam point as needed. With the right side of the facing to the right side of the drawers, stitch along the crotch edge, press, trim, and turn the facing to the inside. Use a slipstitch, fell stitch, or other smooth hand stitch to secure the facing to the drawers fabric.

If you choose not to make a facing, narrowly hem the edges of the opening, with the hem

turned to the *outside* of the drawers. This leaves a perfectly smooth fabric against the skin, and prevents irritation.

#### Assembly

Stitch the inseam with a flat felled seam or a regular straight stitch seam, double stitched for extra strength, with the seam allowances hand whipstitched together to prevent fraying. French seams create bulk that chafes during wearing, and are not seen in period drawers.

At the calf, stitch the tucks. One easy way to do this is to turn the drawer leg inside out, then fold back the lower leg to the fold line of the first tuck. Press the fold, then stitch the tuck. Press the tuck toward the hem, then reposition the drawers leg for the second tuck, and so on. These tucks will be functional; that is, they could be let down if needed, as opposed to tucks that are stitched into the seam.

Work a simple hem at the calf. Tatting, or a bit of Swiss embroidered edging (100% cotton) could be added if further embellishment is wanted. A little hand featherstitching is lovely between the tucks.

If you will be adding facings to your drawers, attach them now.

#### Drawing Up the Waist

Mark the center point of the waistline edge on the drawers. Run in two rows of gathering stitches, ¼" and ½" from the edge. It is not necessary to gather the drawers in the overlap portions, unless you are particularly full figured in those areas.

Stitch the top edge of the waistband and band facing together with a ½" seam allowance. Press, trim, and understitch the seam allowances to the band facing (stitch through both layers of the seam allowance, and the facing, very close to the original stitching

line. This keeps the facing from rolling with prolonged wear.)

Mark the band at the center point, and the side points. If your drawers will open in the back, overlap the front drawer sections slightly (2") on the center band mark, and match the side marks of the band with the center marks of the drawers. Pin the free edge of the drawers to the band, extending the band 1" beyond the crotch edge.

If your drawers will open in the front, overlap the back sections 6" (make a mark 6" from each back edge, then match them on the center point of the band). Match the side marks on the band with the center marks of the drawers. Pin the free edge of the drawers to the band, extending the band ½" beyond the crotch edge.

Draw up the gathering threads to fit. Stitch the seam, press, and stitch again, very close to the first line, to further stabilize the seam. Trim as needed, and press seam allowances up toward the band. Figure 2 shows the inside view of a nearly completed pair of front opening drawers.

#### Finishing

Fold the facing right sides together with the waistband. Stitch the ends of the band with a ½" seam allowance; press, trim the corner, and turn the facing to the inside. Turn under the facing seam allowance and whipstitch the facing closed along the band extensions and the inside waist.

Mark the positions for buttons, and work buttonholes in the band. With the front opening, only one button is necessary. With a back opening, one button position at each end of the overlap is helpful to prevent sagging. Stitch on the buttons.

Finish by adding a laundry marking if needed.

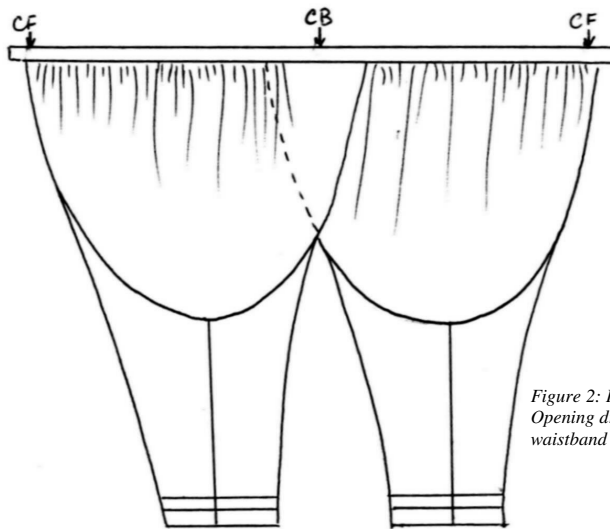


Figure 2: Inside of Front Opening drawers, with waistband attached.