

ORGANIZATION

After twenty years of costuming I have found the secret. The great secret is Organization!

Now I am sure you are telling yourself, "I'm organized!" But are you? Can you at this moment lay your hands on your tape measure or your scissors? Can you in less than minute lay your hands on your latest project and sit at the machine and work. If the answer is no, then you are not organized. And you should not feel bad about it; it is a skill just like sewing and just like sewing it needs to be learned. And if you remember your first sewing project, you know that any new skill takes time. So, lets get started learning!

First thing we have to do is get your stash in order. If you are like most costumers you have a pile of fabric, trim, lace, ribbon, and the many other items needed to sew. Before Heidi and I organized the stash I had no idea where to find a thing. It was all neatly packed in boxes in my 8' X 10" storage locker but there was no way to tell which box had which fabric. One time I took my best friend to pick up some fabric I needed for a costume. It took me 3 hours to find the fabric. After the stash was organized I took the same friend to pick up fabric; he took a book with him this time. He had just gotten settled in the chair I was storing at the time when I told him that I was done. The look on his face was worth all the work it took to get there. So how did I get there?

You will need;

- * Nice clean boxes, File boxes are great, copy paper boxes are also great, and free.
- * 3X5 Cards
- * Scissors
- * Stapler
- * Pens
- * Magic Marker
- * Tape Measure

Take on a box and make it "F-1". This means that this is box number one of your fabric supply.

Grab the first piece of fabric. Clip off a small sample, it can just be a 1/2 inch wedge from the end and staple it to the left-hand side of a 3X5 card. Two staples are usually enough to hold most samples.

Then measure the length of the cloth, and write it down on the card.

Then measure the width of the cloth and write that down on the card.

Write down what the cloth is made of, 100% cotton, 50% wool & 50% Silk, etc. If you don't know make a guess, or just right down UNKNOWN FABRIC.

Now fold the fabric up and place it in the box, and write in the right hand upper corner of the card F-1.

You should have a 3X5 card with a fabric sample stapled to it, with the following information:

What box the fabric is in,
How many yards you have,
What width the fabric it,
What it's content is

And then you can add possible projects for the fabric.

Continue doing this until the box is full. Then put the lid on it and move on to F-2 and so on and so on until you are done with the fabric. If you have a lot of fabric this may take some time. But just keep plugging away and you will be done before you know it. Don't worry about sorting the fabric as you put it in the boxes we will do that

later. Not to the fabric we will be sorting the cards.

When the fabric is done it is time to do the rest of it. For lace, ribbon and trim I found that a piece of cardboard or poster board cut to 4 inches by 9 inches is the best size to wrap on. Cut up a number of these cards then mark one with either T-1 for trim, R-1 for ribbon, or L-1 for lace. The do just like you did with the fabric, clip a sample, measure it and then wrap it around the narrow part of the cardboard.

Depending on the amount of trim, lace or ribbon you can fit a number of different ones on a card, or just one type. When the cardboard is full place it in a box marked either Trim, Ribbon, or Lace, and start a new card until all is neatly wrapped and boxed. For the interfacing, tapes, cords and other such things I just keep them in one box, with smaller items grouped together in zip locks marked Notions. Now you have a nice neat stack of boxes, and a whole lot of cards. Next we organize the cards.

I keep my cards in a 3X5 file box, that I picked up that the store I bought the cards at. To organize them I used the dividers that came with the box, and labeled them SCA, Klingon, Fort 1846, Ren Fair, and a few others. I sorted my fabric by what period costume I was going to make out of it. This worked for me because I do a lot of different periods, if you are only in do one period you might want to sort them by Undergarments, Day, Evening. It doesn't matter as long as they are grouped in an order that makes sense to you. If nothing else sort them by color. Now that you have them done. Now we move on to the fiends of the sewing world, patterns!

Patterns have to be the hardest things to deal with. They tear, they lose pieces, and they never cooperate. I have found that the best way of dealing with them is to prep them before you need them. When I start the planning for a costume and will be using a particular pattern. I will open it, and cut out each and every piece in the largest size. Then I iron them and refold them and place the pieces, the instructions and the cover in a quart sized zip lock bag. This way I can find the pieces when I need them, I know what pattern I am using, and I don't have to try and refold them on the original lines.

Yes, I know that there are people who can refold a pattern back into its original cover, my wife can and I can't. So I deal with it this way. To store your patterns just use another box labeled PATTERNS, and put them in whatever order suits you. All the men's together, all the dresses, etc. If you draft your own patterns you store them in pretty much the same manner. What I do is after I have done all the fittings and have the finished product I transfer it to brown wrapping paper. Making sure that I label each piece and do all the markings. I also at this time draft all the facings and other small bits I will need. It's a pain, but it will save time in the long run. And in twenty years I have never used a pattern just once. So take the time. When I store that pattern I will put a quick sketch of the design in the baggie it makes it easier to remember in the long run. As it was said by Dr. Jones, Sr. "I wrote it down so I didn't have to remember it."

Now with all of the other items under control we come to the sewing box. All through time people have had sewing boxes. It's a simple concept that fell out of favor along with sewing it's self. But we are going to bring it back. While the sewing box reached its height with the Victorians who made boxes with matching everything, you don't have to go that far. You will need a box or basket that will hold:

- * Scissors - Thread Snips and Shears
- * Pin Cushion - I like the Magic Grip-it kind.
- * Pins - quilters Pins
- * Needles - Hand and Machine
- * Seam Ripper
- * Hand needles
- * Pattern Weights - If you use them
- * Rotary Cutters - If you use them
- * Tape Measure
- * Small Ruler - 6 inch is best
- * Chalk - I use the Art Pencil type - One white, one Blue.

- * Calculator - Get a Solar powered one.
- * And anything else you use all the time.

This is the stuff that you will need for most projects and should always know where it is. If you want to you can take some of your creative urges out on the box and fit it out so everything has its place. The important thing is that they are all together were you can find them.

You will also need some project boxes. A project box is just what it sounds like, a box that holds a complete project. That includes the pattern, fabric, thread, beads and anything else that you need to make that item. The idea here is to have everything for one costume together so you don't have to hunt when you want to sew. This is the one box I feel that you should buy. The clear plastic boxes that Rubber Maid makes are perfect. Because the box is clear you can tell at a glance which project is in which box. Limit your self to four at the most. I know that's hard, but much more than four projects going at a time means you have projects that are resting. A resting project is one that you have not touched in a month. If that is the case one of two things happened: it never got started and needs to be put back in the stash until a better time or it's half done, and you need to sit down and finish it so you can start a new project. Its not hard to lose steam on a project, and taking a break for one is fine, but you can't start a new one until the old ones are finished or abandoned.

We move on to your sewing room.

Now I know that those of us who have a whole room are few and far between. So I will work on the theory that like most costumers you are working either at the dining room table or in one corner of the house. You need an area that is for your sewing supplies and nothing else.

You have to put your foot down here and be selfish.

It does no good to have thing organized if everyone and their brother can go though and borrow things. It has been my experience that a closet for just your sewing things is the best bet. If not that an armoire is good, even just a hope chest all it needs to be is something that everything will fit in. Then declare it off limits to any one else. Use a lock if you have to make your point. For this article we will work with the idea that you have a closet. In the closet you should have: your stash, sewing machine, iron and ironing board, patterns cutting board, sewing box and project boxes.

To organize your sewing closet you should start by putting your stash away. I recommend that you put the fabric along the back wall. If possible don't stack the fabric boxes in front of each other. I understand that this is most likely impossible but try to arrange the boxes so you can get at most of them while moving as few as possible. Put the trim, patterns and the notions boxes next to the fabric boxes. I make a stack with the trim, lace, and ribbon on the bottom, notions next with the patterns on top. If you have a shelf put the project boxes on it along with your sewing box. If you don't have a shelf stack them on the fabric boxes.

To hold your ironing board and iron I recommend a hanging rack on the door. Either one that hangs over the door or mounts on the door. This will keep it out of the way but it will still be handy. Make sure that the rack will handle a hot iron so you don't have to wait for it to cool before putting it away.

Your cutting board is stored any number of ways depending on: If you use one. And what type you use? If you still cut out on the dinning room table using scissors I recommend one of the cardboard cutting boards that they sell in most fabric stores. It will protect the table from your scissors and the grids make it easier to cut out. These just fold up and tuck out of the way. If you use a rotary cutter and mat, how you store it depends on what size your mat is. You want a mat as large as possible, but unless you can leave it out all the time, it must either fit in your closet, slide in along the wall or roll up. Either will work it just depends on how much space you have and how much trouble you want to go to. If you are rolling it up I recommend a set of elastic garters to help hold it closed.

Your sewing machine should be in its traveling case on the floor. Even the smallest portable is too heavy to put on top of either the shelf or the boxes. Also by being on the floor there is no chance of it being dropped. This will kill the best machine, trust me I know! With everything in place make sure of two things: one that you can close the door, and that you can get to your project boxes and sewing box without moving anything. This is so where you are doing handwork you don't have to take everything out to get to what you want to work on.

You are now ready to sew.

With everything organized it is a simple matter after you have decided that you need a new tunic for this weekends feast: To check your 3X5 cards and pick out the blue linen for the body and the yellow corduroy for the trim and pull them from their boxes. Get out the interfacing and those nice pearl buttons you found on sale last month. Decide that you want to use the pattern with the bell sleeves not the straight, because you know both are with the tunic pattern. Putting it all in a project box you set up your machine, cutting board and iron board. Then cut out the all the tunic parts, including trim and interfacing, and sit down to sew. And you have gotten this far in no time because the kids and the hubby are engrossed in a movie and you had everything organized so you put the short time to good use. And that's how the perfect people do it.

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