

Summer Sewing ~ Classic Tote Tutorial

Classic Tote Tutorial by Irene

www.sewmamasew.com



Let's get started!

Supplies:

- 1 yard of home décor cotton fabric (1½ yards for fabric with nap or if you'd like to add more pockets)
- Rotary cutter, ruler and mat
- Iron
- Scissors
- Straight pins- for this thick fabric, I recommend quilting pins, size 28
- Sewing machine fitted with a needle for thicker fabrics. I use a Schmetz 90/14 needle. (Some may recommend a topstitching needle and thread, but this is what I've always used with hardly any trouble.)

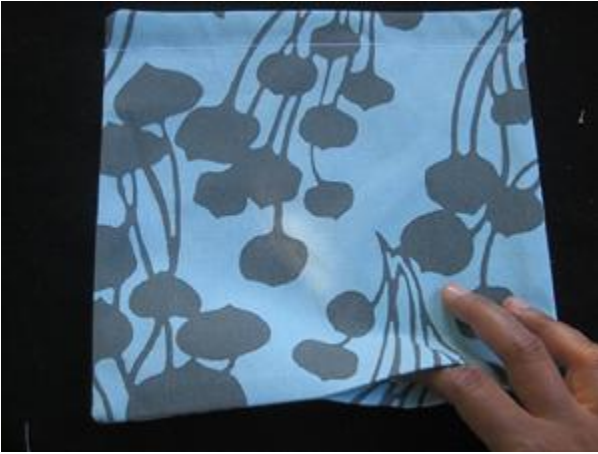
1. Cut **two** pieces of each size from your fabric:



- a) 20" x 21" (Pay attention to the nap here because the top and bottom of the tote will be the **shorter 20" sides**. For my fabric in the photo, I wanted the direction of the design to be vertical on the finished tote so I cut my fabric accordingly.)
- b) 5" x 26" for the handles
- c) 10" x 10" for the pocket

2. Make the pocket:

a) With right sides together sew around all sides using $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam allowance, but leave a small, (2-3 inch), opening for turning. (If your fabric has a certain nap like mine, be sure to match your design before sewing. You don't want to turn your pocket and find the design running one way for the outside and another for the inside!)



- b) Clip corners, turn and push corners out. (I use a chopstick.)
- c) Press making sure seams pushed out and opening is turned in.
- d) Topstitch about 1 inch down across the side opposite of your opening. (The topstitched side will be the opening of the pocket.)

3. Attach Pocket:

a) Using one of your 20" x 21" pieces, place your 9" x 9" pocket on your panel with the right sides up making sure the top of your pocket is parallel to the 20" sides of your tote. (You don't want your pocket to open along the side of your bag!)



- b) Measure in $5\frac{1}{2}$ " from each 21" side and 6" from the top and bottom.
- c) Pin pocket in place.
- d) Sew the three sides of your pocket in place using $\frac{1}{8}$ " seam allowance. Be sure to secure the opening you used to turn your pocket closed with your stitches. (I also use the triple stitch selection on my sewing machine to be sure the pocket doesn't come loose.)

4. Sew main panels

a) Since I don't have a serger, I use a simple French seam to hide all the frayed ends of the home décor fabric.



- b) First, sew around all three sides with wrong sides together using $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance.



c) I've found that in order to have a neat, crisp edge for your French seam, it's best to iron your seams open with the seam pressed to one side. (I put it over the end of my ironing board.)



d) Then turn your tote inside out, lay it out with right sides together and all the seams at the sides. (You may want to use a chopstick or something to push out your corners. Since these will be in a gusset, it's not important to get them pushed out perfectly.) Then press the seams flat so you have a neat edge to sew your next seam.



e) Sew around all three sides with a $3/8$ " seam allowance.
f) Now marvel at your beautiful French seam!

5. Make the gussets



a) With your tote inside out, take one corner and open it up.



b) I do this next step by feel because this is how I taught myself and it's fast. Basically, you feel for your seams: the side seam of your tote, which should be on top (between my thumbs in the photo), and the bottom seam of the tote, which should be between your index fingers.



Simply move the fabric around feeling with your fingers until the seams are lined up on top each other and there's a nice point. (To reduce bulk, be sure that your French seams are laying the in the opposite direction of each other. In the photo, the top seam between my thumbs is laying to the left so I made sure the bottom seam is laying to the right.)



c) Now, measure 2 ½" down from the top point and draw a line. Sew a strong triple stitch along your line.

d) Repeat the above steps for the other corner, but before sewing your gusset line, be sure that the bottom French seam is laying flat in the same direction.

NOT like this:



But, nice and neat like this:



6. Make the handles

a) Press both 5" x 26" pieces in half lengthwise.



b) Open and press both sides in toward the center crease.



c) Press center crease closed again.



d) Stitch 1/8" or as close as you can along each long side. I use a triple stitch again here, but it's mainly for aesthetic reasons.

7. Attach the handles

a) With your tote inside out, create a 1½" hem along the top of your tote by folding down the top raw edge ½" and press with an iron. Fold down another 1½" and press again.

b) Working with one side at a time, place your tote on a flat surface and lay out one handle making sure it isn't twisted.



c) Place your handle by measuring in 5" from each side of the tote. This should leave a 6" space in the middle, between the two handle ends.



d) Tuck each handle end under the hem pushing it all the way up to the top crease and pin.
e) Repeat handle placement and pin on the other side of the tote.



f) Sew a strong triple stitch along the bottom of the hem with the handles laying flat. I use the 1/4" guide on my machine and try to keep it as straight as possible. Sew around the entire tote stitching both handles in place. (As you come to a pin, carefully hold your handle in place and remove your pins before continuing. Don't sew over pins!)



g) Now move to the top of the tote. Again sew around the entire tote, but this time fold your handles up and sew in place. (I don't use pins here and I follow the ¼" seam guide again.)



h) Check your work to be sure everything matches up.

Yay, you are done! Now you can fill your tote and enjoy!

