

By Terry King for Jimmy Beans Wool

While I've been knitting for around 40 years, I'm still pretty much of a beginner at sewing. I've dabbled with sewing at various points in my life and have made quilt blocks, curtains, skirts and a skirt with a matching jacket style top with a short over-skirt. Not much of a portfolio so I've decided to journey back into the world of sewing. I hope you will join me so we can learn together!

Disclaimer: I hope you find this article helpful. Since I'm still learning, what I'm about to describe may not be the best way or even the correct way to perform each step but this is what worked for me. I would love any feedback on how I could do or explain things better! For the first project on my sewing journey I made lined curtains for the JBW retail shop. The retail shop faces the rising sun and we decided that we needed curtains, not only to keep retail cooler but to protect the yarns from fading from the sunlight.

After kicking around several ideas, we decided to utilize some of the beautiful fabrics we sell and make them ourselves. Our first dilemma...which fabric to use? We thought the most fun way to decide was to let all the Beans have a say, so we asked everyone to nominate fabrics they thought would look good. Then we held a vote... And the overwhelming winner was [Tina Givens Opal Owl fabric](#) in the red colorway!

We settled on pocket curtains for simplicity and a lining for extra heat protection. So that we don't have to drill any holes in the metal window frames, we've used black shower curtain pressure rods.

*Special Tip! One of the neat little tidbits I learned for this project is that it is important to know the diameter of your rod *before* you start your curtains. It's important because you need to add this measurement into your calculations for how much fabric you need to cut for the length of the curtain and how large the rod pocket at the top of the curtain will be. Our rods measure 1" in diameter.

We wanted a finished curtain length of 83", measured from the **top** of the curtain rod. To this measurement I added 3" for making a 2 1/2" rod pocket and 8" for a double fold hem at the bottom so we cut the main fabric into 94" lengths. Being that these are in a retail space and will be drawn back with ties we didn't want too much bulk. So I opted to go with 2 panels, the full fabric width of 44 inches. The curtains will be just a couple of inches less than 2 times the window's width.

The lining was cut 2" shorter and 2" narrower than the main fabric.



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First lesson learned:

ALWAYS square up the edges of your fabric! Which means to make sure all the sides of your fabric are straight and the corners are at right angles. I was taught to do this step in the one sewing class I've taken but because I didn't wash and iron my fabric before starting this project...silly me, I forgot to do it. While making the first curtain I realized my error and had to spend extra time fiddling to make a straight hem.



Second lesson learned:

Always make sure that whatever you use to square up the fabric edges is also square! Investing in a quilter's grids, a metal yardstick or even a carpenter's square would be an excellent choice and save you much time and aggravation. Beware of wooden yardsticks as they can bow and warp!



Step 1:

Iron your fabric. Even if you haven't washed it, you will want to iron it to get all the creases and wrinkles out and to soften it up.

Step 2:

Square up your edges. Lay out the fabric, fold in half selvage to selvage and slide each half back and forth until the fabric hangs straight. Lay flat and smooth with your hands. Then use your square to mark and cut a straight edge on each end.





Step 3:

Using the same technique, square up the lining fabric.

Step 4:

Mark and cut your lining 2" narrower than your main fabric.

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Step 5:

Lay your main fabric and lining fabric out with right sides facing each other. Pin one edge together for a 1/2" seam allowance.



Step 6:

Pin the other edge together. Because your lining is narrower you will need to make a fold in your main fabric to meet the edge of your lining.



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Step 7:

Sew both edges of your fabrics together using a 1/2" seam allowance. Be sure to remove all the pins when you're done sewing!



Step 8:

Back to the ironing board! Turn the sewn together fabrics right side out, just like a big pillowcase. Lay one end of the curtain out on the ironing board with the main fabric face down and the lining face up. Smooth out and center the lining on the main fabric and allow the edges of the main fabric to fold back about 1" on each side. Make sure there are no wrinkles in either fabric. Now carefully iron from the center of the fabrics out to the outside edges, making sure to keep the lining center. Press the fold of the main fabric to create a sharp crease.

Step 9:

Oops! I forgot to take a photo of this step, making the rod pocket. I don't know if it's the best way to do it but it worked for me. Fold over 1/2" on one end, pin and press in place. Sew, using a 1/4" seam allowance. Fold over again, 2 1/2" this time, pin & press. Then what I did was top stitch this fold in place. This can seem tricky but what I did was fairly simple. Mark a 2 1/4" "seam allowance" on your machine with a piece of tape and use it as a guide since you won't be able to see the folded under edge. You've just made your rod pocket!

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Step 10:

We're almost there! Now we're going to make the double fold hem. The reason for doing the bottom hem with a double fold like this is to add weight and make the curtain hang nicely. Lay out your fabric and fold the unfinished edge up 4", press and fold again another 4". Pin in place, placing you pins perpendicular to your folded edge and positioning the heads about 1/2" below the upper fold of the hem. You now have a double fold.



Measure from the top of the rod pocket to the bottom of the hem on both edges and in two or three places in the middle to make sure that your curtain is exactly the length you need, all the way across. Then measure **again** just to be sure! Readjust the second fold if needed to make sure it's straight and re-pin. Take the curtain back to the ironing board and press the folds.

Step 11:

There are a number of different methods to sew the hem. I chose to do a Blind Hem Stitch so that I didn't have a stiff seam interfering with the drape of the curtains. As this is a new stitch for me and I have a very old machine (as you can see in the photos above, it's a 1953 Singer), I opted to do this stitch by hand. If you have a newer machine and a blind hem foot, by all means use your machine.

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I was pleasantly surprised to find this stitch is very similar to the mattress stitch, used by knitters to sew invisible seams. Basically you work back and forth just between the top fold of the hem and the main fabric, catching tiny little stitches on each piece. (Don't worry! I'll do a blind hem how to video very soon.)



Now you're finished sewing your curtains! I recommend giving them one more ironing to get out all the wrinkles before sliding them on to your rods and hanging them up!

Most importantly, have fun, be patient and don't stress. Measure and measure again before cutting and all will be well!

Summary:

I learned some great things with this project. First of all, I was reminded to not skip any steps or cut corners! (no pun intended :p) I was pleasantly surprised that adding a lining to curtains can be so simple and that my beginner attempt could look so good!

I think what I did turned out some nice curtains that are on the casual side but there is plenty of room for improvement. For instance, if I made these again I would go ahead and trim the selvedge edges off the fabric. Even though the curtains turned out well, the selvedges weren't always sewn into the seam allowances as I had hoped they would be and show on some of the curtain panels. As it turned out the curtains would have looked just fine if the panels were an inch or two narrower.

One other thing I think I would do differently is to cut the lining a little shorter and not necessarily fold it into the rod pocket at the top which would make the rod pocket less stiff. I also realized that I need to learn more about what my sewing machine can and can't do and perhaps having a newer machine to do some things might be desirable. This is something I will definitely be investigating.

All in all this was a lot of fun and reinforced that I do enjoy sewing when I get into a project. I'm looking forward to my next project!

Thanks for joining me on my learning to sew journey! Please let me know what you think my next project should be or what **you** want to learn!

Terry

