



## Pattern of the Month - January 2016

By Evelyn George

### Denim Market Tote

~12" x 7" x 14" tall

If your New Year's resolution is to cut down on the number of plastic bags you use, here's a quick way to make a very durable and useful tote you can take to the supermarket. You'll want to keep a couple of these in the car—they also come in handy at the Farmer's Market, Street Fair, or any number of places where you find yourself needing a good strong bag. Whether you repurpose a pair of cast-off jeans, or use new fabric, you'll soon be on your way to saying "No thanks" to the "Paper or plastic?" question!

This standard size grocery bag uses 1 pair men's size 42 wide-leg jeans. *\*(Or, 1 yard of 48" WOF fabric is enough for 2 bags.)\** Use any sturdy, washable fabric that your machine can handle. You'll also need a fat quarter of lighter weight fabric for trim; jeans thread or other strong thread, such as Coats and Clark Dual Duty XP (regular or heavy duty); and a #90/14 jeans or topstitch needle.



*(Suggestions: Test your fabric/needle/thread combo first; increase stitch length slightly, to about 2.8; and if presser foot is adjustable, experiment with reducing pressure a little; remember to put it back to normal afterward.)*

#### Cutting:

Starting with a large pair of jeans, cut off the lower legs, measuring 18" up from the hem. Remove inseams, but leave the side seams and hems. Trim each leg piece to 20" wide; the hems will become the top edge of the bag. It's best to avoid using the thick, flat-felled inseams, because they are hard to stitch over; but the side seams are usually OK, and are straighter, as well.

*\*(If using yardage, cut one rectangle of denim fabric 35" long x 20" wide, for each bag.)\**

Cut 2 denim strips 3" x 15" for handles.

From trim fabric, cut 2 strips 2½" x 15" for handle trim.

From trim fabric, cut 2 strips 2" x 18" for binding side seams; one 2" x 15" strip for binding bottom seam; and two bias strips 2" x 8" for binding bottom corner seams (optional).

Optional Pocket: Cut desired size + hem and seam allowances, from denim or trim fabric.

The jeans hems will be used as the top edge of the bag. At the lower corners of each bag side, mark a 3½" square, with two sides of the square being the cut edges of the rectangle; cut out squares. This will shape the box bottom of the bag.

*\*(If using yardage, fold piece in half so center is at bottom and cut a 3" x 3½" rectangle from both thicknesses at the fold, with the 3" measurement on the raw edge and the 3½" measurement on the fold. After attaching handles, skip bottom seam, and go directly to side seams.)\**

(If you are adding a pocket, now is the time to sew it to the center of one side of the bag.)

**Make and Attach Handles:** Press each denim handle strip so that raw edges meet at center of the strip, with right sides out. Press each strip of trim in the same way, raw edges meeting at center. Lay trim strip on top of handle strip so all raw edges are inside, and a little denim shows at edges. Stitch trim to handle, stitching close to folds. Trim handles to equal lengths, about 14" to 15" each. Cover raw edges of handle ends with a 3" square of trim fabric, folding under raw edges and stitching down to cover ends of handles.

Measure to find center of each side of bag at upper edge (if there is a seam, it might not be exactly in the center). On outside of bag, center and pin handles in position 2" below upper edge of bag, with 5" of space between them, one handle on front of bag and one on back. Make sure handles are not twisted, then stitch onto bag, stitching a 1" square with an X in the center, at the end of each handle.

**Construct Bag** (note: Use  $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam allowances throughout)

**Bottom Seam:** Align the two bottom edges of bag, wrong sides together, and stitch a  $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam. The seam will be on the outside of the bag; press it open, with steam, to make it nice and flat. Press raw edges to meet in center of each 2" wide binding strip, with right sides out. Center a strip of binding over flattened seam; tuck folded edges of binding behind denim seam edges, to completely cover them. Pin in place, and stitch close to fold through all thicknesses along both edges, stitching binding and seam to bag. This reinforces the bag, and the binding also makes a decorative trim on the outside of the bag!

**Side seams:** Stitch in the same manner, starting with wrong sides together, so when binding is applied, it will form a decorative trim on the outside as it did before. Add trim in the same way, folding binding edges under the denim seam edges; and extend the trim strip about 2" above the upper edge of bag. Stitch through all thicknesses to bind and trim as you did at bag bottom; fold 2" end of strip over top edge to inside of bag, turn end under and stitch in place about 1" below top of bag. The second side will be more difficult, as you will be sewing down into the bag, but just check carefully, making sure binding is covering seam evenly, and flattening out bag as you go, to make sure you only sew what you intend.

**To make the box bottom:** Turn bag wrong side out. At one lower corner, bring the bottom seam to the side seam, this time right sides together, matching seams at center; stitch together, using a  $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam. It will be thick, so stitch slowly and carefully. Repeat at other corner of bag. These short seams can be covered with a raw edge 2" wide bias strip, wrapping it over the entire stitched seam to cover it, and stitching through all thicknesses close to the original seam line. If this is too much of a challenge for your machine, omit the binding, or add it by hand. This is a utility bag, after all!

*\*Notes: It's easy to vary the bag size depending on your preference and the jean sizes available. Thrift stores may be a good source for larger pairs of jeans or skirts, yielding a good amount of usable denim.*