



## Pattern of the Month - April 2018

By Evelyn George

### Pioneer Doll



April 22 is Earth Day, a perfect time to recycle those old fabric items saved for just the right repurposing. Do you have a collection of old jeans, shirts, vintage linens or other textile items just too special to get rid of? Earth Day is a great time to dream up a project for them, or perhaps work on one you've already started.

Recycling is not a new idea. For example, in pioneer days, dolls and other playthings were fashioned from rags and scraps. No pattern was needed, each doll was different, made up from available materials. Very few survived their time, as they were simply loved to pieces. It's fun to create a primitive doll or toy from old clothes, linens and threads. You can make a special one for yourself, using your textile treasures!

Here are some basic directions to get you started, but of course *your* collection of bits and pieces of beloved fabrics will lead you. Select a few fabrics to start with - a plain fabric for the doll itself, and two or three plaids or prints for the clothes. Make sure all are clean and pressed. You can tea dye them if you want a more antique look: soak overnight in strong tea (or coffee), then rinse well to remove excess.

To make a pattern for a doll body, fold a piece of paper in half and sketch a half-body, adding about  $\frac{1}{4}$ " all around for seam allowances. Unfold and check to see that it looks pretty chubby - sort of like a cookie cutter --because once it has been stuffed, it will be rounder, but *thinner* looking. Redraw it as many times as you need, until you are satisfied. Remember, this is supposed to be primitive, so don't get too fancy.

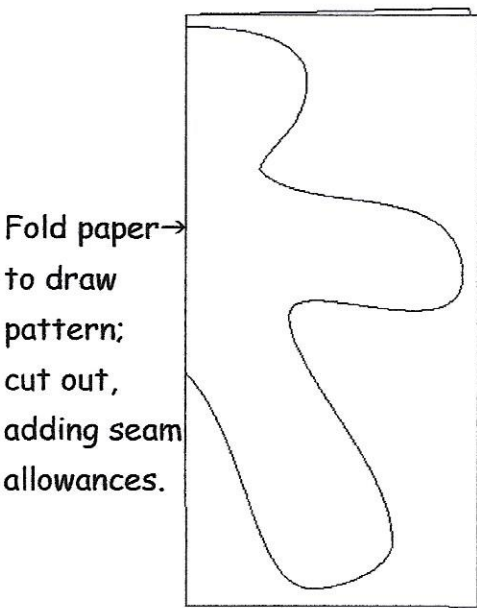
Unfold your paper pattern, and use it to cut out two pieces of fabric, for the doll's front and back. With right sides together, sew around edges with approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance, leaving an opening on one side for stuffing. You can do the stitching by hand, if you really want to connect to pioneer days. Remember to backstitch at beginning and end, so it won't come apart while you're stuffing it.

Clip curves, or trim with pinking shears; turn right side out and stuff. Use whatever stuffing you have—the pioneer women did. I didn't want straw in mine, however, so I used shreds of

fabric and thread. If that seems too lumpy, use polyester fiberfill or batting scraps, etc. Sew the opening closed.

Does your doll need a face? Pencil, pen, paint or embroidery could be used. Mine didn't need a face, but she did need a bonnet to go with her primitive dress and apron, so I cut those freehand and stitched them up by hand. Then she was done. Yours might want buttons, lace or other embellishments; maybe you want to make her a little quilt and pillow, too? Let her tell you what she needs as her personality develops. Just go with the flow, and enjoy the process! And remember that you are recycling, so this isn't costing a penny! Happy Earth Day!

Doll body

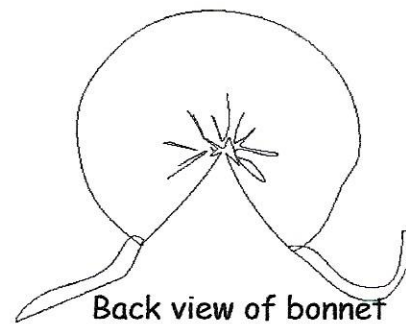


Unfold paper pattern; cut two, from body fabric.

Dress front - curve neck slightly  
Dress back - slit neck opening as needed



Cut rectangle for bonnet; gather lower edge and fasten, for back. Hem other edges; add ties.



Primitive stuffed toys can be made in this manner, too. Draw a rough outline of a cat, bunny, pig, etc. making it fatter to allow for the stuffing to take up some of the width, and be sure to add seam allowances. Keep in mind you can use several fabrics, crazy-quilt style, instead of just one, and you can always look for patterns to use if you're not happy making one up. But it's freeing to just make one up, and if it comes out looking not very realistic, well, that's because it's folk art, primitive style, and quirky is just fine!

