



# A Bag For All Seasons

The eco bag

By Tina Whiteley

**N**ow that single-use plastic bags are being phased out, what better way to do your weekend shopping in the supermarket than with a sturdy and stylish home-made tote bag that you can be proud to pack your groceries in.

Keep it plain and functional or make it highly decorative to catch the eye. The choice is yours, but either way I hope you will have fun with this easy to make design and feel good about supporting the environment at the same time.

## You will need

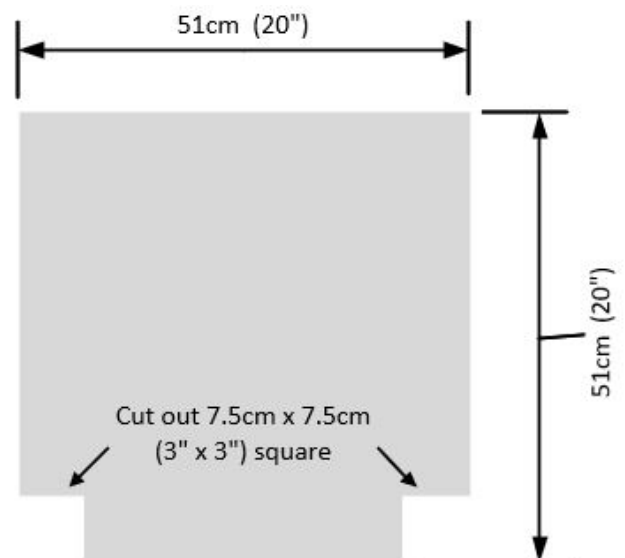
- Outer fabric (approx. 0.75 m)
- Lining fabric (approx. 0.75 m)
- Sewing machine and sewing/embroidery threads
- Scissors and pins
- Erasable marker pen
- Ruler/tape measure
- Standard all-purpose sewing foot
- Top stitch needle size 80/12
- Iron and cloth for pressing
- Cardboard for template (optional)

## Instructions

### Step 1 - Cutting the Fabric For the Outer Bag

With right sides together, cut out two 20 x 20 inch (51 x 51 cm) squares from the outer fabric.

On each piece of fabric, cut out a 3 x 3 inch (7.5 x 7.5 cm) square from the bottom two corners as shown below. If you plan to make several bags, it's worth making a 3 x 3 inch template to save measuring each cut-out square



## Step 2 – Cutting the Lining

Repeat step 1 for the lining fabric, which can be the same or a contrasting fabric.

Keep the lining pieces to one side for the moment and prepare the handles.

## Step 3 – Preparing the Handles

Cut two strips of fabric measuring  $4\frac{1}{2}$  x 24 inches (11 x 61 cm), from either the outer or lining fabric.

For each handle, with the wrong side of the fabric facing upwards, fold the strip in half lengthwise.

Press the strip to give a crease along the centre and then open out flat.

Fold the top and bottom edges into the centre, fold and press again, as shown below.



Finally, fold the pressed strip in half lengthwise, so that the handle now measures approximately 1 inch x 24 inches ( 2.5 x 61 cm)

It will effectively be a quarter of its original width, when fully pressed and the right side of the fabric will be showing, as shown below.



Top stitch along each length of the handle strip, as close to the edge as you can for a neat finish, as shown below. If you wish to add more decorative stitching to the handles, do so at this point.



Keep the handles to one side for the moment.

## Constructing the Bag

### Step 4 – The Lining

Place the lining fabrics with right sides together and stitch up the left and the right sides.

Stitch along the bottom of the lining, leaving a gap in the centre large enough to pull the bag through at the end.

Pull out each cut away corner at the bottom of the bag.



Bring the sewn seams together, making sure they line up.



Pin and sew along the straight edge, remembering to remove the pins as you get to them.



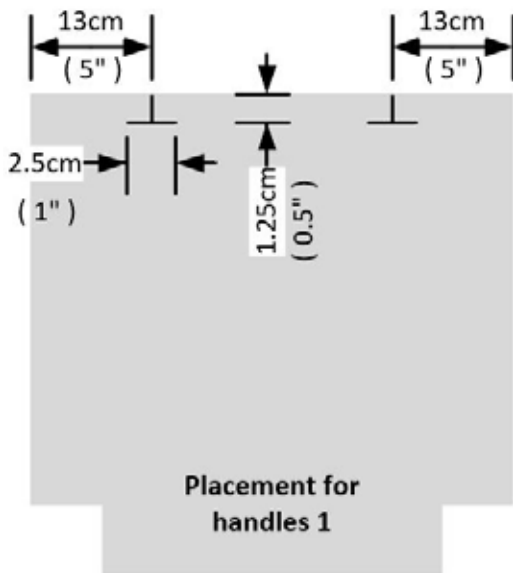
Keep to one side and prepare the outer fabric for sewing.

## Step 5 – Outer Bag Fabric - Placing the Handles.

Take one of the outer bag fabric pieces and, with right side facing up, measure 5 inches (13 cm) in from each side of the fabric, at the top of the bag and mark at that point. This will then be the centre point for each side of the handle.

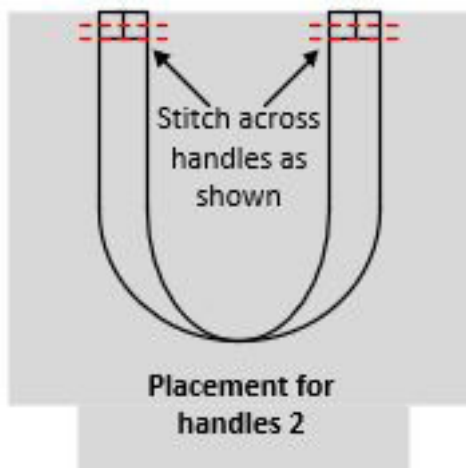
Measure down ½ inch (1.25 cm) from the centre points and draw the vertical line with an erasable marker pen.

Draw a 1 inch (2.5cm) line perpendicular to the vertical lines with ½ inch (1.25 cm) on each side of the lines, as shown in the diagram **Placement for handles 1**. The lines will look like an upside down “T”.



Repeat the above steps on each end of the handle.

The horizontal line of each end of the handle should lie over the horizontal line marked on the bag front, with the vertical lines aligning centrally, as shown in the diagram **Placement for handles 2**.

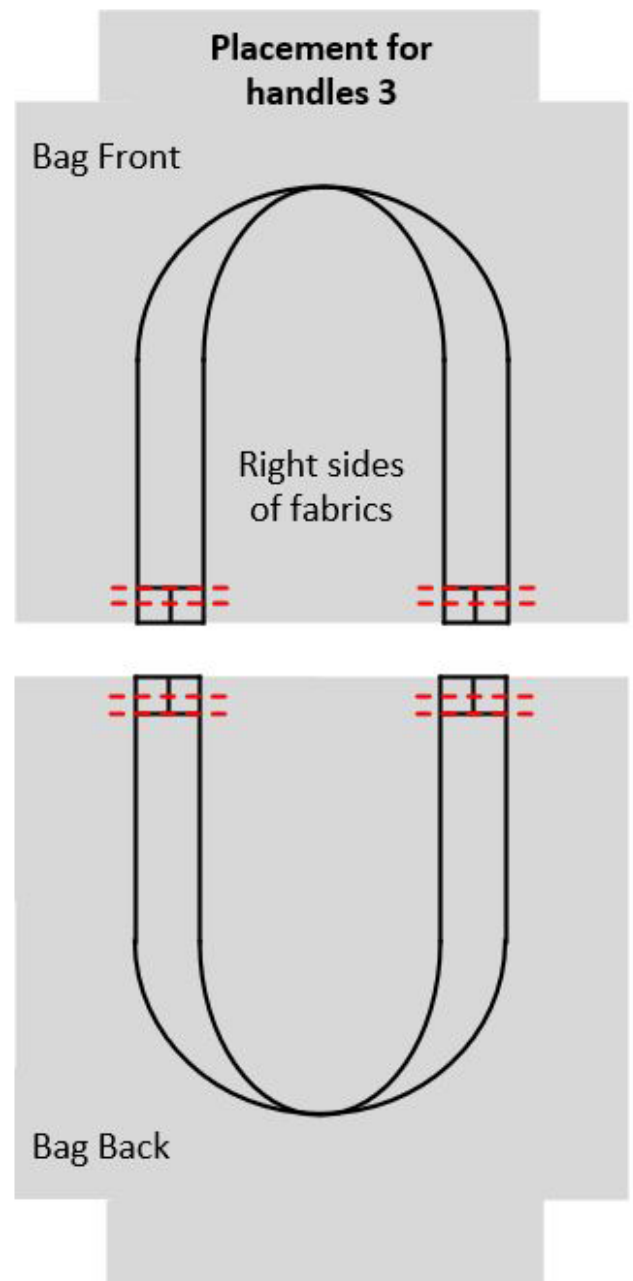


Make sure you don't twist the handle as you place it.

Pin the handle in place and straight stitch across on the line several times to reinforce the stitching. When the lining is added you will not see the stitching so you can go outside of the lines horizontally. Sew another row of stitches above the line for extra strength. The stitching lines are shown in red in the diagram **Placement for handles 2**.

Do the same thing for the second handle on the other side of the bag.

Butt the two outer fabrics with tops together to make sure your handles line up, as shown in diagram **Placement for handles 3**.



Flip the front fabric onto the back fabric and, with right sides together and with handles hanging down inside, sew the sides and the bottom of the bag.

Pull out and sew each open corner at the bottom of the bag, as per the instructions for the lining.

Now turn the bag to the right side, keeping the handles down and press the seams.

## Step 6 – Putting it all Together

Take your outer bag with the right sides facing out and place it into your lining bag, (the lining will have right sides facing inwards). The right side of both fabrics should be facing one another.

Make sure that both sections of the bag are lined up together. Match the seams all the way round at the top and pin.

Double check that the handles are on the inside and hanging straight down. Sew all the way around the top of the bag to join the two fabrics together. Make sure your stitching line is just below where the handles have been sewn.

Turn the bag through to the right side, by pulling it

through the unsewn hole in the lining.

When the bag is the right way up, press and top stitch around the top of the bag, in toning or contrasting thread, as you prefer. Use a longer stitch length - around 2.8 to 3, or use one of the decorative stitch patterns on your machine.

To finish your bag, close up the opening in the lining by hand, using ladder stitch, (if you don't want to see the seam), otherwise, just sew straight across by machine.

## Variations

When you're confident with the construction of the bag, try sewing 2 or more fabrics together to jazz up the look. A 1/3 : 2/3 ratio of fabrics often looks good and a plain, darker fabric at the bottom often contrasts well with a lighter pattern fabric above. You can also add stitching or appliqué elements to embellish the surface. On one of the bags below I used some eco-dyed fabric plus stabiliser underneath and free-machine stitched around the leaf print. On the other, I quilted along the edges of the coloured blocks to mimic stitching in the ditch. I also added an in-built decorative stitch along the length of the handles

## Tip

*If you want your bag to have a quilted look, or want it to be stiffer and stand up more, add an appropriate stabiliser, such as quilting felt or pellon to the outer fabric. Sew the stabiliser and/or add any decorative stitching to the outer fabric before you trim your squares to the correct size, as per Step 1.*

