

HINTS ON MAKING A HIP SCARF

Hip scarves are wonderful. They help you to see the line of your hips, to hear whether you're moving in time, and can make you feel like an instant Belly Dance Goddess. Even for beginner students they are a worthwhile investment. They are, however, rather expensive. Once you have made one yourself you will appreciate why. Even with the simplest methods, sewing on all those coins and beads takes hours and days and even weeks. Do not expect that you can bead or coin a scarf in a day.

It will, however, be a labour of love, and if you follow my hints below, you will hopefully have a hip scarf that you can be rightly proud of.

But first, a disclaimer – I'm no expert! I cannot crochet or make a hip-scarf that looks just like the ones made in Egypt. I have, however, made a number of quite serviceable hip-scarves in my time, and have several hints to offer on what works and (unfortunately) what doesn't. Here's what I've learnt.

SUPPLIES

- You can purchase punched coins from many bead shops or belly dance suppliers. Make sure they have a hole in them.
- Coins from different batches will often be a slightly different hue or have a different pattern. If you can't find identical coins, you can make a great design with varied ones. When you're dancing slight differences won't be noticed.
- Use can also use palettes (big, flat sequins with a hole near one edge) instead of coins. They are usually cheaper, but don't make as much noise as coins. I've edged a hip scarf with alternating palettes and coins. It has a softer, pretty tinkle, and looks really colourful.
- Another alternative to coins is to use plastic beaded curtains for your drops (see more below). I have been able to buy tangled masses of damaged curtains at a bargain price, from an importer's warehouse.
- If you are sewing (rather than crocheting) coins in place, use something thicker than standard thread. The holes in coins may be sharp and will rip through thread easily. You may be safe using double or triple thread, or possibly beeswax on the thread. Best of all, buy specialist beading thread. I have used the thinnest of these threads with great success.
- Beads add colour and assist the 'drop' of the coin (see below). If you are using seed beads, make sure your needle will fit through the hole.
- You can purchase special beading needles. These are very fine and long. They fit through most beads and you can thread many beads at once. On the down side, they are very difficult to thread (the eye is tiny) and are weak. The eye will break after some use, so buy a packet. I prefer to use a normal, slender sewing needle and buy beads big enough for it.
- Choose material for the scarf that is strong enough to withstand sewing and the weight of the coins. Most chiffon / polyester mixes are fine, but delicate fabrics with a more open weave are not ideal. I spent hours

decorating a beautiful, cheap Indian scarf only to have the material develop holes and runs where I'd sewn.

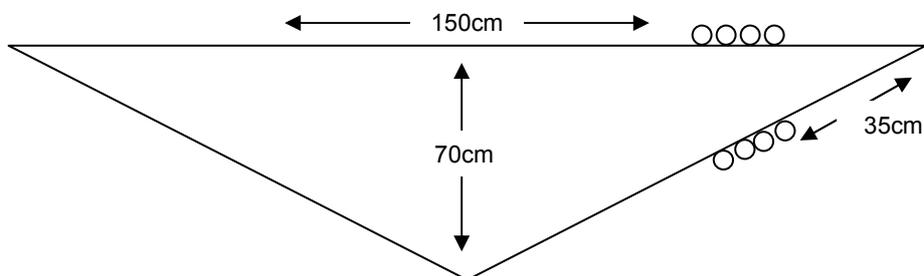
MAKING THE BASE SCARF

- Of course, you can always start with a pre-made scarf and decorate that. If making a scarf from scratch, the easiest way to cut the right size and shape is to take a pattern from a ready made one that fits you. Remember to leave a centimeter or so for hemming.

Triangle hip scarf

- If making a triangle scarf, make sure the top edge is long enough to go around you and provide long ties with a double knot. It is easier to trim the ties than make them longer!
- Cut the triangle deep enough so that the ties (ie: the upper two corners) are not too thin, and the bottom point hangs below your derriere. If you want to be able to fold over the top edge (if you are planning to add a row of coins there too) that will also require more depth.
- But don't make the triangle *too* deep! You don't want the point hanging around your knees. Measurements for a typical triangle scarf are below (these will fit well for a ~100cm hip measurement).

Triangular hip scarf:

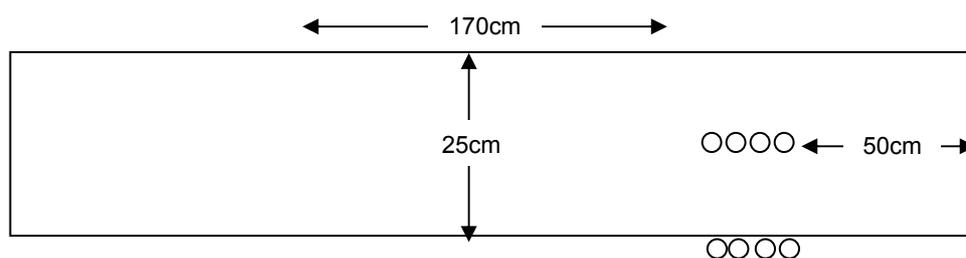


- If you are putting coins along the top edge (optional), remember that this edge will fold over when you tie the scarf. Make sure that your neatest stitching is on the side that will be outside when folded (ie: the *inside* of the scarf), and that the coins drop correctly.

Rectangular hip scarf

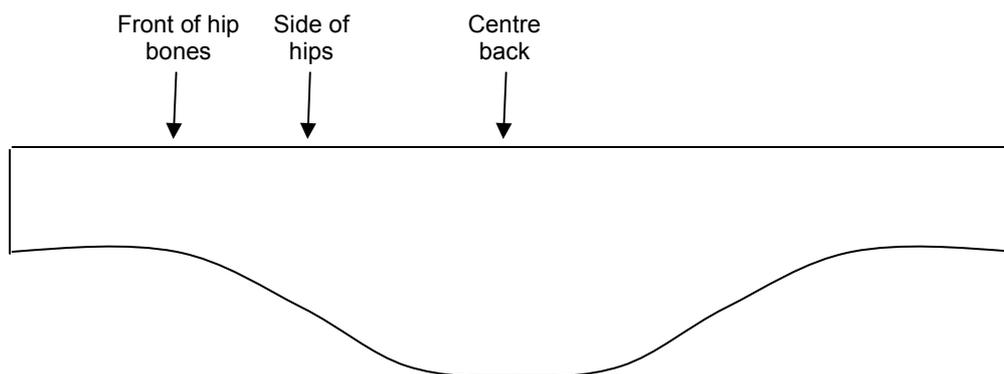
- Rectangular hip scarves generally sit flat against the hips and don't fold over at the top like a triangle does. Once again, make sure the scarf is long enough to allow lots of room to tie a double-knot. Typical measurements are given below (to fit a 100cm hip measurement).

Rectangular hip scarf:



- You can cut a straight rectangle or cut a slight curve in the bottom edge. With the latter, the centre will be deep enough to cover your whole derriere, curving up from just behind your hips, and reaching the narrowest point at the front of your hip-bones where the fabric will be gathered to tie. Even at the narrowest point, still leave a good 15cm or so to tie. See below.

Curved rectangular hip scarf:

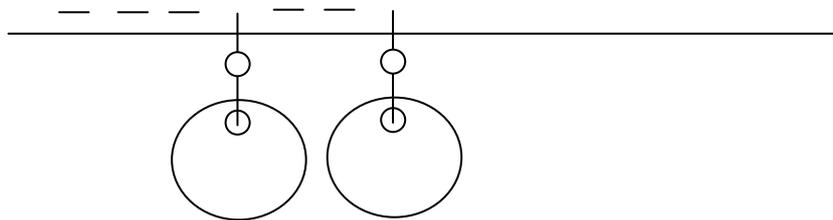


- If you don't have a piece of fabric long enough, create joins where the fabric will be tied – at the front of each hip-bone or where the ties meet at your middle.
- If using stretch fabric, the stretch should go around the hips, not up and down.
- You can hem the fabric in several ways:
 - Overlock with attractive coloured thread, or overlock and then turn over the hem and stitch it down;
 - Fold, iron and stitch a hem if the fabric is stiff enough for it not to roll (lighter fabrics such as chiffon can get really messy);
 - Create a 'roll-hem' using the roll-hem foot on your sewing machine;
 - Zig-zag the raw edge (an alternative if the fabric is light and you don't have an overlocker), turn it under and sew, or hide it with beads and coins.

ATTACHING COINS AND BEADS

- While your masterpiece will take time, you can work it in stages so that you can wear it during the process. You can start by working a row of coins along the bottom edge, to weigh the material down. Over time, you can add extra rows as you see fit.
- Create a hem along your scarf edge before attaching anything. If you are attaching coins in the middle of the material and are using fine fabric (such as chiffon), you can add strength by creating a fold in the fabric and attaching the coins through both thicknesses.
- It is probably best not to attach coins all the way to the edge of the scarf. Leave a gap where the ends of the scarf will be knotted, or your coins may fall off with wear. See the illustrations above for rough measurements, or tie the scarf on your hips and mark where the material starts gathering together. Stop attaching coins at this point.
- An easy way to attach coins is to tack or back-stitch several stitches along and then create a straight drop (of your coin/beads). Thread down through the bead(s) (optional), through the coin, back up through the bead (optional) and back-stitch into the fabric. See below.

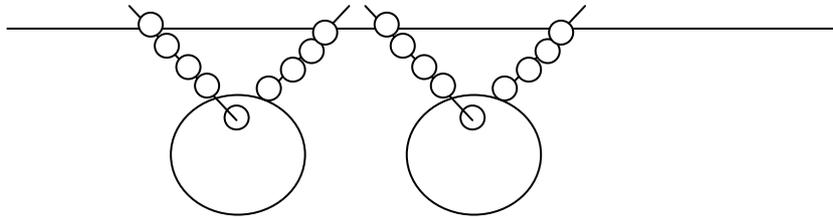
Straight drop sewn along edge of hip-scarf:



- Every now and again, back-stitch several times along the fabric. If a thread is severed, this will stop you from losing a whole row of coins and should hold until you repair it.
- You can hide ugly running stitches by adding beads to the thread on each stitch.
- Large coins may drag down with wear and leave thread exposed. Use double thread or backstitch several times above the drop to avoid this.
- If you want your coins to make a sound, they need to be able to hit together. You can overlap coins, but will also need to ensure the thread is loose enough for them to swing a little – don't pull your 'drop' thread too tight.
- Overlapping coins can take forever if you are covering a large area. You can also get coins to hit together by providing a greater drop. Use several/larger beads and the coins will swing and hit each other more freely. The longer the drop, the more room you can leave between coins and still have them make a sound.

- An alternative to the straight drop described above is a triangle drop. This looks especially nice along the bottom edge of the scarf. To make this, thread several beads, then the coin, then the same number of beads, and secure to the hem with enough space for the drop to bend in the middle. You can loop the thread twice through the coin for extra security. See below.

Triangle drop sewn along edge of hip-scarf:



- If you are using a stretch fabric, you need to allow for this in your stitching. A straight running or back stitch may break when the fabric is stretched over your hips. Zig-zagging the stitches will allow some give. The triangle drop is also good for stretch fabric as this design also 'gives'.

USING BEADED CURTAIN STRANDS

- Beaded curtain strands are a cheap, quick decorating item. They make some noise when hitting together, and are already beaded onto the thread – usually the beads are 'fixed' to the thread so that when you cut a length the beads do not fall off. These can be used to make quick, cheap troupe costumes.
- One idea for a quick hip-scarf is to make a long, rectangular sash and attach groups of strands at intervals. See illustration below. Alternatively, you could sew individual strands all the way along the edge, like fringing.
- To attach the strands, simply tack them to the material, stitching below a large bead at the top of the strand – if the bead is too small the strand may fall out of the stitch. See below.

Beaded curtain hip scarf:

