

CORK COUTURE

BY SARA LAWSON



An eco-friendly alternative to leather, cork fabric is a perfect pick for bag making or for any project where structure is needed. Read on to take the fear out of sewing with this unique material.

Swatches supplied by FabricFurhouse.com.



Samples by Sara Lawson & Kate Zaynard.

ABOUT CORK

From Portugal, cork is harvested from the cork oak tree using a process that allows the tree to continue to flourish. Cork can actually be harvested from the same tree for hundreds of years. The cork is first stripped from the tree using a machete, boiled, shaved into sheets and bonded to a cotton/polyester-blend fabric. This cotton/poly blend is what makes cork so easy to sew. At a thickness of 0.8mm, the final product is both flexible and easy to stitch through with a basic home sewing machine. Cork fabric is usually treated with a form of

Scotch Guard and UV protectant to help the quality and colors last for a very long time. It truly is an eco-friendly and vegan alternative to leather.

Available in over 80 prints and colors, cork fabric is not a frugal purchase, so make a little go a long way. Because of its durability, cork is a great pick for embroidery, appliqué, home décor and more. Cork is perfect for bag making: Use it for straps and bag accents, paired with coordinating quilting cotton. Small pouches are also another favorite use for cork.





SPECIAL TOOLS & TECHNIQUES

When sewing with cork, use either a PTFE foot or a walking foot, though consider experimenting with a standard presser foot as well. Thread the machine with a strong 40-wt thread and use a microtex or 90/14 needle.

To avoid creating unnecessary permanent holes in cork, have a set of fabric clips, such as Wonder Clips, on hand, as well as fabric glue and basting spray to secure layers during assembly.

Cutting cork is easy. Use fabric scissors or a rotary cutter to cut out the needed pattern pieces. For pattern pieces that are cut on the fold, instead of actually folding the cork in half (which creates a permanent crease), trace the pattern piece on the wrong side of the cork, and then flip the pattern piece over to trace the mirror image. For marking cork, use chalk to trace on the cork wrong side. Since it can be used raw, avoid using fabric markers or pens; the coloring from the pen can show on the cork raw edge, whereas the white chalk just brushes off.


Cork is a great canvas for installing rivets and hardware. Rivets in cork install the same way they would in any other fabric: by making a hole through the fabric at a chosen position, and then using a hand press or tabletop press to install the rivets.

ASSEMBLY & CARE

For basic assembly steps, utilize a 2.5mm stitch length, but switch to a longer stitch length for any topstitching. Keep in mind that as with vinyl and leather, needle holes in cork are usually permanent. However, in the case of accidental stitching, first remove the thread, cover the area with a press cloth, spritz with some water and steam.

When using cork for straps or accents, leave the cork cut raw to take advantage of the fact that cork fabric doesn't fray. Simply omit the seam allowance on straps and any accent pattern pieces that would be sewn wrong sides together and then turned right side out. Where straps made from cotton fabric are usually cut four times the width of the finished strap and assembled using steps similar to double-fold bias tape, cork straps can instead be cut two times the width and finished with wrong sides together. Use fabric glue or basting tape to hold the cork strap together while topstitching.

Cork should generally not be ironed. A finished bag should either be finger-pressed or molded into shape by using a generous number of fabric clips on all the seams and leaving them in place for an hour or two. Cork fabric is treated with Scotch Guard from the manufacturer and it's naturally water-resistant, so spot-clean the finished bag or project with a damp cloth rather than putting it through the washer and dryer.

Store cork fabric rolled instead of folded to prevent permanent creases. 



PATTERN PERFECT

Here are a few pattern picks that lend themselves well to cork fabric accents.



Magnolia Bucket Bag
by Sallie Tomato

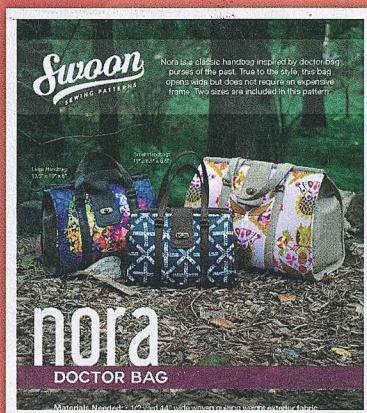


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