

# Indispensable elastics

Get the right stretch for any project

**W**alking down an aisle full of elastics can be overwhelming. With so many widths, compositions, and applications, where do you begin? These flexible fibers offer “grip” at waistbands and cuffs, provide a convenient way to finish edges, and can be used to manipulate fabric for decorative effects, such as shirring and ruching. Here is an introduction to the wide variety of conventional and decorative elastics that are now available to home sewers, as well as some basic application methods.

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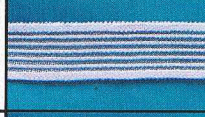











*Learn to use elastics for more than just waistbands. Apply beading cord along a top's sleeves and bodice to achieve beautiful gathered accents.*

*Pattern: modified Butterick 3345; fabric: Japanese double-cloth cotton, Mulberry Silks.net.*



# Types and applications

Elastic is available in a variety of forms from thread to bands. The structure is commonly knit, woven, or braided. Woven and knit elastics maintain their width when stretched and usually can be sewn directly to fabric, whereas braided elastic narrows when stretched, and should be used in a casing. The chart below enables you to compare a variety of elastic types at a glance.

ELASTIC TYPE		CHARACTERISTICS	USES	APPLICATION METHOD
ELASTIC THREAD		Very thin, stretchy thread; you can sew with it on a bobbin	Shirring, gathering, crimping, and smocking	Couch to fabric's wrong side, or sew on the fabric's right side with the elastic in the bobbin
BEADING CORD		Narrow cord for clothing where a light amount of stretch is needed; stronger than elastic thread	Beading, shirring	Couch to fabric's wrong side
ROUND CORD		Thicker than beading cord; for light stretchability on garments not heavily stressed	Button loops, instant gathers on medium- to heavyweight fabrics	Couch to fabric's wrong side
OVAL CORD		Soft elastic cord; for light stretchability on garments not heavily stressed	Buttonhole loops for the backs of gowns and sleeves; also good for making gathers	Couch or stitch to fabric's wrong side
BRAIDED		Lightweight; narrows when stretched	Sleeves, swimwear, waistbands, and leg bands	Insert into casings, or stitch to fabric's wrong side
NON-ROLL (LIGHTWEIGHT)		Woven; roll and twist resistant; use with light- to medium-weight fabrics	Sleeves, waistbands, and leg bands	Insert into casings
RIBBED NON-ROLL		Woven; roll and twist resistant	Waistbands made from heavier fabrics	Insert into casings, or stitch to fabric's wrong side
BUTTONHOLE		Woven; has evenly spaced buttonholes	Adjustable waistbands	Insert into casings, ends extending beyond to button inside the garment
UNDERWEAR/PAJAMA		Woven; comfortable, soft stretch	Underwear and pajama waistbands	Stitch to fabric's wrong side
FOLDOVER		Lightweight; soft elastic with decorative woven design	Adds colorful decorative accents to knit garments or lingerie; can also bind edges	Fold along the center line to encase the garment's edge
"FANTASTIC ELASTIC"		Knit; can be cut lengthwise to any width (down to 1/4 inch) without raveling	Waistbands and leg bands	Stitch to fabric's wrong side
LINGERIE		Knit; has a decorative picot edge	Waistbands and leg bands	Stitch to fabric's right or wrong side
LACE		Knit; flexible elastic, conforms to the body	Waistbands and leg bands	Stitch to fabric's wrong side
SPORT		Knit; soft and flexible	Sportswear and sleepwear waistbands	Stitch to fabric's wrong side, following the channels
KNIT		Durable, curl resistant, and soft yet firm	Sleeves, swimwear waistbands, and leg bands	Insert into casings, or stitch to fabric's wrong side
CLEAR		Nonwoven; soft and thin; stretches three to four times its original length	Swimwear and aerobic wear; stabilizer for seams and edges in knit garments	Sew seam, insert between seam allowances, stitch again 1/4 inch away, and trim
DRAWCORD		Knit, but has built-in braided cord that can extend to twice the elastic's length	Waistbands	Insert into casing; pull cord through a buttonhole

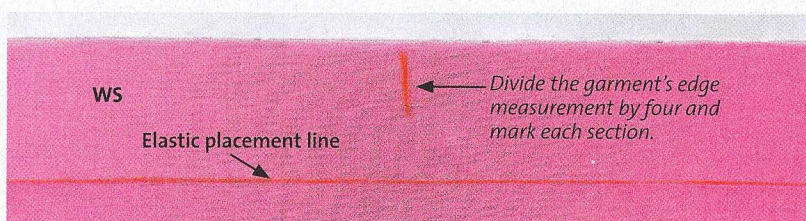
## Uses in waistbands and cuffs

There are two main ways to use elastics in waistbands and cuffs. Sew them directly to the fabric, or insert them into a casing. A casing is particularly desirable because it enables you to replace the elastic easily if necessary.

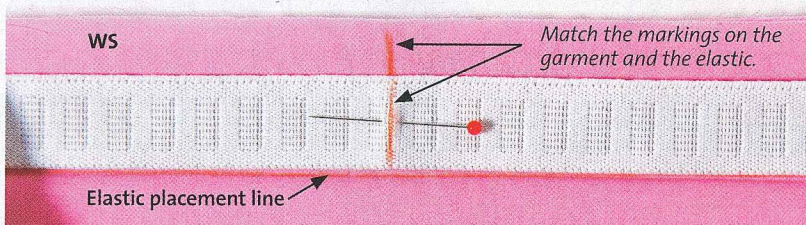
### APPLY DIRECTLY TO THE FABRIC

**1** For this application, use either a woven or knitted elastic, and extend the garment's edge by adding twice the elastic width plus  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch for seam allowance. Sew with a straight, zigzag, or knit stitch, and a ballpoint, universal, or stretch needle to avoid piercing the elastic's fibers.

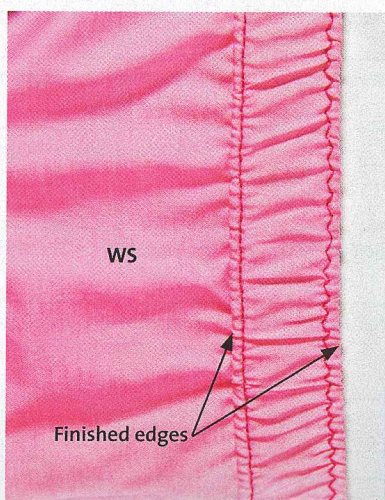
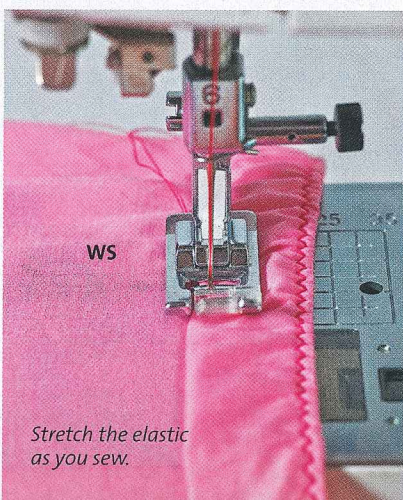
**2** On the garment's wrong side, mark a placement line for the elastic. Divide the garment into four equal sections and mark.



**3** Overlap the elastic's ends  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch and sew along all four overlapped edges. Quarter and mark the elastic, as done in step 2. Working from the wrong side, match markings and align the elastic on the placement line.

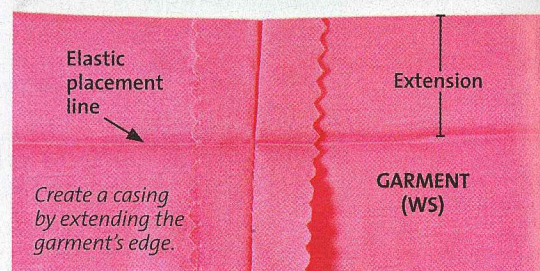


**4** Turn the raw edge over the elastic with wrong sides together. Fold the garment along the placement line. Stitch along the elastic's upper and lower edges; stretch the elastic as it is sewn. If you need to stop and adjust, be sure the machine needle is down so the stitches don't jump.



### INSERT INTO A CASING

**1** Create a casing for the elastic by adding twice the elastic width plus  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch to the garment's edge or adding a separate piece. To add a separate piece, cut a fabric strip to fit the garment's edge. To the length, add two  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch seam allowances. Cut the strip twice the elastic width, plus 1 inch for seam allowances and ease. Fold the strip lengthwise. Sew the two short ends together. Sew one strip length to the garment's top edge, right sides together.



**2** With wrong sides together, fold the garment along the placement line. Finish the raw edge by turning it under  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch and pressing, or serge the edge to prevent fraying. Note: The edge can be left raw on knit fabrics that won't ravel.



**3** Pin the casing in place; stitch around the inner folded or serged edge. Remove about 1 inch of stitching at the casing's back seam. Use a safety pin and bodkin to insert the elastic. Once pulled through, secure the ends and hand-sew the seam closed.

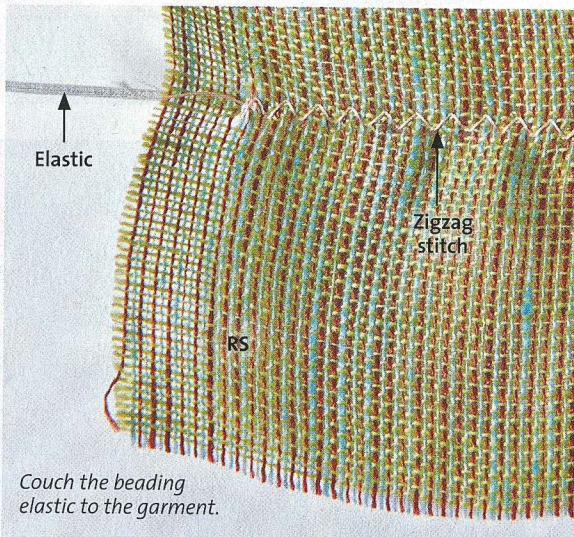


# Couched application

Here's how to insert elastic into a garment to create a gathered effect. Use beading elastic for best results.

**1** Set the machine for a zigzag stitch, and set the stitch width and length to about 2 mm or 3 mm. Use a cording foot or a foot with a groove on the bottom to allow room for the cord to pass through.

**2** Couch the beading elastic. From the garment's wrong side, center the cord under the presser foot, leaving a tail of elastic at the beginning and end. Zigzag-stitch over the cord carefully so the needle doesn't penetrate it. As you sew, do not stretch the elastic.



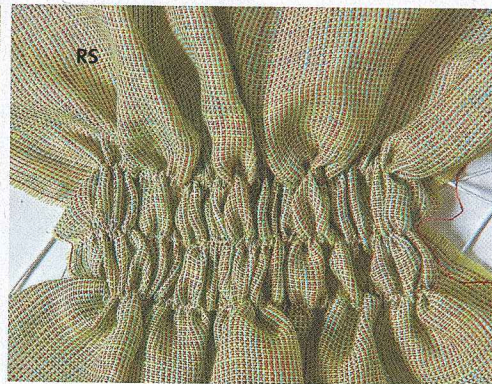
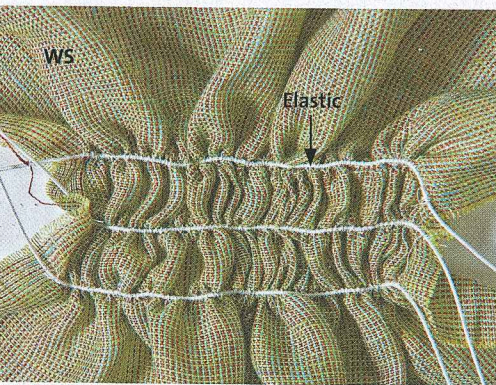
Apply couching technique for a textured effect. The ruched detail provides a closer fit without compromising comfort.

**3** Pull the elastic to gather. The zigzag stitching forms a casing around the elastic. Pull the elastic from either end to achieve the desired amount of gathering. For a shirred result, add one or more rows of stitching parallel to the first. Pull the elastic in the same way.



## WHAT LENGTH SHOULD I CUT MY ELASTIC?

Since elastics have different degrees of stretch, the length you choose depends on the type of elastic and how it is being used. To determine this measurement, wrap the elastic comfortably around your waist. Add a 1/2-inch-wide seam allowance to each end, or 1 inch total. If you find the elastic is cut too long when you insert it in the casing, trim it before closing the casing. If it's too short, cut a new piece.



Add one or more rows of stitching for a more striking effect.

## WEBextra

Learn how to sew with foldover and clear elastic at [ThreadsMagazine.com](http://ThreadsMagazine.com).