

Dintarmawen Design

From movie re-creations to middle eastern dance,
your source for unique costumes and accessories

<http://members.ebay.com/aboutme/dintarmawen>

WOMEN'S COLONIAL HATS

Or, the Art of Making Headwear that Resembles a Potato Chip

I love hats—maybe that's the second thing I inherited from my great-grandmother Olive, who was a milliner in London. (The first thing I inherited was migraines. Ugh.) These “potato chip hats,” as I like to call them, are a lot like Joshua trees—you think you've never seen one until you know what one looks like, and then they're everywhere! Here are some well-known wearers of this cute little accessory:

Cora from *The Last of the Mohicans*



Elizabeth from *The Pirates of the Caribbean*



Marguerite from *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (sink me!)



(All of these pictures are for reference only and copyright their creators—no infringement is intended!)

The tough part about hat making is starting from scratch. Luckily, to do a women's colonial hat you can cheat a bit and use a ready-made hat to start from. I got mine at Michael's—look in the doll-making section, (of all places!) or in the area where they have foam things to build flower arrangements on. You're looking for your basic garden-variety straw hat—usually circular, with a rounded top. Luckily they're only around \$1 so you can experiment without making a huge investment. They do sometimes have them that come with a flat crown already, but I've never found one large enough to not look like it was a doll's hat. You could build out the brim a bit if you were covering it in fabric, but I haven't tried that.

Now comes the fun part. Get a large mixing bowl and fill it with warm water. Now, dunk just the crown part of the straw hat into the water until it's pretty damp. Now, you just form the crown how you'd like it to be—I mashed mine flat so only about 1 ½" of crown was still above the brim, and the rest was inside. Next, take your hand and poke the center of the crown back out a bit (you want it to be able to accommodate the top of your head, but still want it to be below the outer rim of the crown so it won't show if you were looking at it from the side). Then you let it dry (usually takes a day or so) and it will pretty much stay put. Depending on how stiff your straw is, you may have to weight it down a bit so it doesn't pop back out as it dries.

If you wanted to be super historically accurate, you could actually unpick the straw and remake it into a flat crown. But since you usually put a wide piece of lace or material over the top of the crown, it doesn't matter much what it looks like inside—it will be covered when you tie it on.

Next step is forming the brim. Same technique—get it wet, then get creative in shaping it. I like the kind of roundish look in front and back (like Elizabeth's hat), so I found a set of glass nesting mixing bowls (those big glass Pyrex ones work really well). I got the front of the brim wet, then slid it in-between the largest and next largest bowl I had. This gives it a nice rounded shape that also curves down a bit in front. Make sure it's sitting in there straight or else your nice rounded shape will be off-center, which is bad. Just let it dry in the bowls, then repeat for the back. You could also get it wet and then use rubber bands to form it around a large round can or something if you wanted a straighter look that would curve down on the sides without a ribbon (like Cora's hat).



If you can find a styrofoam head (like you'd put a wig on) it makes the next part much easier. Stick a couple of long hat pins through the crown to attach it to the foam while you work, and then you can go crazy with your glue gun. You can keep it simple and just glue a ribbon around the crown, or attach little silk or straw flowers, net, lace, etc. I like to put a wide piece of lace across the top and attach it down with a thin line of glue along the edges of the crown because then I can tie my hat on and not have to worry about it falling off or being crooked. (You can also use chiffon, or that bridal tulle that they sell in big rolls which sometime has a pearl edging—anything kind of sheer and soft that you won't mind having tied under your chin or behind your head all night.)

And never fear—you can still wear that cute ruffley mob cap you've already made. As you can see in the Cora pictures, they sometimes wore both! Or, if you have too modern-ish hair like

mine, you can make a fake ponytail and attach it on top of your head, and the hat and tie will conceal where it joins in pretty well. (You could actually glue the fake hair into your hat's crown on the inside too, which would make getting ready super simple. ☺)



(Side note that could be its own handout: ☺ fake hair is dirt cheap at places like Sally Beauty Supply—for a couple of bucks you can buy enough to make some really cool stuff. Get 100% Kanekalon, but not the stuff that says synthetic braid because it's really snarly. It sometimes comes pre-curled or wavy, but if you get the straight stuff you can wrap sections around a piece of PVC pipe, boil it for a bit, then dunk it in ice water for a minute. Let it dry and you'll have perfect spiral curls. It takes awhile but looks awesome. You can also use regular old hot rollers on a low setting, but I'd recommend getting it into the ponytail/attaching it to a clip first and then curling it. If you curl it first and then try and figure out what you're doing with it it will really knot up into a mess. If you don't want to go to the hassle of doing your own, International Wig on eBay sells some cool clip-on ponytails for really cheap—that's where I got the long spiraled one I wore last Sleepy Hollow.)