

Frequently Asked Questions about Corsets
FAQ for Over and Underbust corsets, patterns #100 and #113
by JoAnn Peterson (pattern designer), September 2006

1. **Should I add seam allowance?**
No. There is 5/8" seam allowance included.
2. **What size should I cut?**
There is a 2 inch gap built in to the corsets at the back where it laces. Measure your waist and cut the corset closest to that measurement. Take it in or let it out until it fits as desired.
3. **What if I am between sizes?**
You have two choices. Either cut the larger size and take it in or cut the smaller and have a bigger gap than two inches across the back. Either is fine.
4. **I am usually a size 8 when I buy clothes in a department store. Should I cut an 8?**
No. Retail sizes are bigger than sewing sizes. Measure yourself with a tape.
5. **I have measured myself and your pattern says I should cut a 12. I have never been a 12 in my life. I buy clothing in a size 8.**
Cut the 12 in a muslin and check the fit.
6. **I want to reduce my waist by 4 inches. Should I cut a smaller size?**
Only if you want to reduce your bust and hips by the same amount. Cut the size closest to your waist, hips and bust or under bust and then take it in at the waist.
7. **Won't taking it in at the waist by 4 inches make the rest of the corset look strange?**
No. Look at it this way. Let's say you have 4 seams where you can take it in. That really makes 8 since there are 2 halves of a corset. Divide 4 inches by 8 for a result of 1/2 inch. You take in a seam 1/4" for a total reduction of 1/2". This means you are only taking in each seam by 1/4 inch at the waist. That is easily done without changing the silhouette very much.
8. **The corset I cut is too big. What should I do?**
Take it in or recut it in a smaller size.
9. **The corset I cut is too small. What should I do?**
Let it out. If it does not fit after letting it out you will need to cut a new corset in a bigger size.
10. **I am a size 14 on top and a 16 at the waist and a 20 at the hips. What should I cut?**
Draw a line from the 14 at the top to the 16 at the waist. Then curve it to the 20 at the bottom. Take it in or let it out until it fits as desired.
11. **My corset doesn't make my waist any smaller. Did I do something wrong?**
Probably not. Some people squish more than others. If you wish a smaller waist take it in.
12. **Can I make the corset longer or shorter?**
The ribbon corset in pattern #113 is best made the length it is. The others can be lengthened or shortened on the line designated. Remember you may need to use a different length busk and bones depending on how much you change the length.
13. **Can I use fewer or more bones?**
Yes.
14. **Where should I put them?**
Where ever you need more or less support. Put them parallel to the grain of the fabric.
15. **The cut edges don't line up. What is wrong?**
Maybe nothing. The cut edges don't always line up but the sewing lines, 5/8 " away from the cut edge, will.
16. **There are so many lines. How can I keep from being confused?**
Putting all the sizes in the same envelope allows the pattern to be used by the maximum number of people. If you are confused by the lines get a red pencil. Trace your size ahead of time so it is very obvious when it comes time to cut. Or, cut your size out of the pattern ahead of time – before you pin the pattern to the fabric.

17. **There are so many pieces that look similar. How can I keep from sewing them together wrong?**
Before you unpin the pattern from the fabric, mark an X on the wrong side of each piece of fabric. Also, all the notches are above the waist, so your notches will tell you where the top of the pattern piece is. For good measure, you might want to mark "top" on each pattern piece as well. When you are finished with your corset put a bow or some other way of marking the top front. This will prevent you from putting the corset on upside down.
18. **I want to use the pattern again but the tissue is so flimsy. What should I do?**
Get some spray adhesive and some non woven interfacing. Stick the pattern to the interfacing. This will give the pattern pieces a longer life.
19. **I have never sewn anything before. Will I be able to make this pattern?**
The patterns are not designed to teach someone how to sew. You will need basic sewing skills to make these garments.
20. **I have looked and looked at the fabric stores in my area and can't find any of the supplies, like the busk and bones. The people working there don't even know what they are. Where can I find them?**
Very few sewing/craft retail outlets carry the supplies or are even familiar with them. There is a list of mail order suppliers in the patterns.
21. **I am a female docent at a historical site depicting (any date from 1837 to 1900). They tell me I need to wear a corset. Will a waist cincher give me the correct silhouette without making a full corset? Can I wear something else until I have a full corset?**
No. The silhouette in #113 is historically correct from only about 1900 to 1906. Even so the period descriptions of the "corset girdles" were that they were appropriate for "young, slight" figures. Also, during that time more full corsets were advertised than corset girdles (though they were getting shorter on top). If you are doing an impression for the years from 1837 to 1900 I would suggest the corset pattern #100. There is no modern lingerie that I know of that approximates the shape of a corset.
22. **Would you call the women's waist cinchers in the pattern #113 "Victorian corsets"?**
I wouldn't. The earliest patent date found was 1899 for the ribbon corset and the other waist cincher was popular from 1901 to about 1906. So, technically, except for a few years, it would probably be more correct to call them Edwardian "corset girdles". Pattern 100 has Victorian corsets.
23. **Would you call the man's waist cincher a "Victorian corset"?**
Yes. Victorian and Edwardian as well. Gentlemen had all sorts of reasons to want a smooth line under their clothing. It would make them look better in their tight fitting evening clothes or at court. Military officers would want them to make them look straight and fit well into their uniforms while on parade or during inspection.
24. **What is coutil? (pronounced coo-teel)**
Coutil is a fabric specially woven for strength for corsets. It comes in plain or fancy weaves and in different colors. You won't find coutil at your local fabric store. See the section called "Suppliers" in the pattern envelope for places to purchase it. Coutil is the best fabric for corsets but medium weight twill will also work.
25. **When I make a full corset I use an 11 inch busk. Won't a ten inch busk be too long in the waist cincher?**
If you are comfortable with an 11 inch busk you will probably be comfortable with a 10 or 9 inch busk in the waist cinchers. If you are concerned cut the front of the corset in scrap fabric. Mark the waist. Hold it up to your body in front and see where the top hits. About 90% of women are comfortable with a 12 inch busk in the full length corsets in pattern #100.

26. **I cut the size that equals my waist measurement. When I laced it the corset closed in the back. Does this mean your corset runs big?**
No, it means you were able to achieve a 2 inch reduction. It is not possible to anticipate how much reduction, and where, each individual can compress their bodies. This is called the “Squish Factor”. Therefore the corset measurement should be considered the starting point and each individual must alter it to achieve the custom fit they desire. In addition, it is impossible to anticipate how each person will cut out and stitch the corset. The difference between sizes is only 1/8” on each seam line in some cases and not everyone can be exactly precise in cutting and sewing. For instance, if you cut out View A in pattern 113 and stitched the seams at 1/2” instead of 5/8” your corset would be 3 inches too big.
27. **I thought a corset would make my bust bigger. Should it?**
The purpose of Victorian corset is to maximize the difference between the waist and the hips/bust. Some people can reduce their waist, some can't. Also, corsets don't create bigger breasts. If you want a larger difference between your waist and bust cut a corset that is too large in the bust and stuff it.
28. **I have read on the internet that this corset is too big in the bust and doesn't reduce the waist enough. Is this true?**
Did the individual who made this generalization happen to mention whether they are a size 6 Cup B or a size 26 Cup DDD? Is their bust the same size as their waist? It is best to take what any given individual's experience has been with a grain of salt. Each individual is unique in size and desired waist reduction. To anticipate all the different requirements from each individual I would have to be a miracle worker, psychic, or offer as many different corset patterns as there are different bras in a retail store lingerie department. (Actually more, since bras only address the bust and corsets address bust, waist and hip.)
29. **Why should I make a mock up or “muslin” of my corset?**
A muslin will get you in the ballpark as far as size. It will also tell you if the corset is too long or short. If the corset is too long from waist to bust point you can cut it off or shorten it at the lengthen/shorten line. But if your full length corset (pattern #100) is too short you will need to lengthen it at the lengthen/shorten lines or it will be too short to support your bust. For instance, a friend fit a tall slender lady who needed the size 6 but had to lengthen it by 4 inches.
30. **I wear a size 40 EEE cup bra. I want to make the Silverado corset. What size should I cut?**
Start with your waist measurement. If you have a build like Rosie O'Donnell use a small bust gore. If you have a build like Dolly Parton use bigger bust gores.
31. **I want huge masses of cleavage. What should I do?**
Change your mind or shop at Fredericks of Hollywood for a non-period look.
32. **I should I cut the B, C or D cup?**
If in doubt, cut the D. You can always take it in.
33. **Are your measurements modern or Victorian?**
They are the standard measurements used today by the large American pattern companies.
34. **What are the finished measurements of the corset?**
For #100 the B cup corset is 2 inches smaller than the listed measurements. The C and D cups have a larger bust measurement. For #113 the corsets are 2 inches smaller than the measurements.
35. **Does the Silverado give more support to the bust?**
Both the corsets support the bust very well and the silhouettes are very similar, although the Silverado is longer in the hip. The Dore takes less time to sew and less time to fit.
36. **I have heard that plastic cable ties, available at home improvement stores, work just as well as steel bones. Is this true?**
I prefer steel.