

Hidden Support

Create a corselet foundation to keep strapless garments securely in place **BY SUSAN KHALJE**

Careful fitting goes a long way towards keeping a formfitting garment in place, but there are instances when more serious support is required. A strapless or off-the-shoulder gown requires inner support, and if it doesn't have an outwardly visible waistline to support boning, you have to add a separate inner foundation layer, sometimes called an "inner corselet." Here, using the garment pattern as my guide, I construct a corselet layer from lightweight cotton fabric, boning, and a grosgrain-ribbon waist stay. I then show you how to attach this layer along with a lining to a garment.

SUPPORTIVE UNDERGARMENTS ARE A MUST

Foundation garments are very fitted, so if you don't wear supportive undergarments, the fabric will pull tightly over the body and flatten the bustline. A good fit starts with a good bra; the benefits of the support and shape it provides far

outweigh the negatives of having that extra layer.

The bra's action is on the body; it lifts, molds, and shapes the breasts. The foundation layer's action is on the dress; it shapes the garment fabric to the body. Expecting it to mold and shape the bust along with supporting the dress is too much to ask. It isn't easy to create perfectly fitted bust cups, but most sewers can easily solve that problem by purchasing (and then possibly tweaking the fit of) a good bra. Once you have a well-fitted underlayer in place, the work of shaping the garment over the body can begin.

WHEN IS AN INNER FOUNDATION LAYER APPROPRIATE?

Garments that have a defined seam at the base of the bodice—whether it's at the actual waist or below—don't really need a separate inner foundation for support. In that case, you can attach boning to an inner layer that echoes

the contours of the bodice exactly. The garment itself and the boned underlining fit very tightly against the body, and that fit—along with the boning and the waist stay—keeps the garment in place. In contrast, a corselet foundation layer is tighter than the garment.

An inner foundation is also unnecessary for garments that have straps because they hang from the shoulders. Although they, too, have to be carefully fitted—possibly with boning—they typically wouldn't need separate support.

An inner foundation layer is only required for garments that don't have seamlines at the waist to support boning. The corselet gives you a tighter, more fitted layer to which to attach boning and helps hold the garment in place. This method enables you to add support to any strapless garment for extra confidence and comfort.

Susan Khalje is a contributing editor.



*An inner
foundation
layer lends
McCall's
pattern 5881
some much
needed
support.*

Develop the inner foundation pattern

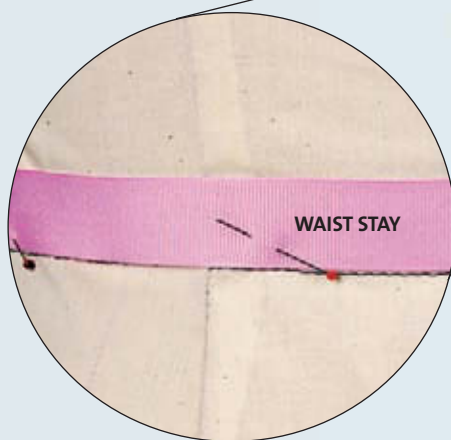
The foundation-layer pattern is not difficult to make; it's almost identical to the garment pattern. Make two muslins—one to fine-tune the garment fit and the other to establish the foundation fit. These two muslins share one common measurement: the top edge. If this measurement is adjusted in one muslin, it must also be adjusted in the other.



1 To start, sew two muslins of the garment. Make one full length and the other identical but with a length of only 5 or 6 inches below the waist.

2 Fit the foundation muslin. The foundation muslin has to be quite snug—much more fitted than the outside garment—so tighten the seamlines, taking in small amounts along each.

From an engineering point of view, it isn't necessary for the foundation to extend below the waist, but a tight foundation layer that ends at the waist can cause a small pooch below the waist. Establish and trim the bottom edge 4 or 5 inches below the waistline, but no longer; it will be heavily boned, and if the boning extends down too far, the wearer will be uncomfortable when she sits down. The actual job of support is accomplished above the waist, so the extension is strictly for cosmetic reasons, i.e., smoothing out the body below the waist.



3 Mark the position of the waist stay. Carefully pin a length of grosgrain ribbon around the body with its lower edge on the waistline.

Note that the garment and foundation layers close separately; typically, the garment is closed with a zipper, and the foundation is closed with hooks and eyes. Align the foundation layer opening with the outer garment opening.



Construct the inner foundation

The foundation layer is worn against the body, so make it from a comfortable fabric such as cotton, which also helps absorb perspiration. Cut two inner foundation layers from a soft, lightweight fabric. If the foundation opens on the side, cut the two layers as mirror images, not as identical pieces.

ASSEMBLE THE PIECES

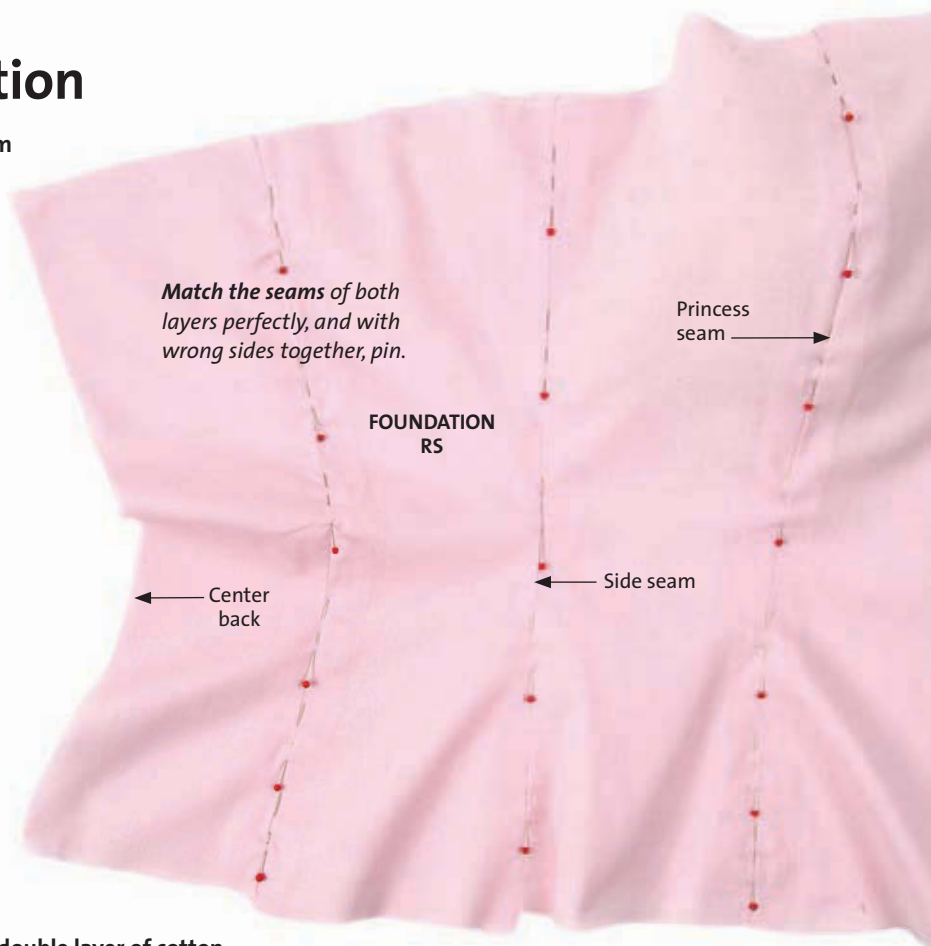
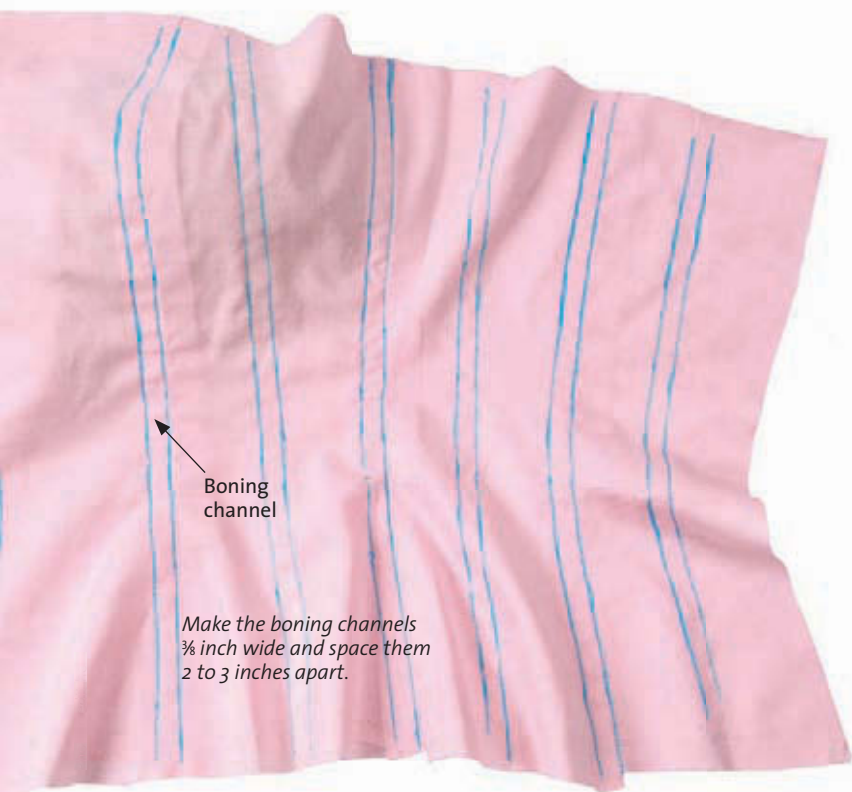
1 Cut your double-layer foundation with standard seam allowances. Allow more seam allowance along the top and along the opening edges.

2 Stitch accurately (the two layers must match perfectly). Clip, and then press the seam allowances open as flat as you can, using a ham for any curved seams.

3 With wrong sides together, pin the layers together. Match the seams precisely, and keep the seam allowances pressed open (especially along the clipped princess seamlines) to make sliding the boning into the channels that incorporate seam allowances easier.

STITCH THE BONING CHANNELS AND THE WAIST STAY

1 Form boning channels by stitching parallel lines through the double layer of cotton. Stitch two lines $\frac{3}{8}$ inch apart for each channel to accommodate $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch spiral steel boning (available at Farthingales.on.ca). I typically place the boning along princess seams, straight down from the top, and then every 2 to 3 inches apart. There's no need to back-tack at the end of each channel—simply go from raw edge to raw edge.



2 Apply a waist stay.

Create it with a piece of 1-inch-wide grosgrain ribbon. Rest the ribbon's lower edge along the waistline, and stitch both edges to the foundation by machine. Stop your stitches at every boning channel; simply backstitch, lift the presser foot, cross over the channel, backstitch again and continue stitching. Leave a little bit of grosgrain at the opening so that it can be folded along the finished edge once the closure is in place. Be sure both sides begin and end at the same place along the open edges.

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SEW IN THE CLOSURE

The foundation needs its own closure, and although a second zipper can be used, I typically apply hooks and eyes because they are less bulky. Before you attach hook-and-eye tape, though, give a little thought to just how the foundation will be fastened. First, orient the hooks so they don't dig into the wearer's skin, and position them so they're easy to operate. If, for instance, the foundation opens on the side, install the eyes on the front side of the garment, so the wearer can easily catch the hooks, which are attached to the side back of the garment.

Along the opening's seam, sandwich the hook-and-eye tape between the two foundation layers, and fold the seam allowances inward (press them firmly). Make sure that both sides match perfectly. Use a zipper foot to edgestitch the outer tape edge to the foundation's back side seam allowance. Turn under the foundation's right side, and hand-stitch it in place, as shown above. Conceal the grosgrain raw edges with a second row of stitches (hand-overcasting or a whipstitch works well).

FINISH THE LOWER EDGE

It's important not to create bulk along the bottom edge of the foundation; you don't want to interrupt the sleek silhouette of your garment. For a smooth hem edge, machine-zigzag or hand-overcast the lower edge; camouflage your stitches by sewing on a piece of wide hem lace.



Connect the layers

Construct the garment and lining separately before inserting the foundation. Then sew one small seam—the top edge—and voilà!—it's nearly finished.

ATTACH THE LAYERS

Insert the boning into the foundation layer. To join the lining and foundation, place lining right side against the foundation wrong side. Hand-baste them together along the top edge, folding the lining's opening raw edges under.



INSERT THE ZIPPER

Align the zipper top with the garment's top edge, and hand-baste the zipper to the garment opening. Use a zipper foot to machine-sew it in place.

ASSEMBLE AND APPLY THE FINISHING DETAILS

With right sides together, sew the foundation and lining unit to the garment, as shown below. Stitch very carefully, using a zipper foot to avoid hitting the boning. After you sew the foundation and lining to the garment, trim down, grade, and clip the seam allowances where necessary.

Then understitch to guarantee that layers will stay where they should. If understitching by hand, sew tiny backstitches along the top inner edge of the foundation about ½ inch below the seamline. Work from the foundation side, and stitch through all layers except the outermost fashion fabric layer. If understitching by machine, stitch just below the seamline on the foundation side. Stitch very carefully to avoid hitting the boning.

To finish, hand-stitch the lining to the zipper tape, carefully concealing seam allowances at the top of the zipper. It does get a little thick there, but if you handle the layers neatly and carefully, you'll find that they'll behave.



Sew along the top edge with the opening seam allowances turned under.



An inner corselet foundation provides sturdy yet comfortable support in front and back that will help keep your garment in place.