

A Little Ribbon Goes a Long Way; Easy Women's Hat Decorations

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What's more fun than trundling along in your Model A? Trundling along in your Model A wearing a Model A era looking hat, of course. But, creating those fabric or straw wonders of yesteryear can be a bit daunting. "Where do I start?" you might ask. I have a few tips I'd like to pass along for authentic looking embellishments you can add to a modern hat to give you a vintage look. I've taken three simple hats from the [MAFCA Fashion Guidelines](#) and [A Book of Fashion Facts](#), and will give you some pointers to get you started.

Keep in mind that most decorative elements on hats are made separately and then attached to the hat. Even when the hatband and bow look like one continuous piece of ribbon, they're probably separate pieces stitched or pinned onto the hat, which makes decorating a hat much easier. It also makes it easier to change the decorations for different outfits or seasons.

Before we proceed, please take *The Pledge*. Repeat aloud:

"I (state your name) will never, ever, ever glue anything onto a hat, so help me (state name of deity)."

When you glue something onto a hat, even with low-temp glue, you risk ruining the hat for future use. If you can remove the hatband or embellishments, it will probably leave some sort of mark on the hat itself, or hole, which has to be covered up. Can't thread a needle? There are internet videos and reference books galore at your local public library. It's never too late to learn a new skill.

Why settle for a hat that "can pass for" vintage, when you can make your hat yell, "I Look Vintage!" loud and clear? It just takes some ribbon, time, and a bit of experimentation.

Hat #1 Simple Gathered Rosette Cockade



This 1931 hat is from the [MAFCA Fashion Guidelines](#), page 3B6, and the embellishment is very easy to make. To get a flat, round shape you need to cut enough ribbon. To calculate the amount, take the width of the ribbon in inches and multiply that number by 7 inches.

My ivory demonstration sample was made from 1 ½" wide ribbon cut to 10 ½" long. The running stitches are ½" long, as you can see in green. Longer stitches give a more pleated effect and a smaller center hole.

My maroon finished sample was made from 1 3/8" wide Ombre (variegated color) wired ribbon, also 10 ½" long, with the gathers at the light-colored edge. I pulled the wire out of both edges, as the center hole was larger than I wanted and it looked too stiff. A snippet of the ribbon appears along side so you can see the before and after.

Hat #1 Simple Gathered Rosette Cockade How-to:

1. Measure out a length of ribbon using the formula of width of ribbon x 7" and cut straight across. If in doubt, round up an inch or so. (Example: 1.5" wide ribbon x 7" = 10.5".)
2. With the right sides of the ribbon together stitch your cut edges together using very short stitches and a ¼" - ½" seam allowance. (If you really want to do it right, make a French seam.)
3. Add a couple of drops of Fray Check or Stop Fray if you have it on the cut parts to guard against raveling. (Product available at most fabric and craft stores.) Let product dry completely.
4. Finger-press or iron the seam open.
5. With a new length of thread, stitch long running stitches along the length of one woven edge as close to the edge as you are able. **Note**-long stitches ½" or so (over and under) will give your rosette center a more pleated affect and a smaller center hole. Shorter stitches will give your center a more gathered affect and a larger center hole. Whichever stitch length you choose, be even and consistent.
6. Pull the thread tightly to form gathers or pleats and knot.
7. Sew a small button to the center of the right side of your rosette, and a loop of green ribbon for a leaf to the wrong side, if desired.

You'll probably want to make a few rosettes, so keep this in mind when you buy your ribbon. Place your finished rosettes around the crown (domed part) of your hat where the securing stitches *won't* show. If you stitch them to the brim, the knots and stitches *will* show. Have fun arranging them over the top, or around the hatband, or both.

To secure your rosettes on your hat, think of each rosette as the face of a clock. Make a tiny stitch at just a few of the numbers around your clock, say at 12, 4 and 8 o'clock positions, making them as unnoticeable as possible. I like to knot each stitch individually, but that's your choice.

A Few Words About Ribbon

During the years 1928-1931, ribbon was sold in satin, velvet, grosgrain (ribbed), moiré (looks water marked) and metallic finishes in a variety of widths (roughly 3/8" up to 5 ¼" wide) and a variety of colors, usually in 100% silk or silk/rayon blends. The Fall/Winter 1929-30 Montgomery Ward catalog advertised double sided satin ribbon which had a contrasting color on each side: deep pink combined with blue, turquoise and coral, maize and pink, orchid and maize, Nile green and pink, coral and maize. Imagine making embellishments from those!

"Roman striped" ribbon (with stripes running down the full length) was also sold at this time, and could be used with striking effect. Ombre ribbon, where the color is dark at one selvage edge and fades to white at the other was also available, but may have been less common. In short, don't be afraid to use color.

On the other hand, if you find that modern ribbon looks “too bright to appear vintage”, try dyeing a small swatch in strong coffee or tea to dullen the color. If you like the duller color, dye the rest of your ribbon, and be sure to rinse it repeatedly until the rinse water is clear.

When choosing ribbon for your embellishment, consider color, width, weight, and stiffness or drape, as well as whether your new ribbon is wired or not. Wired ribbon has a tiny wire running the length embedded in each selvage edge. The wires might or might not help your design. Definitely do NOT cut wired ribbon with your best scissors, as you will damage your scissors; use a wire cutter. Experiment with inexpensive ribbon and see what results you get. Lightweight, flexible ribbon will give your embellishments a relaxed, fluid look. Stiff or heavy ribbon will give your embellishments a stark or geometric look. It just depends on your taste and the look you’re trying to achieve.

Hat #2 Layered Loops



Layered Loops isn’t an authentic name, just something I made up to describe the main ribbon embellishment, and it’s surprisingly easy to construct. This hat, dated 1928, is from MAFCA Fashion Guidelines, page 3B3.



Refer to the pictures, above. The black one is made with the reverse side (dull side) of 3" wide satin cut to 27" long. I gathered it at the pinned places (see How-to, below) to make it look like it fit into the bar side of a belt buckle and hemmed the back, which you can see in the reverse side photo at right. Only one end of ribbon actually goes through the bar. I made a tail out of a seven inch long piece of the black, making running stitches to gather it to the same width of the loops, hemming the cut ends and stitching the two pieces together.

The green one is made from 1½" wide grosgrain ribbon and the finished length is five inches long. This sample shows the form of the loops in clearer detail. Otherwise, the samples are made the **same** way.

Hat #2 Layered Loops How-to:

Cut a length of ribbon 27" long. Your finished embellishment will be roughly 5" long.

1. Measure 1" from the first cut edge and insert a straight pin across your ribbon. This is pin #1".
2. Starting at pin #1, measure down 10 inches and insert a pin across your ribbon. This is pin#2.
3. Starting at pin #2, measure down 8 inches and insert a pin across your ribbon. This is pin #3.
4. Starting at pin #3, measure down 6 inches and insert a pin across your ribbon. This is pin #4.
5. Hold the first cut end (where you started measuring) in one hand and bring up pin #2 to level of pin #1. (Ignore the 1" long bit for now.)
6. Bring up pin #3 to the same level as pins #1 and 2.
7. Bring up pin #4 to the same level as pins # 1, 2, and 3. All 4 of your pins should be in a clean stack, one on top of the next. Neaten up the loop side edges if necessary.
8. Tuck the second cut end, which is now on top, down between the short top loop and medium loop.
9. The first cut end (the 1" long bit) can be folded downward and hemmed, or trim it slightly shorter than the level of the loop tops and apply a few drops of Stop Fray.
10. Stitch a few stitches near the top, through the whole stack (be sure to secure those cut ends) and knot securely.
11. Pin a decorative pin or sew a large vintage button at the top of the ribbon loops to cover.

To attach your Layered Loops embellishment to your hat, find an orientation you like: loops facing up or down; facing front or towards the back of the hat. Either pin it with a corsage pin or stitch to your hat or hatband with a few small stitches. There's a lot of improvisation involved. Experiment with the length of your loops and type of ribbon.

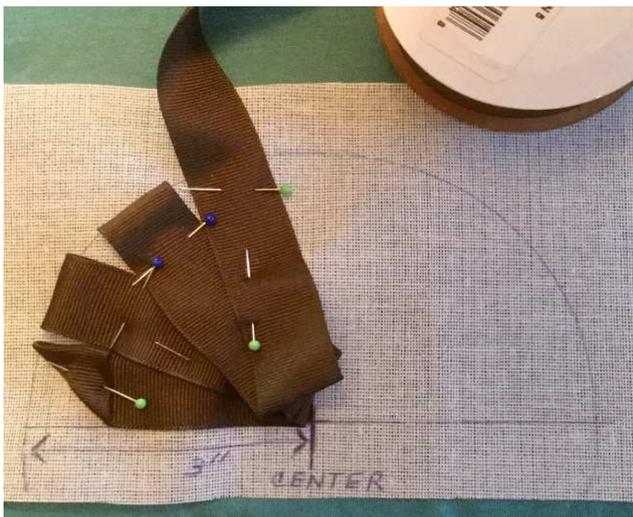
Hat #3 Folded or Pleated Ribbon Rosette Cockade



According to Wikipedia, Cockades, or the French Cocardes, have been used for centuries by men to show military rank, nationalist or political affinities. Women started wearing them around the nineteenth century, usually on hats, and were still in use for decorative purposes during the Model A era. Although many cockades are round or rosette in shape, many are also oval, oblong, triangular, full circle, half or part circle, or arch shapes. They may be made as single rows of ribbon, two or more rows of ribbon, or spirals. They might be made of one or several colors. They can be lush like roses and chrysanthemums or stark and geometric.

The Model A era photo, above, (from A Book of Fashion Facts, page 204, and dated c. 1928-1929) shows a double pleated row, but I made mine as a single row, with a little extra fold at the end for added texture and a 1" covered button to hide the center pivot point. You have to be really precise to have that center point exposed, but it's doable.

My finished sample is made of eleven 3" high loops of 7/8" wide grosgrain ribbon. ($3" \times 11 \times 2 = 66"$.) Each loop goes up **and** down so each loop is actually 6" long and folded at the 3" mark.



The loops are stitched to a backing material called buckram, which is fairly stiff. It's available at most fabric stores and is similar to needlepoint canvas. It doesn't ravel and can be painted with fabric paint to match your ribbon to make it inconspicuous. I left the buckram its original color here so you can see it clearly.

If you choose to color yours, I recommend you use flexible brush-on fabric paint (not puff-paint) and allow the buckram to completely dry before you make your cockade.

The loops are more spread apart here than in the finished sample so you can see how it goes together.

Hat #3 Folded or Pleated Ribbon Rosette Cockade How-to:

If possible, don't measure out and cut how much ribbon you think you'll need. Try to work with it from the spool because little alterations in size can add up to inches of needed ribbon. If you're buying a cut length, purchase extra. If you have to work with pieces of ribbon, start and stop at the center pivot point.

1. Decide how big you want to make your cockade and draw it out on a piece of buckram. I used a kitchen bowl – real scientific. Also draw your horizontal line and center pivot point. The center pivot point is crucial so don't guess. Use a ruler.
2. Start with the cut end of your ribbon at the center pivot point and lay your loop out to the outermost edge and pin. Then fold the ribbon exactly down upon itself again.
3. When your ribbon reaches the center pivot point, angle the next loop so it overlaps the first loop. Just how much it overlaps is your choice. Try to keep the bottom fold of your ribbon centered over the pivot point, but don't let any of the edges of the angled folds cross the bottom edge line.
4. Continue making loops and pinning until your half circle is complete, rearranging as necessary for symmetry and evenness. Cut your ribbon from the spool when done and end with your cut edge at the center pivot point.
5. Apply a couple drops of Stop Fray to the cut ends.
6. Stitch your loops to the buckram, only stitching where the buckram is **completely** covered with ribbon. Stitch all your loops down with tiny, evenly spaced stitches, and sew on your button center if you have one.
7. Cut away all the exposed parts of buckram with *no* ribbon. In the photo, I marked the outermost stitch point in pins with blue heads so you can see what I mean. When you trim away the buckram including that below the bottom edge line, try not to cut any threads. If you do, just re-stitch.

To attach your cockade to your hat, lay it over the hatband, lining up the bottom edges as shown in the photos above. Not every loop has to be stitched to the hat, but stitching near the outer edge of the buckram in a few places will usually do the trick.

Have fun experimenting with ribbon embellishments. For more helpful information, see the following publications:

Old-Fashioned Ribbon Art, Ideas and Designs for Accessories and Decorations, 1986 by Dover Publications, Inc.

The Artful Ribbon, Beauties in Bloom, by Candace Kling, 1996.

A Book of Fashion Facts, A Resource and Reference Guide of Vintage Fashions 1928-1931, 2006 by MAFCA.

Model A Era Fashion Guidelines, 2015 ed., by MAFCA.

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