

How-To



Building the Perfect Pleater Ilana Murray

Pleating is easy if you know the secret. A simple invention you can build enables you to easily create perfect pleats by the yard.

Do you have a thing for dresses or decorations with thousands of pleats but not the patience to make them? Do you like to make the other costumers jealous? Keep reading! This article will show you how to start pleating up to 500 perfect pleats per hour while you watch TV in a comfy chair.

In the early 1990's, I spent a lot of time staring at dresses from the 1870's-1880's and being bummed that I was not patient enough to make that many pleats. I started looking for modern solutions to the problem and found a product made of plastic that sped up the process. It was expensive at the time and the plastic left starch marks on fabric because it lacked absorbency. It was really designed for modern permanent press fabrics and not cottons, wools and linens.

I found this to be unacceptable and out of reach, and started thinking about how I would improve it for my specific period costume needs. I had some cheap muslin scrap from a project and deemed it to be



This is my first finished board. Notice the strips of watercolor paper that slip into each fabric knife pleat pocket (below)



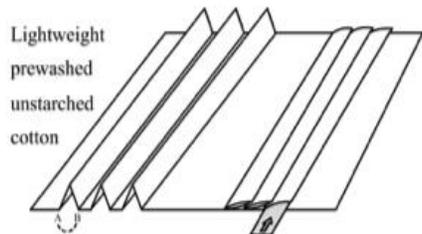
absorbent enough to start my project but still needed something stiff to fill it with. From my years as a painter, I figured out that water color paper would do the job. It is absorbent, stiff, and even affordable. A couple of large cardboard pieces from an old box made a nice platform for my test. Add contact cement and I was ready to build.

I built two boards – one with half inch knife pleats and one with one inch box pleats and It turns out that my prototypes were all I needed. I've been using them since the early 1990's and they just keep on working. The total cost, at the time, was around \$3 for watercolor paper; everything else I used was scrap I had lying around.

The knife pleat board is the simplest. The handout for a class I teach (next page) shows the easiest method to build your first board. You need to measure and make some pleats, but rest assured that this is the last time you'll have to tirelessly measure one pleat at a time for this size of pleat. One thing not mentioned in the handout is having a friend help you place the glue-covered finished pleat panel on the cardboard. This way you can have four hands stretching it out neatly to position it on the cardboard.

Using the boards is easy once you have built one. Just follow the class handout and the images on the following pages.

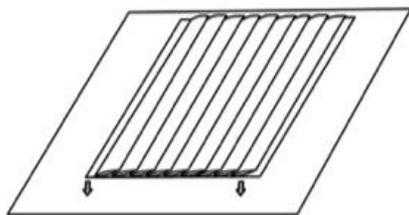
THE PERFECT PLEATER



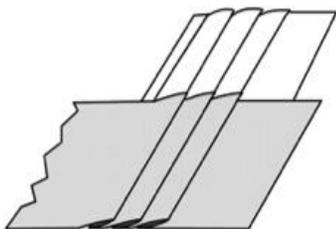
Lightweight
prewashed
unstarched
cotton

Stitch A to B to
make tubes.
Repeat for each
desired pleat

Insert stiff watercolor
paper strips cut
snuggly to fit the full
length of each tube



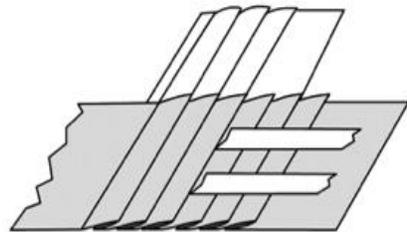
Glue fabric piece to stiff cardboard with
contact cement and let dry



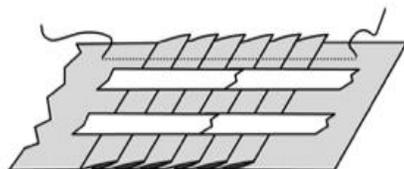
Slide fabric into slots and iron
(starch if desired)



Tape newly ironed pleats with masking tape
and carefully peel the pleats off the board



Place the previous pleats back on the board
and continue to pleat remaining fabric
adding tape on each set



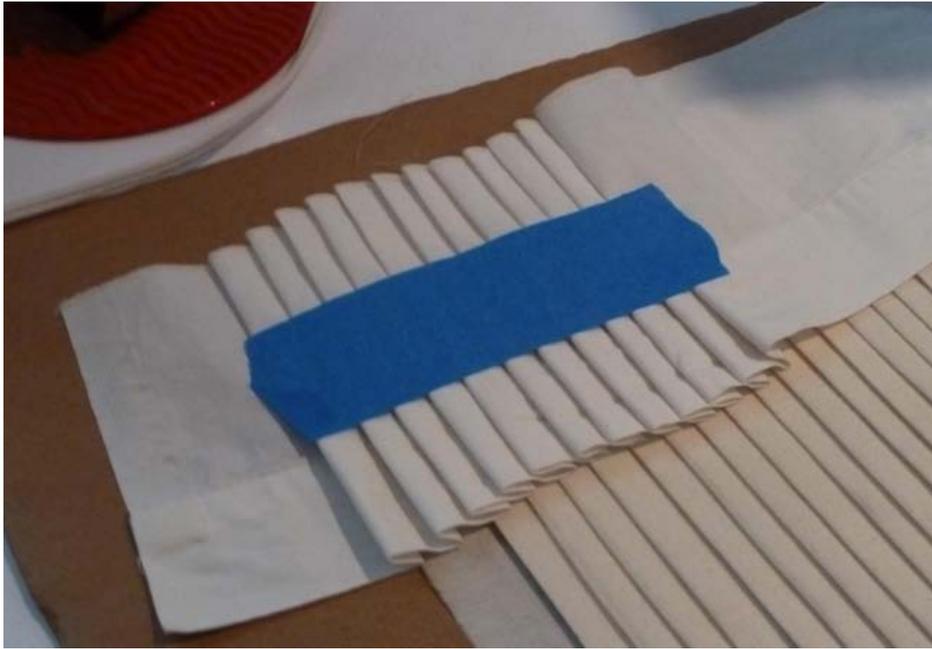
After all fabric is pleated, tack the pleats
together and sew to your project

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Crease the fabric into each fold of the pleater board. You can iron and starch it directly on the board to get a perfectly clean pleat.





Add blue painters tape or similarly low tack masking tape to hold the finished pleat in place while you remove it from the board.

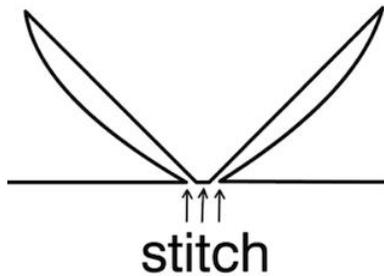


Gently pull it up off the board and press it with the iron. You can add more pleats to the end of it by lining it up on the board and continuing to pleat and tape.



Once the pleat is removed from the board, you can sew it directly to a garment (see handout). If you want to save your pleats until later, you can also run a basting stitch along one edge to secure it for storage. If I'm going to store the pleats for more than a few days, I will do the basting stitch and carefully remove the tape. This is also a good time to add more starch and do a really hot pressing with the iron.

After you have finished building the knife pleat board, the box pleat board should come more easily. It uses the same method as the knife pleat but has a different set of stitch points. Each box pleat should look like the letter V from the side.



Two final notes on constructing and using your pleater boards. First, let the glue dry for at least 10 hours before using your new pleater board. Then, you can start using them to churn out millions of perfect little pleats. During my heyday, I was pleating about 500 knife pleats per hour and 400 box pleats per hour. While my boards are looking a little ratty after 20 years, they still turn out pleats just as beautiful as they were when they were pristine. I have used them for everything from home décor to my wedding dress.



Box pleater board has two leaves for each pleat.



Watercolor paper strips within box pleater leaves.



Fabric that has been pleated on box pleater.

Second, if you use tape to stabilize your pleats, use only a low to medium tack tape and don't leave it on for more than a few days. The tape may mar lower quality fabrics such as cheap floral ribbon. Higher quality fabrics can be left with the tape on for up to a month if you haven't ironed over the tape. If you're going to use your pleats right away, you can iron right over the top of the tape to get a crisp pressing. TEST THIS FIRST on a scrap piece to make sure the tape you are using does not transfer to the fabric after being ironed.

Once you get the hang of your new pleat boards, you will find that you can make them in any size or spacing that you want for whatever project you can think of. Your pleats don't even need to be a straight line. Practice pleating in slopes and waves to create really elegant pleats.

Happy Pleating!

Ilana Murray is a costumer, instructor and maker. She teaches at [Tech Shop San Jose](http://TechShopSanJose.com), workshopweekend.net and various bay area conventions. As owner of The Golden Gear and Windows of Asch, she makes and sells steampunk, gothic and industrial wearables, art and curiosities. All of her brands and services can be found at MadeByTheMurrays.com.

