How To Make Wave Tucks

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Before you start to panic, this technique does not require a bathing suit or a surfboard; all you need is your sewing machine... and a desire for style! We’ve shown you numerous ways to take fabric from flat to fancy: pleating, gathering, shirring, and pintucks to name just a few (see the full list at the end of this article). Although these are all traditional techniques, we work hard to give them a new twist by using exciting fabrics or finding new applications. And, just when you think you’ve seen it all, some ingenious soul develops a fresh approach to fabric manipulation. Today, we’re discussing a fairly new technique: wave tucks. These are not to be confused with wave pleats, which are a form of pleated draperies. The wave tuck starts as a modified pintuck, but quickly transforms into beautiful winding folds with just a few passes through your sewing machine. We use them next week, during our Michael Miller Cotton Couture series, to embellish a preppy handbag (the Fuschia and Tangerine tucks in the photo above are a little sneak peek).

The wave tuck has a contemporary flair we find very appealing for home décor. As we always like to do, we did a little research to see how others are using the wave tuck, and to find out what ideas are floating ‘round the creative world. Low and behold, we found wave tucks can vary in both size and direction. Plus, we spotted wave tucks on just about everything from garments and pillows to quilts and lampshades. Below, we explain how to sew basic wave tucks. Then, we provide a glimpse into some alternate applications you may want to try!

NOTE: You may have an optional foot for your sewing machine called a pintuck foot. Do not use this for wave tucks; you need a large-sized tuck for the wave technique. Pintucks are small tucks in the fabric that can be corded for a more pronounced look. To learn more about pintucks, and other delicate embellishment options, check out the tutorial we did on Heirloom Sewing.

How to sew a basic wave tuck

In our example photos below, we used a light colored fabric with bright thread so you could see the technique clearly. Fabrics conducive to this technique include woven cottons, knits, cotton sateen, even garment fabrics like polyester and rayon. We
always recommend testing fabrics before starting your actual project.

1. Sewing successful wave tucks begins with accurate marking of the fabric. First, it’s important to test your selected marking pen, pencil or chalk on your fabric. In addition, determine if you will mark your fabric on the right or wrong side. If you mark the wrong side, you can use thread to trace the marked lines in order to see them on the right side. We discuss this thoroughly in our Box Pleat Tutorial.

2. For our samples, we marked the fabric on the right side with a fabric pencil.
   NOTE: In addition to marking accurately, consider the depth of your seam allowance. Tucks will create bulk in a seam. To eliminate this, it’s a good idea to start tucks ½” to 1” from the raw edge of the fabric so they won’t get caught in the seam.

3. Place the fabric right side up on a flat surface.

4. With a marking tool and ruler, mark lines for the fabric tucks. We marked the lines for our tucks 1” apart, and 1” apart from each other. In other words, we drew a line every 1”.

   NOTE: If you’re following a pattern or tutorial, the tuck markings will likely be indicated. If you’re incorporating wave tucks into an un-marked project, you’ll need to calculate the extra width needed to sew the tucks. If you’re new to pleating, check out our Box Pleat and Knife Pleat tutorials for more information.

5. Pinch and fold the fabric together so each set of tuck lines match up. Place pins in the folds to hold in place.

   NOTE: To make sure the tuck lines are even with one another, always look at the opposite side of the fold to insuire the pin is lined up with the marked line on the opposite side.

6. To help hold the folds in place, you can press along the folded edged.

7. Set up your sewing machine for a straight stitch.

8. Sew along each marked tuck at the base, not the folded edge.
NOTE: As you sew, be careful of any previously sewn tucks (especially if your tucks are close together). You don't want to catch the fold of a previous tuck in the seaml ine of a new tuck. Always fold the tucks away from the needle as you sew.

9. Once all the pleats are sewn, lay the fabric on a flat surface again. It should be right side up with the sewn tucks parallel to you.

10. With a fabric marking pen or pencil and a ruler, mark lines perpendicular (or intersecting) to the tucks. These are the wave lines. We spaced our waves 2” apart.

NOTE: You can mark the lines with the folds all laying in one direction. Or, you can flip the folds back and forth and mark alternating lines in the same manner you will be sewing. We find alternate marking helpful so the marked line is always visible with the direction you are stitching the wave. Remember, you can also use thread basting to mark these lines.

11. Along the first drawn line, place pins in each tuck to hold the fabric flat. Make sure to place the pins in the direction you will sew. It's easier to sew over the tucks with the folded edge lying toward you at the machine.

12. Along the second drawn line, place pins in each tuck in the opposite direction to the first line.
13. Continue in this manner the length of the fabric.
14. Sew along each drawn line in the direction of the pins. Remember to remove the pins as you go; never sew over pins with your machine, you can cause serious damage.
15. Yippee! You just made wave tucks! Pretty, huh?!
Different ways to sew wave tucks

You may discover some of these techniques are more suited to certain fabric types, such as a knit over a woven. Don't forget to test them all on scraps first!

1/4" wave tucks

1. We used our Janome Quarter Inch foot to sew super accurate 1/4" wide tucks.
2. Mark tuck links 1/2" apart and spaced 1" apart from each other.
3. Fold and pin the tucks in place, and press the folded edges as described above.
4. Set up your sewing machine for a straight stitch and attach the Quarter Inch foot.
5. Sew the tucks in place. The flange of the Quarter Inch foot runs along the folded edge, insuring a beautifully accurate seam.
6. As described above, mark perpendicular lines and pin the folds into wave tucks. We spaced ours 2" apart.
7. Remove the Quarter Inch foot, and attach the Standard presser foot.
8. Sew waves in opposite directions as described above.
Angled wave tucks

1. We were having so much fun playing with this technique in the S4H studios, we decided to try to sew wave tucks at different angles.
   NOTE: Remember, any time you work with woven fabric on an angle, it will stretch. It also alters the shape of the fabric, so start with a much larger piece of fabric and then cut your piece when your pleating is complete.
2. As with the other techniques already explained, mark the fabric, but mark it at your desired angle.
3. Fold, press, pin, and sew the wave tucks.
NOTE: We quickly discovered you could also simply sew straight wave tucks on a large piece of fabric, then turn it at an angle to get a similar effect. We recommend trying both to see what you think.

**Few vs. many wave tucks**

1. A small gathering of wave tucks provides an interesting look. We created these little wave tucks following the exact same steps as the basic wave tuck above. We used ¼” tucks spaced ½” apart. Wouldn't this be cute as the focal point of a pillow front?

**Contrasting wave tucks**

1. We've added fabric inserts to box pleats many times, such as in our Organic Cotton Box Pleat Pillows and our Citron & Gray Pleated Crib Skirt. Why not add an insert to wave tucks? This is exactly what's coming up in our Michael Miller Cotton Couture Preppy Handbag.
2. For our sample, we cut strips of fabric 1½” wide and sewed them together with a ¼” seam allowance. The fabric seam lines now provide the exact same markings as the 1” drawn guide lines in our basic wave tuck example above.
3. Using the seam lines between the two fabrics, pinch and fold the tucks in the same manner as described above. There will be a seam at the peak of each tuck. Pin in place, and press the edge. Sew 1/2" tucks.

4. When complete, the insert fabric should be hidden in the tucks.

5. Mark and pin the wave tucks. Sew in place.
When finished, contrasting wave tucks look like this:

Non-sewn tucks

1. To keep you thinking of different ways to apply this technique, we decided to see what would happen if we didn’t sew along each tuck fold. Instead, we marked and folded tucks as before, then pressed and simply basted them in place along the raw edge rather than sewing a full seam.
2. Then, we marked lines across the tucks at 2" intervals and sewed in the opposite direction of the folds on every line. We removed the basting, and here’s what we ended up with:
Wavy tucks

1. Sometimes sewing terminology can be a bit confusing. So, we wanted to show you this technique because it has a similar name. You can make wave tucks as described above, or you can be completely carefree and make free-form wavy tucks.

2. With this technique, you pin tucks in the fabric in a random wavy pattern.

3. Then, simply sew along the very edge of wave, stitching the fold flat to the fabric.
4. Here's what this looks like when finished - kind of a 'shabby chic' feel.

NOTE: Remember, any time you alter fabric with any type of gathering, pleats or wave tucks, the fabric will change in size. Always complete your fabric manipulation first, then cut out the pieces for your selected project.

You may also like these other 'fabric bending' tutorials...

How To Make Knife Pleats
How To Make A Box Pleat Or Inverted Box Pleat
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How To Do Shirring
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