Toby the Terrific Stuffed Turtle

Turtles get a bad rap. They are the go-to metaphor for all things sluggish and slow. Cartoons depict them as dull-witted and sleepy. But as one of the animal kingdom’s oldest species, they deserve a lot of respect. We’re proud to share our favorite turtle, Toby. He’s not only as cute as they come with his shy smile (made with darts!), he also has a job: holding his owner’s PJs in a hidden pocket on his bottom shell. Thanks, Toby!
Unlike his real-life counterparts, our turtle is cuddly soft from top to bottom. He’s meant to be a little pillow pal, and as such, his head is designed to be a bit droopy rather than sticking straight out. We embellished Toby with a bow for some of his photo shoot poses. It’s a fun way to add a spot of color when you’re green-on-green. To make sure your project is extra huggable, check out our tutorial on pillow stuffing tips, tricks and tools.
Our original fabric is Cuddle plush from Shannon Fabrics, and we offer links in the Supplies list below to our Dot and Chevron stripe options. Of course, you can pick your own green combo – or live dangerously and make your turtle any color of the rainbow you’d like.
Please note that Toby Turtle has button eyes. They are very securely stitched in place (you’ll see below how they are secured with heavy thread through his head to create a bit of a tufted look). But, if you want to make him for a very young child, you may want to consider using appliquéd fabric circles instead of buttons. Just make sure you choose a fabric that will not bleed onto the fleece when washed.
Toby finishes at approximately 21” from nose to tail and 14” wide, measuring up and over his shell but excluding his feet.

**Sewing Tools You Need**

- **Sewing Machine** and standard presser foot
- **Zipper foot**: optional but helpful when stitching the edge of Toby’s shell
- **Walking or Even Feed foot**: optional but helpful when working with layered fleece – or engage your machine’s built-in fabric feeding system, such as the Janome built-in AcuFeed™ Flex fabric feeding system
Fabric and Other Supplies

NOTE: Supplies shown below are for ONE Turtle

- ½ yard of 58-60”+ wide soft fleece for the turtle’s bottom shell and secret pocket; we used a green/white chevron Cuddle
  NOTE: This amount allows a bit extra for fussy cutting the pocket to match the shell.
- ¾ yard of 58-60” soft fleece for the turtle’s shell, shell piping, head, feet and tail; we used a green Cuddle with white dots
- Scrap or ¼” yard of medium-weight fusible interfacing to stabilize the neck, you only need an 8” x 8” square; we used Décor Bond by Pellon
- ONE 12 oz bag of Poly-Fil® 100% Premium Polyester FiberFill or similar
- 1½ yards of ⅜” piping cord
- TWO ½”- ¾” black dome-type, shank buttons or felt or similar to create ½”- ¾” black fabric circles; we used ¾” dome buttons purchased locally
- ½ yard of fold-over elastic; we recommend Dritz Fold-Over Elastic to match the underside fabric; we used lime
- All purpose thread to match fabrics and fold-over elastic
- Strong thread for attaching the button; optional, we used Coats Dual Duty Heavy in Black
- Cotton floss in a contrasting color; optional
  NOTE: The floss is an option should you want to outline the turtle’s smile – we opted not to use it, preferring Toby’s shy, subtle smile, however, if you choose a darker color of fleece, on which the darts are less visible, you may want to add a running stitch along the dart lines for emphasis.
- See-through ruler
- Fabric pen or pencil
- Iron and ironing board
- Scissors
- Rotary cutter and mat
- Seam gauge
• Seam ripper
• Straight pins
• Long doll needle for sewing button eyes in place, we used Dritz Doll Needles
• Hand sewing needle

Getting Started and Pattern Download

NOTE: For our instructions, we will be referring to the fabrics used in our sample: Chevron and Dot.

1. **DOWNLOAD AND PRINT:** our SEVEN Turtle Pattern sheets, which have been bundled into ONE PDF file to make the download easier
   IMPORTANT: Each page in the PDF is ONE 8½” x 11” sheet. You must print the PDF file at 100%. **DO NOT SCALE** to fit the page. There is a guide rule on each page so you can confirm your final printout is to scale.

2. Cut out each pattern piece along the solid line.

3. Butt together (do not overlap) Shell Top Part 1 and Shell Top Part 2 along the center line – the edges marked with a single arrow. Tape together to create one full pattern piece.

4. For the two Shell Bottom Part 1 pieces, flip over one piece so it is wrong side up, then butt together the two pieces along the center line – the edges marked with a single arrow. Tape together to create one half of the bottom pattern.

5. Repeat with the two Shell Bottom Part 2 pieces to create the second half of the bottom pattern.

6. Butt together (remember, never overlap) the two halves of the bottom pattern along the center line marked with the double arrows. Tape together to create the full bottom pattern piece.

7. For the two Shell Pocket pieces, flip over one piece so it is wrong side up, then butt together the two pieces along the center line marked with the double arrows. Tape together to create the full pocket pattern.

8. From the Chevron fabric, cut the following:
   Use the assembled Bottom pattern to fussy cut ONE piece
   Use the assembled Pocket pattern to fussy cut ONE piece

9. Take the time to fussy cut the pocket to match the bottom.
10. From the Dot fabric, cut the following:
   Use the assembled Top pattern to cut TWO pieces
   Use the Head pattern to cut TWO pieces
   Use the Foot pattern to cut EIGHT pieces
   Use the Tail pattern to cut TWO pieces
   From the remainder of the fabric, cut enough 3” strips on the bias to equal 44” in finished length. This can be one continuous bias piece or a few shorter bias strips sewn together, using a ¼” seam allowance, to equal 44” in finished length.

11. From the interfacing, cut an 8” x 8” square.
At Your Sewing Machine & Ironing Board

Assemble the feet and tail

1. Find all eight feet pieces and the two tail pieces. Match them up into appropriate pairs and place each pair right sides together. Pin in place. The feet will look like little booties.

2. Using a ½” seam allowance, stitch around the curved outer edges of each pair. The inner straight edges remain open.

3. Clip into the turn of each foot, clip the curves, and trim the seam allowance back to ¼”.

4. Turn right side out and get a small handful of fiber fill. Fluff up the fiber fill.

5. Stuff all the feet and the tail, working the filling down towards the bottom, leaving the upper ½” – 1” empty so it can be easily flattened into the seam.
NOTE: If you are new to working with fiber filler, remember to check out our Pillow Stuffing Tutorial for stuffing tools and tricks.

Assemble the head

1. Transfer the dart markings to the wrong side of each of the head pieces.

2. Fold and pin the dart along the marked lines. Stitch in place.
3. Repeat to create the dart on the remaining head piece.

   NOTE: Check out our Dart Making tutorial if you are new to this technique.

4. Place the two head pieces right sides together, very carefully aligning the darts. The sewn darts are what create Toby Turtle’s shy smile, so it’s super important the stitching lines align. “Nest” the dart seams, folding one up and one down, as you would the seams in patchworking. This will further help form a perfect point and, therefore, a perfect shy smile.

5. Using a ½” seam allowance, stitch around the curve of the head, leaving the neck open.
6. Find the 8” x 8” square of interfacing and the Head pattern piece.

7. Fold the interfacing in half. Place the pattern piece on the interfacing, measure 3” back from the neck opening and mark along both sides at this point. Cut out just the bottom portion of the head pattern, cutting straight across at the 3” point.

8. Following manufacturer's instructions, fuse the interfacing the the wrong side of the sewn head. Fuse one piece on either side. This helps give Toby's neck a bit of extra stability.
9. **Clip the curves** and trim the seam allowance back to \( \frac{1}{4} \)”. Turn the head right side out through the open neck.

10. As above with the feet and tail, stuff the head. The face and head should be firmly stuffed, but with little if any stuffing at the top of the neck opening.

11. Find the buttons, long needle, and heavy thread.

12. Using the paper pattern, mark the placement for both eyes.

13. Thread the long needle with the heavy thread and double the strand. Run the needle through the head from one side to the other. Pass through a couple times, drawing up the thread to create a soft tufting effect.
14. Slip the needle through the shank of the first button and secure it in place, passing the needle through the head.

15. Then, slip the needle through the shank of the second button, secure it in place as you did with the first, then insert the needle into the head and pull the thread down and out through the open neck. This hides all the thread tails inside the head. Knot to secure.

Create the upper shell and piping

1. Find the two halves of the upper shell. Place them right sides together. Pin along the center curved line.
2. Using a ½” seam allowance, stitch along the center line. **Clip the curves.** Finger press the seam allowance open.

3. Find the piping cord and the 3” bias strip(s). If necessary, stitch together the shorter bias strips to create the finished 44” length. This should be done with diagonal seams, as you would most traditional piping or binding. Pin the strips at right angles.

4. Stitch along the diagonal seams and trim back the seam allowance to ¼”.
5. Wrap the finished piping strip around the cording, right side facing out. Trim away the excess cording so it is flush with the ends of the fabric. The raw edges of the fabric should be perfectly aligned along the length of the entire strip. Pin in place.

6. Stitch in place, running your seam close to the cording. We used a standard presser foot, you could also use a Zipper foot.

7. Pin the finished piping around the entire outer perimeter of the top shell, on the right side. The raw edges of the piping should be flush with the raw edge of the shell. Your starting/ending joint should be at the bottom end of the shell, right over where the turtle’s tail will be inserted. Remember to leave about 1-2” of piping free at the beginning and end in order to join them together to finish.

8. At the starting/ending joint, use your seam ripper to open up the seam just a bit on the head end in order to reveal the cord. Cut the end of the revealed cording so it butt together with the
tail end of the cording. As mentioned above, this joint should align with the shell’s center seam.

9. Trim away the excess fabric, re-fold the fabric into place around the cording, and re-pin.

10. Machine baste the piping to the shell, keep your seam as close to the cording as possible. We used a standard presser foot on our Janome with the needle set to the left position. You could also use a Zipper foot.
NOTE: If you are new to these techniques, check out our full tutorials on bias binding as well as piping, which have great step-by-step notes on joining.

Create the bottom shell with its pocket

1. Find the two Chevron pieces and the fold over elastic. Cut the elastic down to 11½”.
2. Stretching the elastic just a tiny bit, wrap it over the raw straight edge of the pocket piece. Pin in place.
3. Stitch in place, making sure you catch both sides of the elastic in this one seam.
4. Place the main bottom shell panel right side up and flat on your work surface. Place the pocket right side up on top of the shell. Align the bottom curved edges of both pieces. Pin the pocket in place along the sides and around the bottom.

NOTE: The elastic is not meant to be “gathered.” It is there to just give a little stability to the top of the PJ pocket so the fabric won’t stretch out of place with repetitive use.

5. Machine baste the pocket to the shell, using a $\frac{3}{8}$” seam allowance.

Assembling top and bottom with the feet, tail and head

1. The “appendages” (head, feet and tail) are pinned and machine basted in place OVER the piping so when the turtle is stitched top to bottom and turned right side out, they will all come out beneath the piping.
2. Start with the tail. Fold to find the center of the open end of the tail and mark with a pin. Align
this pin with the bottom end of the shell seam line. This should be right over the splice point of the piping.

3. Push the fiber fill down into the tail. Place the tail in position with the raw edges of the tail flush with the raw edge of the shell/piping. Remember, as mentioned above, the tail is laying over the piping at this stage. Pin the tail in place. Machine baste the tail in place.

NOTE: Again, we are still using our standard foot, but if you are having trouble keeping as close to the piping cord as you need to be, try a Zipper foot. You could also use a Walking or Even Feed foot or engage your machine’s built-in fabric feeding system.

4. Find the Shell Bottom pattern. Place it over the top shell/piping. Using the dots on the pattern, mark the position for the four feet.
5. Place one foot at each marked position. As above, make sure the stuffing is pushed down towards the bottom of the foot so the top edge is free to flatten. Align the raw edge of each foot with the raw edge of the shell/piping. The feet should be facing backwards (towards the tail), like they are swimming away. Take a look at the photos are the top of the article to confirm the foot position. Pin in place, then machine baste in place.

6. Find the turtle’s head. Align the center seam of the head with the top of the center seam of the shell. Make sure his head is facing the right direction. When you align the raw edges of the head with the raw edges of the shell/piping, the head will drop back over the piping and the “smile” will be facing up. Pin in place and then machine baste in place.

7. Once all the appendages are basted in place, lay the shell bottom right sides together with the shell top, sandwiching all the appendages between the layers. Pin the layers together all around, leaving approximately 5” – 6” open at the neck for turning and stuffing. There will be
some squishing and futzing required at this point (yes, these are both highly-technical sewing terms) as you work around the appendages and keep the layers flush. This is why we suggested you not over-stuff the appendages. Don’t be afraid to use plenty of pins.

8. Using a ½” seam allowance, stitch around the turtle through all the layers. Go slowly to keep your seam allowance as consistent as possible. We switched to our Janome Walking foot to help control the layers. Remember to lock your seam at either side of the 5” – 6” opening at the neck.

9. Clip the curves all around, being super careful to not clip into your seam. Gently turn the turtle right side out through the opening at the neck.

10. Stuff the turtle through the opening at the neck, filling from the bottom up.
11. Pull the bottom shell up into position along the open neck, fold back the raw edge of the bottom shell so it’s flush with the sewn seam, and pin in place.

12. **Hand stitch** closed.

13. Repeat to **hand stitch** along the top neck, hiding your tiny stitches beneath the piping.

**Contributors**

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