

Shirring Tutorial

Shirring, or gathering fabric into three or more decorative rows by parallel stitching, provides many ways to be creative and can dramatically change the look of sewn garments.

To shirr, use matching thread on top of your machine and elastic thread on the bobbin. Elastic thread can be found in the notions section of you favorite fabric store, usually where elastics are found, and looks like this:



The matching thread should be placed on top of your machine and threaded as normal:



The elastic thread should be wound on the bobbin by hand as your machine will wind it too tightly causing the thread to break easily. Begin winding the thread with a slight tail as you would with your machine. Wind the thread by hand fairly loosely, but tight enough to wind evenly on the bobbin:



Most machines shirr the best when set for a long, slightly looser straight stitch but you will need to practice on scrap fabrics before beginning a project to find the ideal setting for your machine. I set my machine to a stitch length of 4.



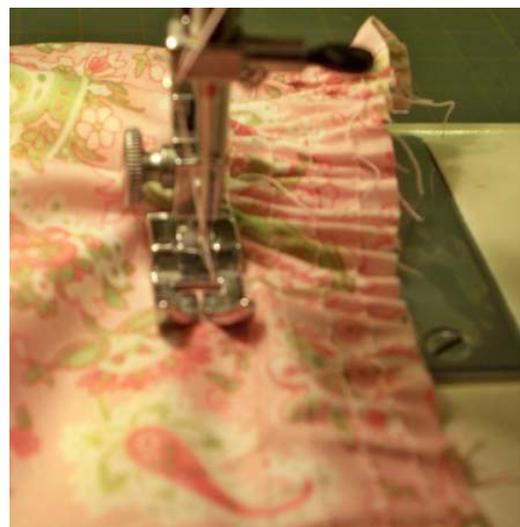
Begin with a long end of elastic thread (for tying off later) at a discreet area (such as a side seam) $\frac{1}{4}$ " away from the edge of the garment you are shirring (usually necklines, sleeves, hems, etc). Shirring closely to the edge will give a nice gathered look, especially if you are working with more than one layer of fabric. Keep in mind that thin material will shirr easier so you may prefer to shirr with a further space in between (such as $\frac{1}{2}$ ") so the fabric doesn't appear too bunched up.



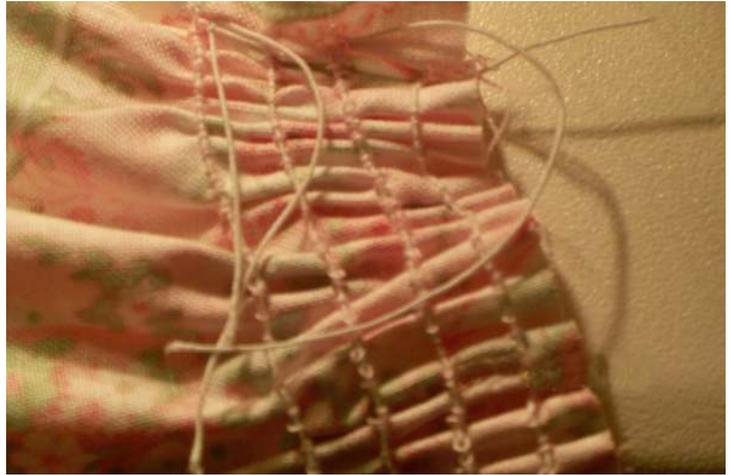
Backstitch several times and then shirr all the way around the garment backstitching again several times once you have overlapped the starting point a little. Cut the matching thread close to the garment. Cut the elastic thread but make sure to leave it long for tying off later. Tying off the elastic thread will prevent it from pulling out with wear.



Begin each row of shirring $\frac{1}{4}$ " below the first row and remember to leave long ends of elastic thread. Again, if you are working with a thin fabric, you may want to keep the rows $\frac{1}{2}$ " apart. Make sure that the garment is pulled slightly (as shown) to keep it flat while stitching each new row.



Repeat these steps until several rows are completed and the desired look is achieved. Turn the garment wrong side out and carefully double or triple knot the elastic ends on each row to prevent the elastic thread from pulling out. Trim the elastic thread.



Using the high steam setting on you iron, hold the iron just above the shirring and heavily steam all the way around the elastic thread. This step is often skipped but it really allows the elastic to shrink up providing the nicely gathered look associated with shirring.



Here is a finished shirred top:

