

Ask Jo: About Using Shirts

When questions come in from blog readers that I think others might like the answer to, I answer them here on the blog. Today is one of those days.

Today's question came from Bobbie:

Do you only use the backs of the shirts? How do you use the fronts and sleeves?

This question came after I had been working on Baby Friedman's quilt...



This quilt was made entirely of shirts...minus the red of course.

I've made several quilts from shirts and I absolutely love them. They are instantly vintage especially if you can find a

good 100% cotton sheet for the backing. Seriously, one washing and the quilt feels like you've had it years. I love that feeling.

I think my favorite shirt quilt is Rectangle Wrangle...Read all about the quilt [HERE](#).



I love-love-love it!! Being I get shirts at such a cheap price sometimes I feel like I'm sewing for free. I'm not but it sure feels that way sometimes.

I didn't know anything about sewing with shirts until I heard about it from Bonnie Hunter. Once I heard, I was right on board as I have had good thrift stores in my area.

But...back to the question..."**Do you only use the backs of the shirts? How do you use the fronts and sleeves?"**

The answer is...Some of each. Sometimes I get LOTS and LOTS of shirts in all at once and then I get a little overwhelmed with them all so I take the backs off and then sell the rest of the the shirt to blog readers via one of my auctions. When I feel like I need to get "caught up" and this is a quick easy way to get caught up.

Cutting up shirts does take time but it you get into a system,

it's not bad at all. Most of the shirts I have gotten recently, I'll be cutting up the whole shirt. My scrap users system is low on strips so now is a good time to replenish.

I'll show you what I do...Here's the shirt I am working with...



I start out by making a slit on each of the sides along the buttons. I then rip up to the collar.



Then I take a scissors and and I cut around the collar. Then



I have this...

From here I make a couple cuts in the collar as shown then rip. Interfacing in the shirts is always different.

Sometimes it's stuck on the fabric. If so I throw that piece.



This is what I have "harvested" so far...two great strips for my scrap bucket and buttons. Yes, I save buttons. I have yet to figure out why.



Next on to the cuffs. I cut them off.



I make the slits and again rip.



I cut off and save those two pieces.

Next, these get cut off.



Then I cut the sleeves off. I often cut through both thicknesses of fabric at the same time. I also cut off the seams...



Next I cut on each side of the seam at the TOP of the sleeve.



Then I rip.
With that, the sleeves are done.

Now I start on the rest of the shirt. A slit goes on each side of the side seam.



I rip up to the under arm and then start in on scissor work.
I cut out the yoke and cut the back off.



Then cut the fronts off. I've gotten so I can do a shirt in about 7 minutes. Time consuming yes but I still feel very well worth it.

This is my harvest from one shirt.... Look. That's a lot of



fabric!!

If I am working on cutting out a quilt, I will often pull a shirt front out or sleeves out and put them in a pile. The rest gets folded up and ready to be used.

I always take this much out...the ripped pieces go immediately to the scrap bin. I use this to make the crumb quilts. The yoke piece with the tag goes there too. The good tagless piece gets cut up into strips for scrap users.



The rest I layer like this. Back on bottom...then fronts and



then sleeves.



I fold them in half.
..in half again.





Then half this way...

Then thirds to make this bundle that's kind of like a fat



quarter.

Then they go right into my drawer.



When it comes time that I need some of the fabric, I unfold the bundle, I pick out what I want, always leaving the back

for last. Next time I pick that bundle to use, I'll likely take out a sleeve or two depending on what I need, then fold it back up and immediately put it away.

If anything is left after I cut what I need for the quilt I'm working on, it goes in the scrap bucket or cut into strips for the scrap users system.

For me...the back side of my quilting machine is designated "shirt land". I have three 3 drawer units to hold the cut shirts and a scrap users system for the strips.



Taking the time to organize it all is totally worth it!!

I hope that answers the question...I love to keep all of the shirts but sometimes time doesn't allow so I sell the rest of the shirts. At other times Kelli and I split shirts. One of us gets the back and the other gets the rest. It's a great way to get a larger variety.

I'd love to hear from any of you on how you handle shirts...and as always if you have a question, leave it in the comment box or drop me a note rogjok@iowatelecom.net.