

How to Make a Hen Saddle or Apron



How to Make a Hen Saddle



With Printable
PDF Pattern Included



Why is your hen wearing a dress? This is a question I hear if I put the hen saddle on a chicken. The hen saddle protects the chickens back and feathers from the treading of a rooster. I have also heard these called hen aprons. If you don't keep a rooster, you may not ever need the protection of a hen saddle. Making the hen saddle is an easy DIY project. First lets look at why the hen saddle might be necessary.

Observing chickens mating can be disturbing if you haven't seen it before. Roosters are not gentle when they mate. The hen submits by crouching down. The rooster jumps on her back and treads his feet into her feathers to gain his balance. The actual mating is quick and both hen and rooster shake their feathers, walking off to continue foraging. The rooster may go from one hen to the next in quick succession. And if you have more than one rooster, the boys may have their own idea of which hen belongs to each of them. Roosters must have a different idea of what courtship should look like!

How Does Feather Damage Happen?

Rooster feet are large and the talons are sharp. In addition, the spur may be quite long. All of these structures are digging into the back of the hen while the rooster is mating.

Feathers are meant to protect and fluff. They can not always withstand repeated abrasions. The [mating behavior](#) can cause the hen to loose her back feathers. After the feathers fall out, the hen is still a willing victim in the mating game. Now however, the skin on her back will take the wear and tear. Some hens seam to have a lighter feathering and lose their feathers quickly. Some manage to keep a downy covering.



In addition, sunlight will burn the tender skin on the hen. This can't be healthy!

Use a Hen Saddle to Stop the Feather Loss Before it Happens

The first sign of feather loss starts near the tail of the hen. Look near the tail feathers for a downy look instead of feathers. If it's not molting season, you probably are seeing feather loss from mating. Molting usually starts in late summer and is over by the time cold weather hits. Nature intended it this way. The new feathers and downy undercoat are ready to insulate the chicken through the colder weather. [Read more about molt here.](#)



Rooster caused feather loss is usually seen in the spring.

Mating season begins as the days lengthen. Look for feather loss at this time and think about using a saddle to protect the hen.

Using a hen saddle will protect the feathers before they fall out. If you don't want to sew a hen saddle, there are many options for buying them. If you can sew a simple pattern together, you may enjoy stitching up a few to protect your hens.

The hen doesn't seem to notice she is wearing a saddle once it is on her. Depending on the temperament of the hen, she may object to being caught and held while you dress her. After the saddle is on correctly, the wings fold over most of it and they rarely seem to bother with it.

Occasionally the saddle will roll up the hen's back. Flip it back down and when she adjusts her wings it will cover it up again.



When to Use the Hen Saddle

The hen saddle does a great job at protecting the hen's tender skin during mating season. As late summer approaches, the roosters should be less active, and the molting process will begin. At some point during the molt, new feather growth will begin. At this point, remove the hen saddle so it does not interfere or abrade the new feathers. If there is still an over zealous rooster, that must stay with the flock, you may need to play around with the timing of taking the saddle off. In some cases, putting the hen saddle on during the day and

removing it at night, might be the answer.

Save for later!



How to Make a Hen Saddle

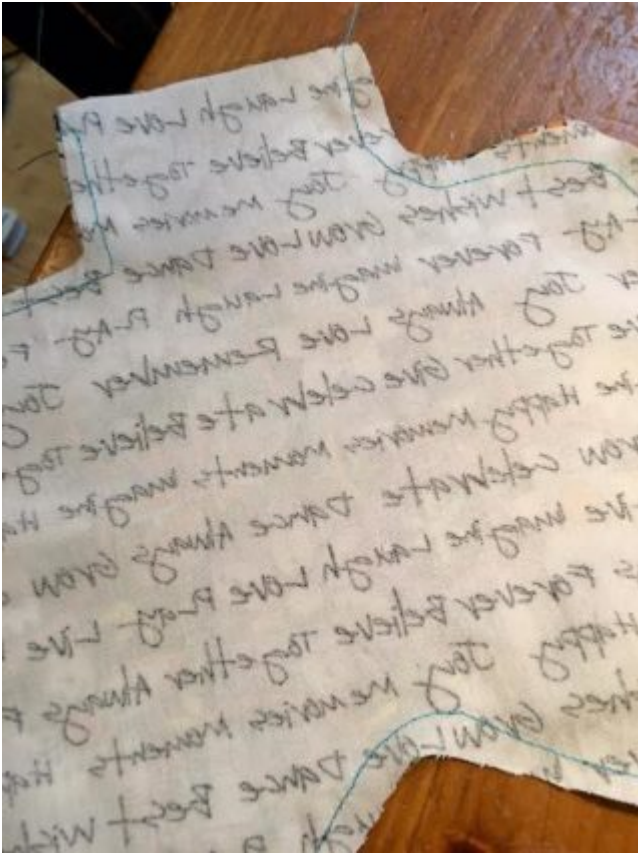
Using the pattern provided, or make your own, cut two from cotton fabric.

Cut a piece of elastic 12 inches long.

(I used two contrasting “fat quarters” which can be purchased where ever quilting supplies are found. Two fat quarters will make 4 hen saddles. Of course, you can use an leftover cotton fabric you have on hand,too.)

Place the two pieces of the hen saddle, right sides together.

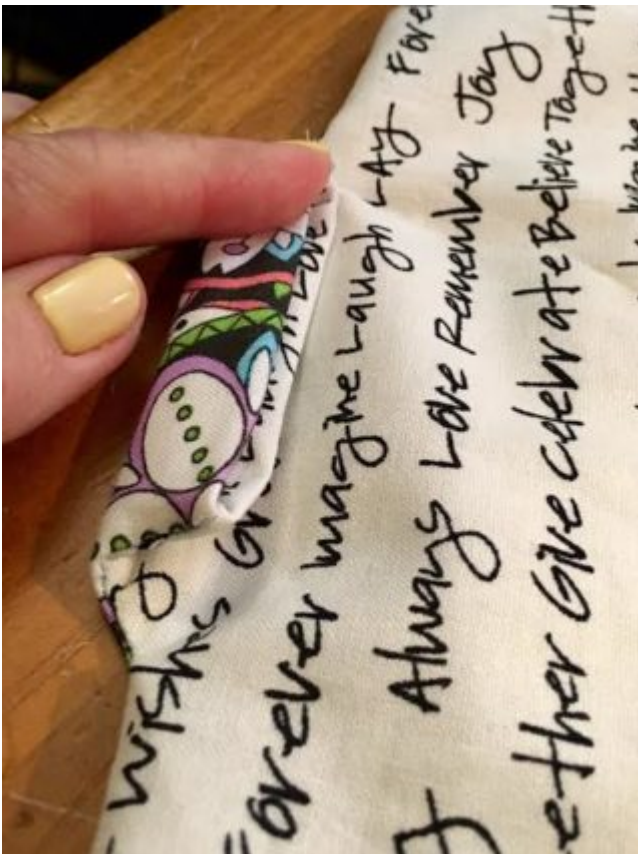
Stitch the two layers together, leaving the opening shown, unsewn for turning. Use a quarter inch seam allowance and clip the curves to make turning easier.



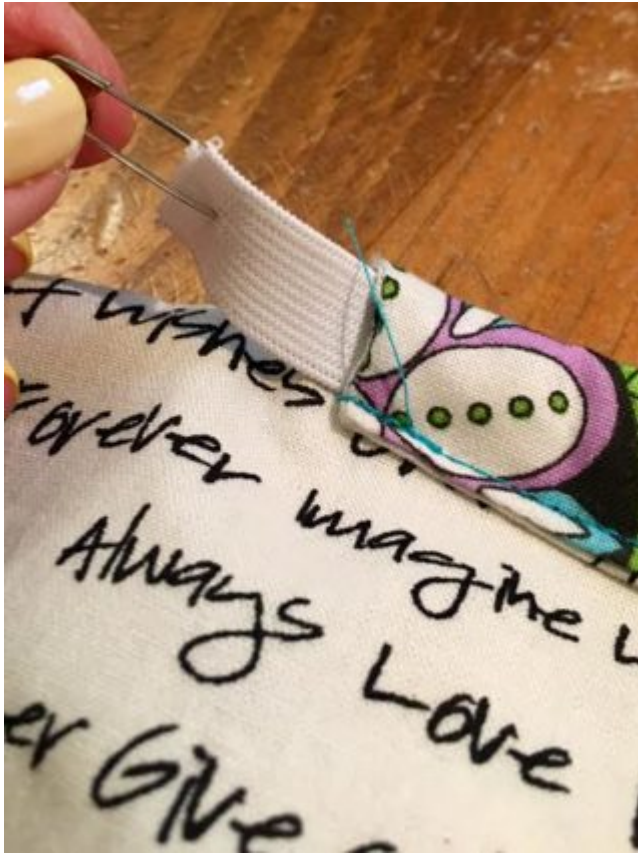
Turn the hen saddle to the right side by pulling the saddle through the opening. Smooth and press the saddle.



Turn the opening raw edges to the inside. Press. Fold over the top for the elastic casing. Sew to the body portion at the top, making a casing for the elastic band.



Insert the elastic band through the casing. Attach to each side of the hen saddle, stitch in place. If you are having trouble threading the elastic, attach a safety pin to one end to push through the casing.



Show your creation to your hens! I am sure they will all want to wear the latest fashion statement!



Hen Saddle in Action

Are you wondering how in the world you will get your new hen saddle onto the chicken? Watch this video as I apply the hen saddle made in this post, to one of our buff Orpington hens. It seems my buff Orpingtons are especially prone to feather damage from the roosters. Maybe because they are a docile breed and don't run away from him as quickly!

Print the Pattern and Instructions

[Print here](#)

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Directions for Making a Hen Saddle

Required materials: 2 contrasting "fat quarters" of cotton fabric. These are sold in quilting supplies in retail shops.

One 12 inch piece of ¼ inch elastic

Thread

Sewing machine or hand sew

Using the pattern provided, or make your own, cut two from cotton fabric. Cut a piece of elastic 12 inches long.

Place the two pieces of the hen saddle, right sides together.

Stitch the two layers together, leaving the opening shown, unsewn for turning. Use a quarter inch seam allowance and clip the curves to make turning easier.

Turn the hen saddle to the right side by pulling the saddle through the opening. Smooth and press the saddle.

Turn the opening raw edges to the inside. Press.

Fold over the top for the elastic casing.

Sew to the body portion at the top, making a casing for the elastic band.

Insert the elastic band through the casing.

Attach to each side of the hen saddle, stitch in place. If you are having trouble threading the elastic, attach a safety pin to one end to push through the casing.

Watch how to dress the hen in the hen saddle in this you tube video

<https://youtu.be/g3EvLpib5TI>

Step by step instructions with photos are found Timbercreekfarmer.com (use the search bar and the term 'hen saddle')

