



Toadstool Tote and Rain Bucket Hat

FUSE YOUR PLASTIC SHOPPING BAGS INTO FUN, RETRO-MODERN ACCESSORIES.

BY BETZ WHITE



The eco-savvy shopper brings her own reusable bags to the store, at least when she remembers them. But when life hands you lemons (or wasteful plastic bags), make lemonade — or in this case — toadstools!

The Toadstool Tote and coordinating Rain Bucket Hat are made entirely from plastic shopping bags. When layered and heated with an iron, plastic

bags fuse together to create a durable material similar in feel to Tyvek. Fused plastic can be easily cut and sewn into a variety of projects, such as the 2 demonstrated here.

Betz White is a designer, author, and “green” crafter who combines her whimsical color and design sense with a love for repurposing. Her latest book, *Sewing Green* (Stewart, Tabori & Chang) will be released in spring 2009. betzwhite.com

Photography by Garry McLeod



» MATERIALS

- » **Plastic shopping bags in 3 colors:**
 - 6–8 white with red** from Target
 - 2–3 brown** I got mine from Hershey.
 - 1 red** or whatever color you find attractive with the mix

NOTE: Feel free to come up with your own color combo from whatever you have available in the stash of bags lurking under your kitchen sink! Some ideas might be a navy blue Gap bag, a green Barnes and Noble bag, or the yellow bag your phone book was delivered in.

- » **Roll of parchment paper, 15" wide**
- » **Ribbon, 5/8" wide** You'll need 26" for the tote, 25" for the hat.
- » **Iron and ironing board**
- » **Scissors**
- » **Ruler**
- » **Pencil**
- » **Sewing machine**
- » **Thread**
- » **Waterproof craft glue** I used Fabri-Tac.
- » **Templates** available online at craftzine.com/09/fusedplastic

Prepare the Materials

1. GATHER YOUR BAGS.

Each project will use 4 plastic shopping bags fused into 1 large sheet. To create each project as shown, use 3 Target bags and 1 dark-colored bag, such as the brown Hershey's bag shown in Figure A on the following page.

2. OPEN AND LAYER YOUR BAGS.

With your hands, smooth out one bag at a time onto a work surface. Trim off the handles, cutting across the top of the bag with scissors. Next, trim off 1/4" along the bottom of the bag, opening up the pleats. Make 1 straight cut from the top edge of the bag to the bottom to create 1 large, single-layer rectangle. Repeat with the other 3 bags.

Layer all 4 bags, one on top of another. I placed the brown bag on the bottom and layered the print bags on top, arranging the Target prints to create an all-over pattern.

3. PROTECT YOUR EQUIPMENT.

Cover your ironing board with a sheet of parchment paper a few inches longer than your stack of cut plastic bags, about 42" long. Place the layered plastic bags on top, then cover them with another sheet of parchment. The bags will probably be a few inches wider than the parchment, so be sure to keep the plastic completely sandwiched between the paper when you're fusing it, by repositioning them both as needed.

4. IRON YOUR BAGS.

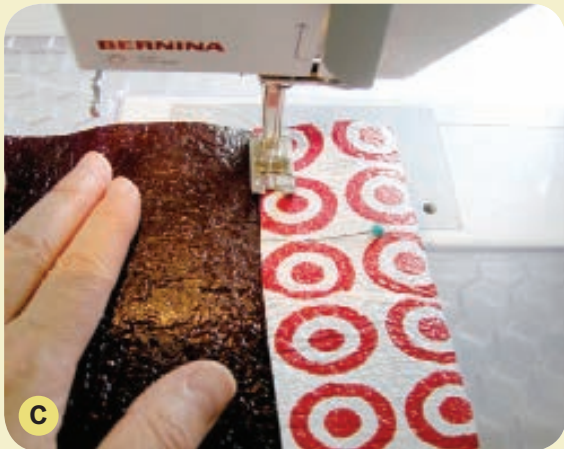
Before getting started, be sure your workspace is well ventilated. Some plastics may give off an odor, although I haven't experienced a problem with this.



A



B



C



D

Set your iron on the synthetics setting. Making sure not to touch the hot iron directly to the plastic, slowly iron on top of the parchment paper (Figure B). Keep the iron moving. As the plastic layers begin to fuse together, they'll shrink a bit. Be aware that any ink from the bags will transfer to the paper.

NOTE: I recommend reading through this step and then practicing on a few extra bags first. Experiment with the number of layers and iron temperatures, as this is not an exact science and your results will vary.

5. FUSE, CHECK, AND FUSE AGAIN.

After ironing one area, let it cool before lifting the paper. Check to see if the layers have started to melt together. You may want to increase the iron's temperature if you find that the plastic isn't fusing. Reposition the parchment paper and continue this process until you've fused the entire length of the stacked layers.

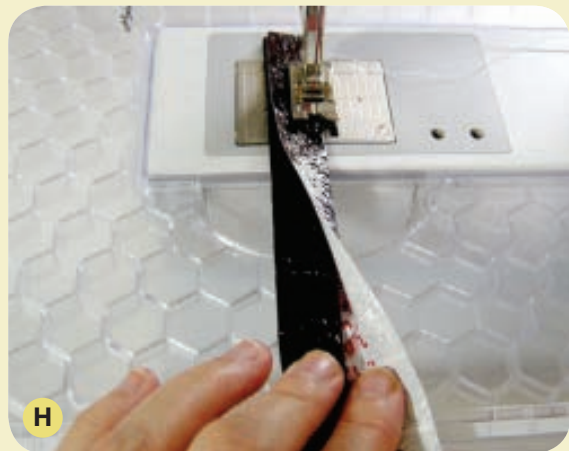
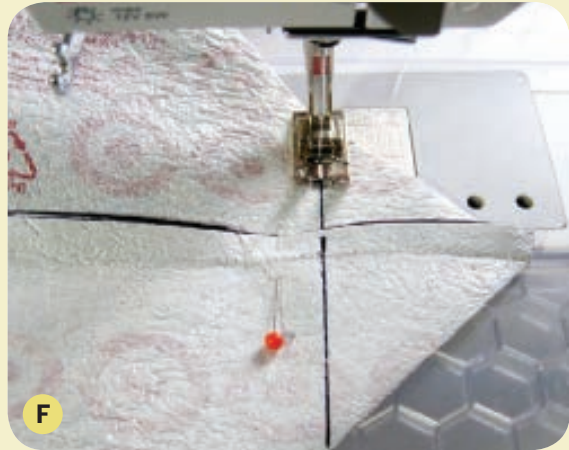
Turn the fused plastic sheet over, cover with parchment, and repeat the fusing process from the other side. The layers of your fully fused plastic

should feel like 1 piece. The trick is to go slowly — an iron that's too hot will result in fast-shrinking plastic that's rippled. Once fused, your plastic sheet should measure about 14"×36", big enough to make either the Toadstool Tote or the Rain Bucket Hat.

NOTE: To create the tote appliqués as shown, you'll also need to fuse a small amount of red plastic for the toadstool stems.

» SEWING TIPS

Stitching fused plastic with a machine is fairly easy, as long as the plastic hasn't become too thick or hard. Use a universal needle and a stitch length of 3–4. Practice stitching on a few scraps and adjust your machine's tension if necessary to achieve even stitches. Straight pins can be used to hold your work, but if you find that the plastic is too difficult to pin through, try using paper clips.



Toadstool Tote

Finished size: 11"×12"

Appliqués, such as these little toadstools, are quick and fun to do with fused plastic. Plastic shapes fuse easily to this tote, and there are no edges to unravel. Ribbon trim and a little stitching give it a clean, finished look.

1. MEASURE AND CUT.

Using a ruler, mark a rectangle on your fused bags measuring 13"×30". Cut it out with scissors.

2. HEM THE TOP EDGES.

Place the rectangle, right (brown) side up, onto your work surface. Starting at one of the short ends, fold up a 2" hem toward the right side. Make a crease with your fingers, then pin the hem. Topstitch $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the edge (Figure C). Repeat for the other short end of the rectangle.

3. CUT AND FUSE YOUR APPLIQUÉS.

Using the templates provided online, trace and cut

the large and small toadstool tops out of a scrap of Target-print fused plastic and the toadstool stems out of a second color (like the red I used).

As shown in Figure D, place the appliqué shapes onto the right side of the large rectangle, about 4" below the top of the hemmed edge. Cover with parchment paper and fuse into place. Keep the iron moving!

NOTE: Do not overheat, as this may cause additional shrinkage.

4. STITCH YOUR APPLIQUÉS.

To add grass below the toadstools, randomly straight-stitch forward and in reverse, pivoting at the top and bottom of the blades of grass (Figure E).

5. SEAM THE SIDES.

Fold the rectangle right sides together, matching hemmed edges at the top. Pin the sides and straight-stitch, using a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance, from top to fold. With a pen, mark the bottom fold near each corner to designate the bottom of the bag.



6. ADD BOX CORNERS.

Adding “box corners” gives the bag dimension, by adding a seam perpendicular to both the side seam and the bottom fold. With the bag inside out, align one side seam with the mark made on the bottom fold, creating a point at the corner. Measure 2" from the corner, mark a line perpendicular to the side seam, and pin in place. Sew on this line, creating a triangle (Figure F, previous page). Trim the triangle off after stitching. Repeat for the second corner.

7. TOPSTITCH THE RIBBON.

Turn the bag right side out. Place your ribbon along the edge of the opening’s hem, covering the stitch line, and pin. Topstitch 1 edge of the ribbon all the way around the bag (Figure G). Repeat for the other edge.

8. CREATE STRAPS.

Cut 2 straps, measuring 2"×13" each, from the remaining scraps. Fold 1 strap in thirds, lengthwise. Pin and topstitch the length of the strap 1/8" from each edge (Figure H). Repeat for the second strap.

9. STITCH ON THE STRAPS.

Measure and mark your strap placement on the front of your bag, 3" in from each side seam. Pin each end of 1 strap to these marks, overlapping the inside edge of the bag 1/2". Repeat for the second strap on the back of the bag, taking care not to twist the straps.

Topstitch the top edge of the bag, stitching through each strap end to secure it (Figure I). For extra reinforcement, stitch across the strap ends a second time. You’re done!

Rain Bucket Hat

Finished size: approximately 7"×12"×23" circumference (women’s M/L)

Back in the day of beauty parlor hairdos, ladies would keep plastic rain hats (or worse, a plastic bag!) in their pocketbooks should they encounter an unexpected downpour. Now you can keep your 'do dry and stylish with plastic bags — fused and stitched into this sassy Rain Bucket Hat!



1. CUT OUT PATTERN PIECES.

Using the pattern online, cut out 1 hat top, 2 hat sides (each cut on a fold), and 2 brims (each cut on a fold), from a large sheet of fused plastic (Figure J).

2. SEW THE SIDES TOGETHER.

Place the 2 hat sides right sides together, and seam the ends using a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance (Figure K). Press open the seam allowances with your fingers, and topstitch them open on either side of the seam line. Repeat for the second seam.

3. JOIN THE TOP TO THE SIDES.

Fold the hat top in half and mark the halfway points with pins. With right sides together, align these pins with the side seams of the sewn hat sides, along the top edge. Distribute the material evenly, pinning the top edge of the hat sides to the hat top (Figure L). Stitch using a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance.

4. SEW THE BRIM.

Place the 2 brim pieces right sides together, and sew the ends using a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance.

Finger-press open the seam allowances and topstitch them open on either side of the seam line. Repeat for the second seam.

Fold a $\frac{1}{4}$ " hem around the perimeter of the brim. Pin and topstitch $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the fold (Figure M).

5. JOIN THE BRIM TO THE SIDES.

With right sides together, align the side seams of the hat sides with the seams of the brim. Distribute the material evenly, pinning the bottom edge of the hat sides to the inside curve of the brim. Stitch using a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance.

Flip the brim down and finger-press the seam allowances up toward the inside of the hat. Edge-stitch the seam allowances to the hat sides, $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the seam.

6. ADD A BAND.

Apply waterproof glue around the seam where the hat sides meet the brim and press a length of ribbon (about 25") into place to create a hatband (Figure N). Allow the glue to dry. ✕