

Tutorial: Totes Big and Small

by [Mary](#) • January 14, 2011 • [98 Comments](#)



It seems like I'm always leaving the house with something...dinner for a friend, toys for my toddler, extra pair of shoes or who knows what. I usually grab a Bath and Body Works bag or a plastic mega-store bag but in the interest of looking less "mom-frump" (my term for how I often feel these days) I

thought a nice set of tote bags would help me look a bit more pulled together. Here's the first tutorial in the series on some different tote styles. Later I'll do a second one on a version with a pocket and different handle straps.

You can scale the size up or down for whatever purpose you have in mind. I make two sizes generally. One is a small tote the same size as one of the paper Bath and Body Works bags you get at their stores. It's great for a few toys, extra shoes, or even wrapping up a gift. The larger size is great for groceries, farmer's markets, extra toddler clothes/toys when going out for the day, as a beach bag, for a change of clothes for the gym or whatever else you can think of. It's about the same size as a paper grocery bag.

For this pattern you'll need an outer fabric and a liner fabric. I like at least one of the fabrics to be a heavier weight to help the bag hold its shape a little better. All seam allowances are 1/2" unless otherwise noted.



1. **Small size:** Fold your fabric in half and cut 15" squares from both your outer and liner fabrics with the center fold of the fabric at the bottom of the square. (If you do it this way, you'll be cutting through two layers of fabric and if you were to open it up, you would have a rectangle of 15" x 30".) At each of the bottom corners cut a rectangle 2 1/2" tall by 3" wide. If the fabric you're using doesn't allow you to have the center fold at the bottom you'll cut two rectangles from both fabrics 15" wide by 15 1/2" tall, and your corners will be 3" square.

Large size: Cut 20" squares from both your outer and liner fabrics with the center fold of the fabric at the bottom of the square. (If you do it this way, you'll be cutting through two layers of fabric and if you were to open it up, you would have a rectangle of 20" x 40".) At each of the bottom corners cut a rectangle 3" tall by 3 1/2" wide. If the fabric you're using doesn't allow you to have the center fold at the bottom you'll cut two rectangles 20" wide by 20 1/2" tall, and your corners will be 3 1/2" square.

2. For the outer fabric, put right sides together then stitch up the sides. Repeat with the liner fabric.

3. If you have a raw edge rather than a fold at the bottom, stitch that together.

4. Create the bottom of the bag by stitching the corners. See below for photo detail. You'll stitch all 4 corners (the 2 for the outer fabric and the 2 for the liner).



5. Your outer fabric and liner should now look like this and you can iron the seams flat.



6. Now flip the outer fabric right side out, then nestle the liner inside.



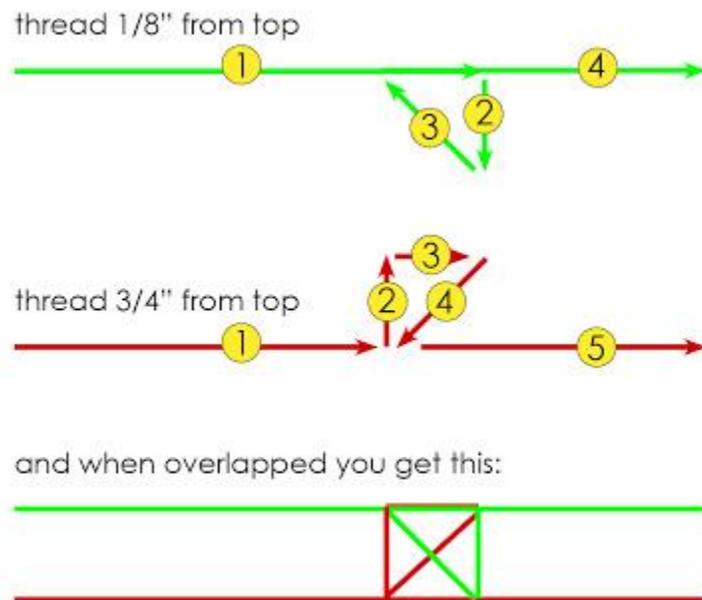
7. Now pin along the bottom of the bag on the front and back, but not the sides. Stitch along the edge of both layers with a 1/8" or 3/16" seam allowance.



8. Fold the raw edges of the top of your bag in 1/2" and pin. Also, tuck the straps about 1" down in between the two fabrics and pin in place. I used cotton webbing from JoAnns, and here's a comparable strap on [Amazon](#) (affiliate link). But you could also make them out of a coordinating fabric. For the small bag each strap is 14". For the large bag I wanted something I could carry by hand or over my shoulder so it's 26".



9. Now stitch around the top. Leave a 1/8" seam allowance at the top and then sew a second seam 3/4" down from the top. Then go back and put an X over each strap. Or if you don't want to have to go back and do the Xs later, see the diagram below for the exact steps I followed.



10. Optional: If you want your tote to have a boxy shape, pin the 4 sides going straight up from each corner then stitch 1/8" in from the edge through both layers like you did in step 9 around the top.



And now your project is complete!