Imogen

a hamblemouse pocket pattern

Modern pockets are rubbish, but our ancestors had it sussed

Tie-on pockets were a staple of female western clothing until the late 19th century. They were tied around the waist using linen or cotton tapes, usually worn under the skirts and were accessed via an opening in the side seam of the skirt. Women kept all kinds of useful things in them - books, money, sewing kits, gin and kittens to name a few.

As silhouettes got slimmer and skirts became less voluminous, tie-on pockets became obsolete. We've had rely on built-in pockets - and for the most part they're either non-existent or pretty useless.

Take a stand - become a Pocketeer

Reclaim a bit of history AND have a place to keep your stuff by sewing yourself a pocket. You don't need skirts with side openings. I wear my pockets over my jeans and now I feel underdressed without one.

This photo shows me modelling a large patchwork pocket I made using historically accurate materials and methods from around 1790. The Imogen pattern I've created is simpler and more streamlined but it's still going to change your life (or at the very least change the way you carry your phone/facemask/gin/kittens).

Before you get started

I've put the (one-page) pattern at the end of this guide. The method has plenty of pictures for you to refer to.

I've also repeated the method with all the images removed in case you prefer to save your ink and just print the text.

Print your pattern

I've designed the pattern to fit on a single sheet of A4 paper (US friends – it should also print out fine on letter size). To achieve this, I haven't included a seam allowance, so **you need to cut your fabric about 2cm (1") bigger all round**. This seems generous, but it allows for the extra sewing we're going to do to strengthen the seams.

One of the many beauties of pockets is that there are no absolutes in terms of size or shape. Use this pattern, but feel free to elongate or widen it if you prefer. As long as you cut all your pieces of fabric the same size and shape, you'll be fine - just make sure that your shape is symmetrical.

Choose your fabric

You're going to make the front of your pocket using two pieces of fabric (front piece and lining piece), and the back using just one piece. There are countless ways of making pockets, but I've chosen this design for my Imogen pocket because it's a fairly simple structure which is also strong, and a good choice if you're new to pocketeering.

You can use one, two, or three different types of fabric, but I recommend you only use non-stretch, and make sure that your back fabric isn't flimsy. You can save the really good-looking stuff for the front. The remnant of paisley in my example was begging to be used but only just big enough (look out for the scrappy top left corner!).

Gather your materials

Fabric: enough for three pieces, each approx. 32x25cm (13"x10")

Tape/ribbon: this is for the waist ties. I used linen tape, but you could use anything that's strong, flat, and at least 15mm (0.5") wide. You need enough length to go around you and tie in a comfortable bow/knot.

Thread: you'll be basting, sewing, and top stitching. Polyester or cotton thread is fine, and you could also use embroidery thread for the top stitching if you like. The top stitching will be visible and you might want to make it look pretty.

Needle (whatever size you're comfortable with)

Scissors

Pencil or chalk and a ruler or straight edge

Pins

Iron and ironing surface

I've written this pattern for hand sewing but there's no reason not to use a machine if you prefer.

Method

Step 1

Using the pattern as a guide, cut out three pieces of fabric identical in shape and size: one front, one lining, one back.

Cut your fabric about 2cm (1") bigger than the pattern outline.
Don't cut down the opening line **(A)**.

Step 2

Pin the front and lining pieces right sides together. Use your pencil/chalk and straight edge to mark the opening line **(A)** on the front piece. Baste the front and lining pieces together down this line.
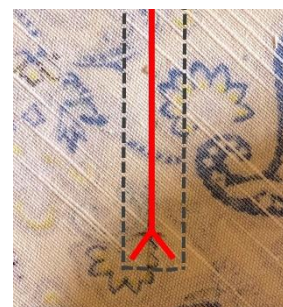

Step 3

Backstitch firmly **around** the line. Go down one side, around the bottom and back up. Leave about 0.5cm (⅜") between your stitches and line **(A)**.

Step 4

Remove the basting and carefully cut down line **(A)** between your backstitches, through both pieces of fabric. This will form the front opening. If you have room (don't go TOO close to your stitches), carefully snip in a Y shape at the bottom (see the red line in the image). If you're not sure you can do it safely, you're fine without the Y.

Step 5

Turn right sides out and press.

Your front piece will be flat and lovely, your lining might look a bit puckery round the bottom of the opening but don't worry – nobody will see it anyway!

Step 6

Lay the back and front pieces right sides together. You'll have a sandwich of back, front and lining pieces. Pin & baste through all three layers, all the way around the sides and bottom but leaving the top open.

Step 7

Backstitch firmly around the sides and bottom where you've basted.

Remove your basting and trim the raw edge as close to the stitching as you feel is safe. Around 0.5cm (⅜") is ideal. We're going to reinforce this seam in a later step by enclosing the raw edge, so the less of it you have, the better.

Step 8

Turn the pocket right sides out and press.

It's starting to come together!

Sew around the front opening to reinforce the edges. You could do a running stitch, blanket stitch, whatever you like. These stitches go through the front and lining pieces to add some strength to the seam. They'll be visible on the outside and inside of the pocket.

I used some embroidery thread here, but you can use any thread you like.

Here's an example of some blanket stitch:

A row of chain stitch (on the bottom):
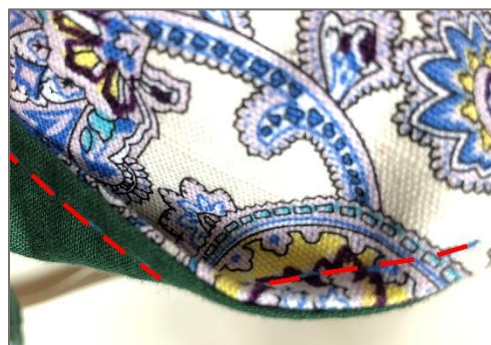

And some simple running stitch:

Top stitch around the sides and bottom of the pocket (see red line in the picture).

These stitches go through the front, lining and back pieces to add strength to the seam and hide the raw edge on the inside of the pocket. These stitches will be visible on the front and back of the pocket.

I used embroidery thread and a fairly large running stitch in my example. This is fine if you're happy with the strength of the original seam. If you want extra security or you're planning to carry rocks in your pocket (each to their own), use 'normal' thread and sew a firm backstitch.

Sew through all three layers straight across the top of the pocket, then trim straight across the raw edge.

These stitches need to be strong. They don't need to be pretty - see my extra-unpretty example!
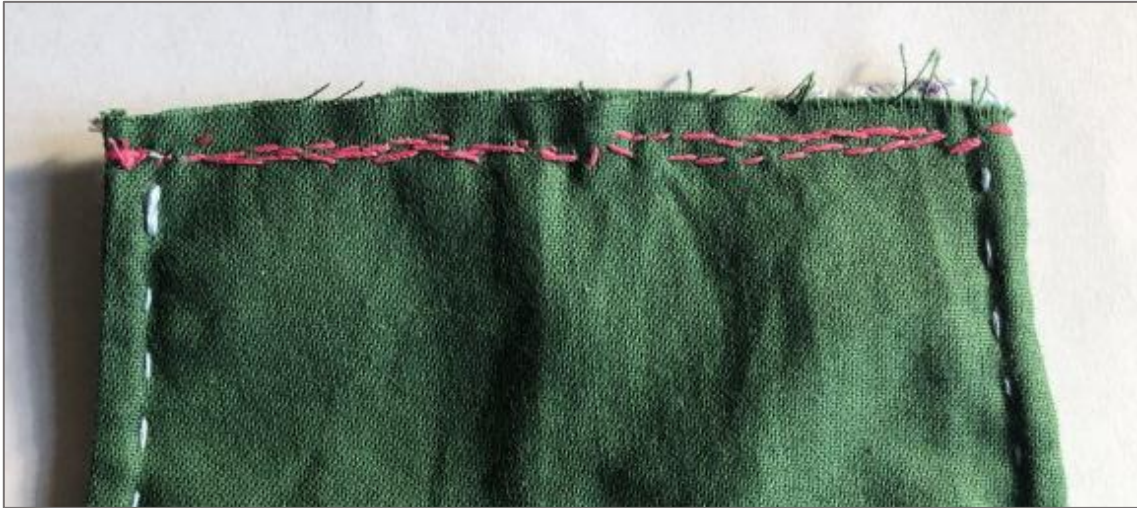
Step 12

Find the centre point of your tape. Lay the centre of your tape across the top back of the pocket, so it covers the stitches and the raw edge, with some of the tape sticking out over the top of the pocket. Pin it in place along the bottom edge:
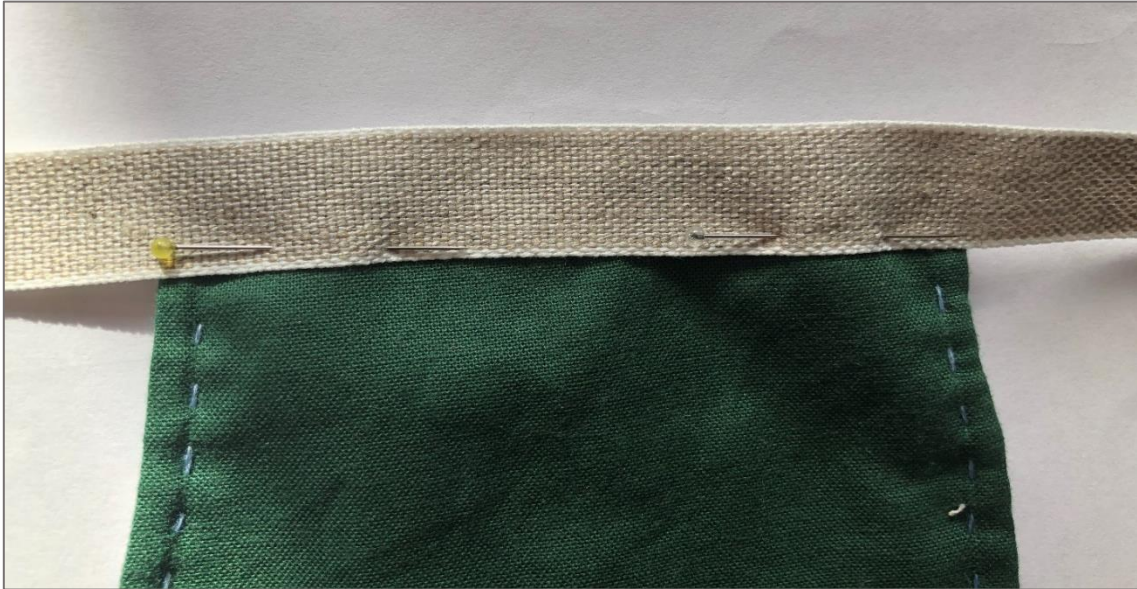
Step 13

Sew the **bottom** edge of the tape to the pocket. Sew through all the layers for strength.

Step 14

Fold the top of the pocket over from back to front, so the tape is now visible across the top of the pocket front. The edge of the tape that you've just sewn in place in Step 13 is now running across the top, and all the raw edges are covered. Pin the bottom edge of the tape in place (jaunty label optional).

Step 15

Sew the bottom edge of the tape to the front of the pocket. Do this by whip stitching the tape to the front and lining layers. You can stitch through the tape and all three pocket layers if you prefer, but you'll lose a bit of inside space at the top of the pocket, and your stitches will be visible at the back.

Step 16

Reinforce the tape by sewing from top to bottom at the corners. You can go through all the layers here for extra strength.

Step 17

Fold over and stitch the ends of the tape to stop them fraying.

Step 18

Give your beautiful pocket a final press, and you've finished!

Method (no images)

Step 1

Using the pattern as a guide, cut out three pieces of fabric identical in shape and size: one front, one lining, one back.

Cut your fabric about 2cm (1") bigger than the pattern outline.
Don't cut down the opening line **(A)**

Step 2

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Step 3

Backstitch firmly **around** the line. Go down one side, around the bottom and back up. Leave about 0.5cm (⅜") between your stitches and line **(A)**

Step 4

Remove the basting and carefully cut down line **(A)** between your backstitches, through both pieces of fabric. This will form the front opening. If you have room (don't go TOO close to your stitches), carefully snip in a Y shape at the bottom. If you're not sure you can do it safely, you're fine without the Y.

Step 5

Turn right sides out and press.

Your front piece will be flat and lovely, your lining might look a bit puckery round the bottom of the opening but don't worry – nobody will see it anyway!

Step 6

Lay the back and front pieces right sides together. You'll have a sandwich of back, front and lining pieces. Pin & baste through all three layers, all the way around the sides and bottom but leaving the top open.

Step 7

Backstitch firmly around the sides and bottom where you've basted.

Remove your basting and trim the raw edge as close to the stitching as you feel is safe. Around 0.5cm (⅜") is ideal. We're going to reinforce this seam in a later step by enclosing the raw edge, so the less of it you have, the better.

Step 8

Turn the pocket right sides out and press. It's starting to come together!

Step 9

Sew around the front opening to reinforce the edges. You could do a running stitch, blanket stitch, whatever you like. These stitches go through the front and lining pieces to add some strength to the seam. They'll be visible on the outside and inside of the pocket.

Step 10

Top stitch around the sides and bottom of the pocket. These stitches go through the front, lining and back pieces to add strength to the seam and hide the raw edge on the inside of the pocket. These stitches will be visible on the front and back of the pocket.

I used embroidery thread and a fairly large running stitch in my example. This is fine if you're happy with the strength of the original seam. If you want extra security or you're planning to carry rocks in your pocket (each to their own), use 'normal' thread and sew a firm backstitch.

Step 11

Sew through all three layers straight across the top of the pocket, then trim straight across the raw edge. These stitches need to be strong. They don't need to be pretty – no one will ever see them.

Step 12

Find the centre point of your tape. Lay the centre of your tape across the top back of the pocket, so it covers the stitches and the raw edge, with some of the tape sticking out over the top of the pocket. Pin it in place along the bottom edge.

Step 13

Sew the **bottom** edge of the tape to the pocket. Sew through all the layers for strength.

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Fold the top of the pocket over from back to front, so the tape is now visible across the top of the pocket front. The edge of the tape that you've just sewn in place in Step 13 is now running across the top, and all the raw edges are covered. Pin the bottom edge of the tape in place.

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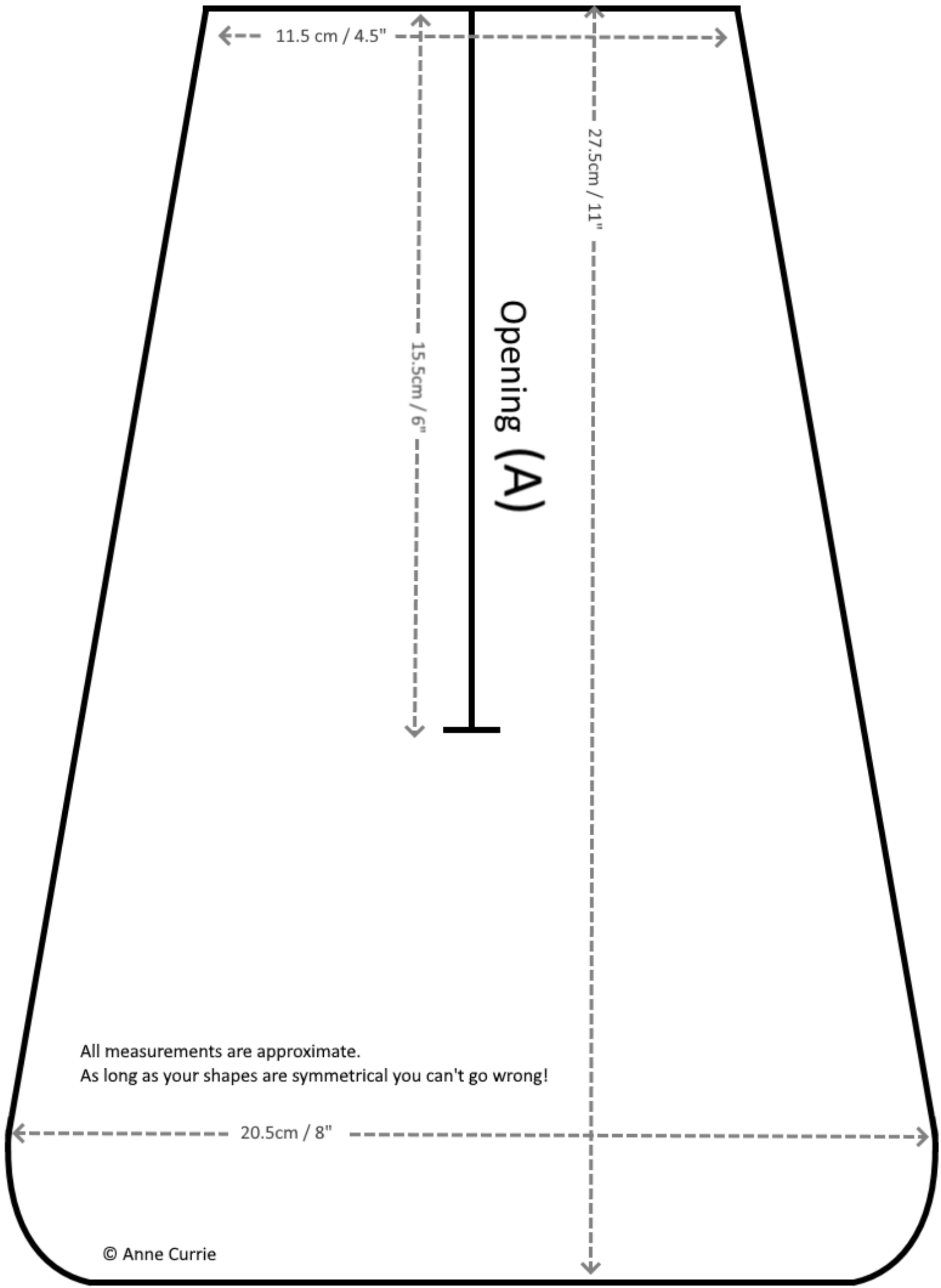
Step 16

Reinforce the tape by sewing from top to bottom at the corners. You can go through all the layers here for extra strength.

Step 17

Fold over and stitch the ends of the tape to stop them fraying.

Step 18

Give your beautiful pocket a final press, and you've finished!

11.5 cm / 4.5"

27.5cm / 11"

15.5cm / 6"

Opening (A)

All measurements are approximate.
As long as your shapes are symmetrical you can't go wrong!

20.5cm / 8"

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