

Pickle Project, Winter 2020: Portable Utensil Sets



During Covid times, supporting local eateries often means getting take-out. All that take-out produces a LOT of trash! While the containers are harder to avoid, I've been carrying my own utensils and cloth napkin, so that at least I can save some napkins and plastic silverware. And honestly, my cloth napkin and collapsible utensils are much nicer to eat with than the plastic stuff anyway.



There are tons of options out there for the contents of these sets: folding spoons and forks, small utensils for children or for tea/espresso, camping sporks, screw-together chopsticks, telescoping straws, flexible silicone straws, and even regular full-sized cutlery. And most of these are available in packages with several,

so you can put together sets for everyone on your list. A quick Amazon search will overwhelm you with choices!



Personally, I go with a cloth napkin, a folding spoon, and screw-together chopsticks, because I find the chopsticks easier to wipe clean on the go than a fork and the whole package fits in my pocket.



As always with these projects, I'll provide the dimensions I used and a description of how I arrived at those sizes, but these rolls are very easy to modify to suit your needs.

They're pretty basic, but I did use three different methods for finishing raw edges and different ways of attaching the pockets and constructing the flap. There are endless variations on how to do this, but I hope this at least gives you some inspiration!

Materials

Since you're carrying around utensils you eat with and then put back in the roll when you're done, it's important to choose materials that are easily washable and will dry reasonably quickly. Cotton is the obvious choice. I like to use a sturdy-ish material on the outside.

For these examples, I used some scraps of denim and some quilting cotton I had left over from making face masks. Sources for good fabrics could be old jackets or jeans, cotton shirts, sheets or pillow cases, table cloths, tote bags, etc. Quilting cotton is also probably the easiest type of fabric to buy, comes with a TON of great prints, and because it's so common you probably know someone who has scraps of it kicking around if you ask.

Remember that this is an item that will need to get washed, so it's a good idea to wash and dry all materials before starting, using the hottest settings that will be used when they're finished. Also, it's really best to iron the fabric so it's flat when you start cutting!

Before you start: Measuring the utensils that will go into the kit

This is fairly obvious, but a few things to consider:

- Things with rubberized or silicone handles or flexible straws don't slide that easily, so they probably will need wider slots. Experiment with your fabric to know for sure.
- Don't forget that silverware also has depth - spoons curve, handles have thickness, etc. So plan for enough width to get items in and out easily. You probably want to put the business ends of your silverware into the pockets so you can pull them out by the handles.
- Smaller items can slide out the side of a roll like this depending on how deep the pocket goes, and items may not all be the same height. If you plan for the napkin part to wrap around the outside, that will pad everything else and keep anything from slipping out.
- Napkins are floppy and not easy to get into a long skinny pocket, even if they fit. So you probably want to think about how it will be to put the napkin away after use when you make the napkin pocket.

I laid out these items on top of a quilting rule so you can see their dimensions. In case you have ordered similar items but don't have them yet, I think these are probably close enough to common sizes for planning purposes (but if you aren't sure, a little extra space doesn't hurt!).

Folding silicone straw; screw-apart chopsticks; folding spoon:



Regular dinner table-sized silverware; stainless steel straw; regular chopsticks; little specialty fork; little espresso spoon:



I made these three options with three different methods of constructing them and dealing with the raw edges on the fabrics.

The napkins are pretty straightforward; just a 9"x12" rectangle with a hem or edge binding, plus a loop to make it easy to hang them to dry wherever you are, such as by looping them onto a strap on the outside of your bag. I make them a good bit smaller than a typical cloth dinner napkin, so they're less bulky and easier

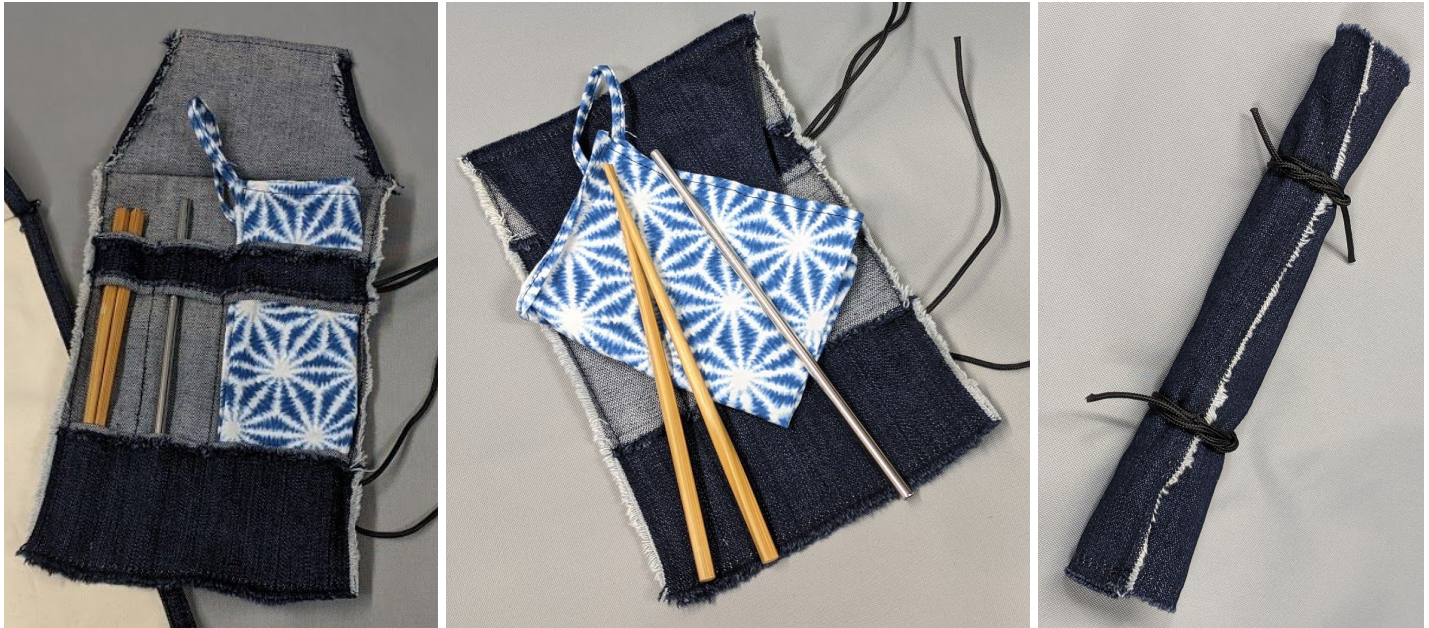
to wash and hang dry when you're not at home. I make the loop a couple of inches long. Again, quilting cotton is great for this because it's lightweight and soft and comes in many different prints.

Note:

This tutorial and other projects are provided for free for your personal use. Please do not sell them without permission. If you enjoyed this project, I hope you'll consider making a donation to the League of American Bicyclists, MassBike, American Bicycle Education Association, or your local bicycle advocacy organization.

Version 1, the really easy ultra basic:

The first and most basic is this one, which holds just a napkin, normal chopsticks, and a stainless steel straw; is held shut with simple ties; and is made from only denim and saves steps by using the raggy denim edges as a trendy design element:



The straw and the chopsticks are around 9" long, but they aren't very thick. The outer panel needs to be a little longer than those items, with a little extra length to accommodate seams at the top and bottom. A 1-1.5" wide slot for each is plenty roomy. The napkin needs more room or it will be a pain to put back. The two-part pocket (i.e, short pocket down at the bottom with a narrow strip higher up) will hold the long skinny things well, while still making it easy to use the same pieces in the same configuration to put a napkin into.

So, here are the dimensions I used:

- Main outside panel: 10 ¼" high x 6 ½" wide
- Upper half of the pockets: 2" x 6 ½"
- Bottom half of pockets: 3 ½" x 6 ½"
- Upper flap: 5" x 6 ½" with two of the short sides cut off at an angle (so that the flap tapers in and doesn't stick out when the roll is rolled up)

With denim, you get a raggier raggy edge if you rip the fabric rather than cutting, so that's what I did except on the angled edges. The first step was to hem the raw edges on the pocket parts. This keeps the fringy bits where they show, but where they're less likely to get messy; and it makes a firmer and more finished-looking edge.



Assembly is pretty straightforward: Lay the two pocket parts in their places and sew all the way around the edges, including the edges of the fabric where there are no pockets. This is to keep the fabric from fraying more than you want it to. I sewed at about $\frac{3}{8}$ " from the edge of the fringe; you'll want to experiment and see what works to stabilize the edge and hold things together. I also always backtack (sew back and forth) a couple of times at the edges of pockets to reinforce those places that will get a little more stress. Then the flap goes across the top. You can see that I hadn't tapered the sides yet:



To taper the sides of the top flap, I folded the piece in half and cut the taper so both sides would match. Then folded over the edges and sewed them *without* fraying them first. That's because with the tapered edge, you're fraying the edges on the bias and it's a little different. But once they're sewn down, you can pull at the threads until they stop at the stitching; then trim the excess.

Next, I sewed lines of stitching to separate the three pockets, and lastly I sewed cords onto the edge on the napkin side so the roll can be tied shut.



Version 2, the full size dinnerware picnic roll:

This version requires the largest seam allowances and results in a roll that's longer than its contents by that amount. I made it to hold a large full-size fork, knife, and spoon; plus a metal straw and a napkin, for those who don't want to compromise on cutlery! You could even splurge on an extra large napkin here!

Again, the outside is denim. The inside is a rather stiff, very fine unbleached cotton canvas, which gives the whole roll a more substantial feel.

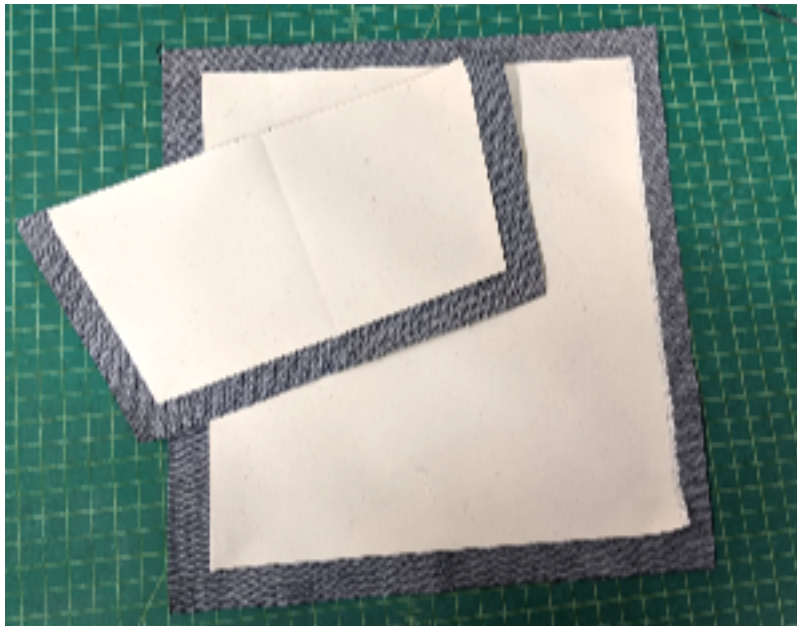


This canvas makes really nice crisp creases, so I made the pockets by folding the fabric in half and using the fold as the edge of the pocket - no hemming required.

The wider contrasting edges of the roll are formed by hemming the denim over the edges of the white fabric. So I measured and cut the white fabric first, to the following dimensions:

- Backing panel: 11" high x 10" wide
- Silverware pocket: 14" high x 6.5" wide; folded over the long way
- Napkin pocket: 11" high x 7" wide; folded over the short way
- Top flap: 5" high x 10" wide, with two sides cut at an angle

Next I cut the two denim pieces for the backing and the flap by measuring $\frac{3}{4}$ " larger around all sides of the backing and around all but the long side of the flap:



I used an iron to create a crisp hem around the edges, folding the denim over the white interior, although it isn't sewn down at this point:



The silverware pocket actually gets sewn to the white canvas first, before anything else gets assembled, as shown. This is because the last slot for the straw is skinny, and this will hide the raw edge without as many seams that show on the outside.

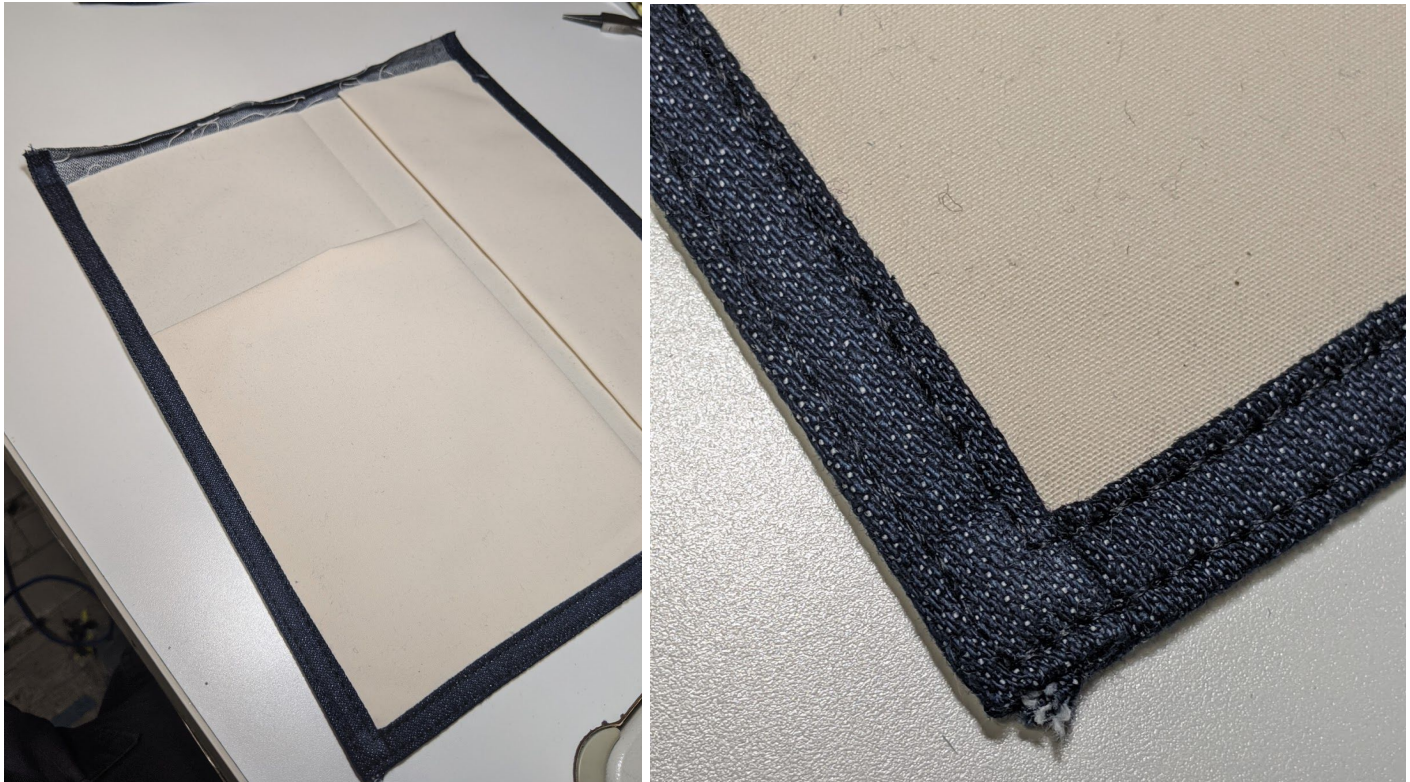
Mark the location for the raw edge, then sew it down at about $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance with the outside of the pocket folded back over the napkin area. Then fold it back where it will end up. This canvas creases easily, so I just made a crease in the back panel to show me where to line up the raw edge.

Lay the napkin pocket on the righthand side. The napkin pocket opens on the long side, for a long and shallow pocket that's easy to put the napkin into.



Next, lay the white canvas with the pockets in place onto the denim backing. The hem has been pressed already, so it should form a binding about $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide over the edges of the canvas.

Stitch the hem down around three sides, leaving the top edge un-hemmed. I made two lines of stitching, one close to the inside edge and one close to the outside edge, which gives a nice finished look and tacks down all the corners neatly.



One note about this step, if you're using a thicker fabric like denim: The bulk of the fabric can make the layers drift apart as you sew, because the feed dogs pull the bottom through and the foot pushes the top forward. A nifty trick for avoiding this is to use a strip of some stiffer material on top of the material to be sewn. The needle stitches along the side of the strip and the foot rests on top of it. In this case I used a strip of plastic I cut from some plastic packaging or other.



Next, place the top flap in position and sew the top hem with the same two lines of stitching as the other sides, with a backtack at each end to secure the stitching.



I layed the silverware items out just to verify the locations of the stitching dividing the pockets, and marked those spots with chalk:





And then stitched the dividers between slots. Finally, I sewed a strap with a buckle onto the outside by backtacking over the same location as one of the dividing slots, so that it wouldn't interfere with the pockets. I recommend rolling the roll up with the contents inside to determine the location and length of this strap, although in this case the length is adjustable. In the photo below you can see where I marked the location with chalk on the strap and on the roll.



Version 3, The Pocket Essentials:

This is the version I find most useful for just keeping with you all the time. It holds folding chopsticks, a folding spoon, and a napkin. That flexible silicone straw can go in there too, but I don't like the one I have so I don't use it. For this one, the outside is still denim but the inside is made of contrasting colors of quilting cotton that coordinates with the napkin. But there are all sorts of re-used materials that would work great here too!

For this version, the flap is constructed differently. It's a separate piece on the inside, but not on the outside. Like in Version 2, the pockets are folded over so that the top edge is a neat fold.

So the pieces I cut are as follows:

- Outside main panel: 7" wide x 9 ¼" high
- Flap, lining only: 7" x 3 ¼"
- Backing panel, lining only: 7" x 6"
- Napkin pocket: 5" x 6" (folded in half to be 2.5" x 6")
- Utensil pocket: 4 ½" x 8" (folded in half the long way)

When the pieces are laid out into their rough configuration, here's how they look:



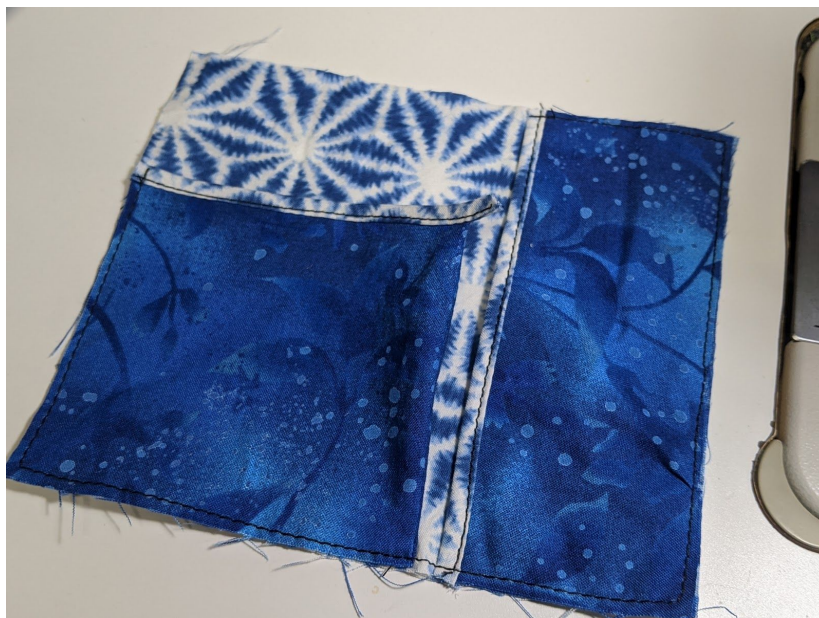
The napkin pocket will eventually be sewn into seams on the three sides that don't have a fold, but the utensil pocket has an exposed raw edge. So fold the utensil pocket in half with the **right sides together**, and stitch that short side closed with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance. Then clip the corner at the folded end, turn it right side out and crease or press the seam so it lies flat.



This next step is really optional since these edges are folded over, but since the fabric is light I bound the edges with strips of the contrasting color. It does make the edges a little crisper. With heavier or stiffer fabric it might be too much, but with lightweight material it's nice. You don't need to worry about cutting these strips on the bias; straight to the grain is fine, since these are not curved edges. I left a little tail of the binding sticking off the end next to the seam so that I can neatly tuck it under when I sew the pockets down. If you cut it at an angle, the edges won't fray.



Now the pockets need to be assembled to the backing, but only of the lining - the outside piece comes later. Put the pockets into position and sew around all sides. Don't worry about that unattached corner of the utensil pocket, it will get sewn down later.



Now comes the assembly with the outside, and the reason why the flap is separate from the body on the lining. Put the inside pieces and the flap piece on top of the main outside panel with right sides together. The cut edge of the flap lining and the backing panel lining should meet up. Then sew around all sides, and clip all the corners.



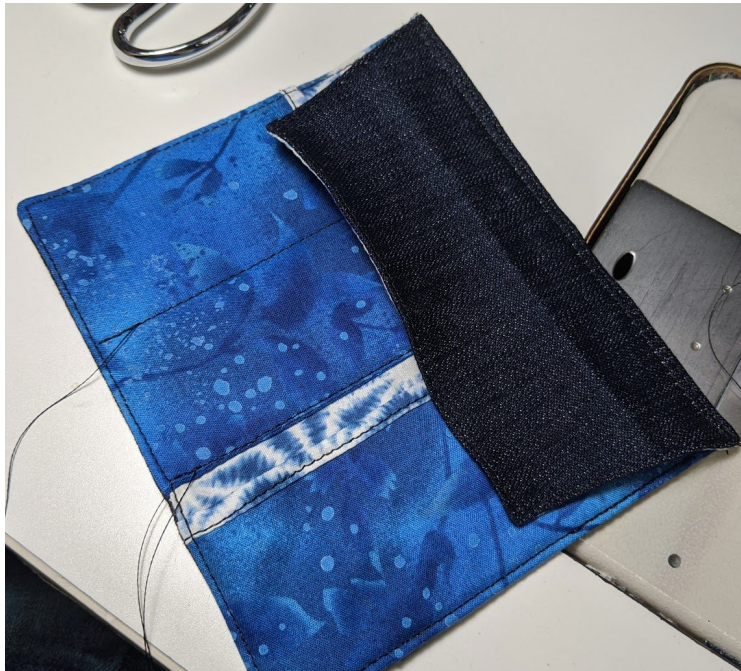
Turn the piece right side out through that gap between the lining flap and the lining body, and press or flatten all the edges. Then topstitch all around the edge at around $\frac{1}{8}$ " or maybe a little less. (Photo before topstitching or pressing)



Now the hanging edge of that utensil pocket gets sewn down. With the edge having been pressed before, it should be nice and crisp and you should be able to topstitch really close to the edge. Remember to tuck that binding edge under when you get to the top, and backtack a few times to keep it secure. Then sew another line of stitching dividing that utensil pocket into two slots. In this case, I continued the stitching for the slots and for the edge of the pocket all the way to the top edge of the backing piece instead of stopping at the top edge of the pockets, but that's a matter of preference.



Now the flap can fold down and cover the raw edges of the lining fabric. Fold carefully and if the pieces are wrinkled, it's a good idea to press to make sure the edges don't slip out. Topstitch at about $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the folded edge, backtacking on both ends. That keeps the flap folded down and the raw edges of the lining neatly covered. (And trim those thread ends, too! ;))



The last step is to put a strap around the outside. I made this one out of a strip of denim and a Paracord buckle, measured by putting the contents into the roll and rolling it up.



Like before, the strap is backtacked on top of the stitching for the pocket. The utensils get rolled into the middle with the napkin around the outside.



Shown below with teeny spoon and fork, just because; and with chopsticks, folding spoon, and that bendy straw I don't actually use:



If you have any questions about methods, materials, or anything else, please send me a note at store@dillpicklegear.com or find Dill Pickle Gear on social media. I'd love to see your creations, and hear your ideas for future Pickle Projects!

This tutorial and other projects are provided for free for your personal use. Please do not sell them without permission. If you enjoyed this project, I hope you'll consider making a donation to the League of American Bicyclists, MassBike, American Bicycle Education Association, or your local bicycle advocacy organization.

For more projects and tutorials, visit www.dillpicklegear.com/projects.

