



Mimi's Handbook for Dollmakers

Fingers

by Gloria J. "Mimi" Winer

Introduction

Making good fingers is an art in itself. There are tricks to sewing the fingers, tricks to trimming the seams, tricks to turning the fingers, and tricks to stuffing the fingers. (It is almost as easy, if not easier, to wire the fingers than to stuff them.) Here are the instructions that you will find in some of my patterns to help you.

Sewing the Fingers

* Hint

If your machine has a feature that makes it stop with the needle down, use it — it will help you turn your work accurately without creating a glitch.

To sew the fingers, follow these instructions:

- Make a template of the arm and hand.
- Trace around the template with the purple air-soluble marker.
- Make the lines between the fingers just a tiny bit deeper. Fingers should be as long as the palm of the hand.
- **Stitch before you cut.**
- **Stitch very slowly and carefully around the fingers. Keep stitches just inside the purple marking. There should be at least two tiny stitches between each finger.**
- **Pivot every 2 or 3 stitches as you round the finger tips. (To pivot, lift pressure foot, with the needle down and turn the fabric slightly, put pressure foot down and stitch another couple of stitches and repeat until you have rounded the finger.)**
- **When you get to the area between the fingers, pull fabric toward you slightly so you can stitch several times in the same place. You want a minimum of two stitches between each finger. By not allowing the fabric to move you can get several stitches in the same space.**

Trimming the Seams

To trim the seams, follow these instructions:

- Cut out the arm and hand leaving a 1/8-inch seam allowance. (Leave more — 1/4-inch — at the opening.) Do not cut between the fingers yet.
- Be very careful cutting out the fingers. Follow the directions exactly.
- Cut on the side that does NOT have purple marks, it's easier to see the stitches.
- With small sharp scissors, slice between fingers as close to the center of the narrow space as possible. Snip very close to the stitches between the fingers or it will not turn properly. Trim around the tips of the fingers. The seam allowance will be very narrow, not much more than 1/32-inch.

Turning the Finger

I recommend using a hemostat for turning fingers. It's faster and the risk of damage to the fabric is less than with some of the other turning tools on the market. I use a 3" straight hemostat or a very small alligator clamp.

❖ Hint

When you are looking for hemostats, look for the longest, thinnest jaws you can find. Even in the same box of hemostats some of the jaws are thinner than others.

To turn the fingers, follow these instructions:

- Fold the arm down into a cuff, like a glove.
- While holding one cloth finger between your thumb and forefinger, gently insert jaws of a hemostat into the finger.
- Open the jaws slightly and use your fingernail to push a tiny bit of the seam allowance at the tip of the finger into the jaws.
- Lock the jaws. Dampen your own thumb and forefinger, (I lick them) then, protecting the cloth finger by holding between your damp thumb and forefinger, gently twist jaws of hemostat until finger is turned into palm.
- Turn all fingers this way.
- Now, grasp any finger with the jaws of the hemostat, pull on the cuff, and presto, the hand and arm is right side out.

- Close the jaws of the hemostat and gently push the end of each finger to spread the seams out. Protect the muslin finger while pushing by holding it between your thumb and forefinger.

I bet you thought it would be more difficult than that.

❖ Hint

- If you poke a hole in the finger, all is not lost, but you will have to wire the finger to recover it. Stuff with chenille stems or hand armature as explained later. When you're finished, spread a little white glue over the tear and smooth it. It hardly shows at all.
- If you want to use Fray Check for more strength, apply it after you turn the fingers. If you apply it before you turn the fingers, you must turn them while it is still wet or they will become too stiff to turn.

Stuffing the Fingers

If you are not ready to try wiring the fingers, or if you can't find chenille stems, you can stuff the fingers by following these instructions:

- Fold the arm down to form a cuff like a glove so that it is easy to work with the fingers.
- Wrap a small amount of stuffing around the small screwdriver stuffing tool like a cotton swab (Q Tip®).
- Slip the end of the tool into a finger.
- Pinch the finger to hold the stuffing in place while you pull the tool out.
- To add a knuckle, wrap a tiny bit of stuffing on the tool and slip it under the skin to the right place. Pinch the finger again and pull out the tool.

❖ Hints

- Look at your own hands if you are not sure where to put the knuckle.
- Stuff the hand lightly so that it doesn't get too thick.
- Stuff the wrist so that it is quite firm.

Wiring the Fingers

It may be easier to wire the fingers than to stuff them. Wire the fingers by following these instructions:

- Fold the arm down to form a cuff, like a glove, so that it is easy to work with the fingers.
- Using small wire cutters, craft scissors or kitchen shears, cut chenille stems into thirds.
- Use a small needle nosed pliers or your hemostats to bend the wires up approximately 1/16 inch on each end of each piece of chenille. Continue bending and press the end back into the chenille so you can't feel the sharp ends. This prevents sharp ends from puncturing the doll's skin.
- Bend each chenille piece in half. Don't pinch the bend too tight.
- Put a bent stem into the jaws of the hemostat lengthwise, with the rounded tip up. Grasp the finger to be stuffed between your thumb and forefinger and gently slip the chenille stem all the way to the end of the finger.



- Holding the tip of the wire inside the finger with your own fingers, unlock the hemostat and remove it.
- Stuff each finger this way.
- After all fingers and thumbs are wired, place a very small amount of fiberfill (about the size of a quarter, and not much thicker), into the palm of the hand. Before removing the hemostat, spread the stuffing by working the jaws back and forth a few times. Do not make the palm too fat.
- Turn hand over and do the same to the back of the hand.

- The thumb and perhaps the fingers may need a little more stuffing. Use the stuffing tool to add stuffing to fingers. Wrap a little stuffing on the tip and slide it under the skin to get the stuffing in the right place.
- To add a knuckle, wrap a tiny bit of stuffing on the tool and slip it under the skin to the right place. Pinch the finger again and pull out the tool.

Finishing Wired Hands

You may wish to wrap the ends of the chenille stems all together with white floral tape before you begin stuffing the arm.

- Grasp the back (wrist end) of the palm of the hand in the hemostats to keep the chenille stems in place. The hemostat will prevent the wires from being pulled out while you wrap the wires.
- Pull the arm fabric down in a cuff to allow access to the wrist area.
- Twist the chenille stems together above the wrist.
- Wrap with white floral tape, stretching it as you go to activate the adhesive.