The contents of this page are compliments of the exhaustive efforts of Miss Lauren S.

Essential Beginner’s Outfit:

**Shift:** Essential 18th century ladies’ underwear.  White (upper or middling class) or off-white (lower class) linen, 3/4 sleeves (drawstring or gathered to a narrow cuff), drawstring or hemmed neckline, underarm and side gussets, mid-calf length.

Sources: 18th Century Gowns, Rancocas Merchant, Silly Sisters

Patterns:  Kannik’s Korner (may want to make sleeve fuller, widen neck, add cuffs if desired)

**Petticoats/Skirt:** At least 1 (2 is preferred); linen, cotton, fustian, or worsted or flannel wool (see notes below on fabric for appropriate colors); drawstring or pleated waist (pleated lays better); linen or cotton tape waistband; ankle-length to several inches above the ankle. Hem circumference can be between 90” and 120”.

Sources: 18th Century Gowns, Rancocas Merchant, Silly Sisters, Jas Townsend- but very easy to make yourself

Patterns: unnecessary, as it is basically two or more rectangles sewn together. Good directions ay be found at or

**Shortgown/Bedgown:**  Similar in cut to a bathrobe or loose-fitting jacket, to be worn around the house or while working outdoors.  Linen, wool, or cotton (see below for colors), pinned and held closed by the apron.  Current research suggests shortgowns were more prominent than bedgowns in the middle colonies after 1770.

Sources: Rancocas Merchant (there are others but Sue’s are the nicest and best-priced in my opinion)

Patterns: JP Ryan, Kannik’s Korner, Mill Farm

**Apron:**  Keeps your clothes clean, and great for wiping your hands on.  Linen is best for absorbency, wool is the most flame resistant, cotton not recommended except for a dress apron.  White, striped, checked, or solid colors all appropriate (see notes on colors below). Black aprons also seen among German women, and non-German women imitating the fashion. Bibbed aprons also appropriate for a German impression, but only if it is black (any other color of bibbed apron is only appropriate for French impressions).

Sources: Jas Townsend, Rancocas Merchant- but very easy to make

Patterns: Mill Farm, directions also found here  and in Rural Pennsylvania Clothing and Tidings from the 18th Century

**Cap:** Covers hair to keep it clean and hide modern hairstyles.  White cotton or linen.  No mobcaps (basically a gathered circle of fabric resembling a shower cap- not 18th century appropriate)!   You may have to try a few before you find one that fits well and looks flattering.

Sources:  Smoke and Fire, Smiling Fox Forge, Rancocas Merchant, Jas Townsend

Patterns:  Mill Farm, JP Ryan, Kannik;s Korner

**A Full Wardrobe:**

 One you have procured the essential items above, you can expand your kit with the following items:

**Kerchief/Modesty Piece:**A square or triangle of linen, cotton, or silk, usually around 30”,  to be worn over the open bosom created by 18th century styles, both for modesty and for warmth. White, striped, checked, and solid colors are all appropriate. May be referred to as a fichu by some reenactors or sutlers, but the term is not found in any 18th century English sources.

Sources:  Rancocas Merchant, Smiling Fox Forge, Smoke and Fire, Scarlet Scarab- or you could just hem one yourself.

**Stockings:**  Over the knee or mid-thigh length, wool or cotton (or silk for upper class impressions).  Unisex.  White was common, as well as blue, grey, brown, and green.  Most colors offered by sutlers are acceptable.

Sources:  Jas Townsend, Smiling Fox Forge, Smoke and Fire, Scarlet Scarab- if they sell 18th century clothes, chances are they sell stockings.

**Garters:**A must for holding up stockings, secured below the knee (if you do it above the knee they will fall down).  Leather garters with buckles only appropriate for a man’s impression- women generally used ribbon or tape wrapped several times around the leg and tied in a knot or bow.

Sources:  Wm booth Draper and Burnley and Trowbridge both sell ribbon and tape, and Rancocas Merchant also sells hand-woven tape.

**Hat:**  Good for keeping the sun out of your eyes and preventing sunburn.  Low crown, wide brim, plain straw or wool(you can buy a blank and trim it yourself or get one that is already trimmed). Tied under the chin or at the nape of the neck.  Not to be tied so that the sides bend all the way down to the sides of your face, creating a tunnel- that is a 19th century fashion.  If you trim it yourself, use silk or cotton ribbon. Fancier hats may be made of silk or silk-covered straw.

Sources:  Smoke and Fire, Smiling Fox Forge, 18th Century Gowns

Trimmings: Wm Booth Draper or Burnley and Trowbridge

**Pockets:** Worn as a separate garment, tied around the waist under the top petticoat.  May be worn singly or in pairs.  Good for holding small items or hiding modern items (phone, keys, etc.).  Linen or cotton bound with tape, with tape ties.

          Sources:  Smoke and Fire, Smiling Fox Forge, Rancocas Merchant, Jas Townsend

          Patterns:  Mill Farm, Kannik’s Korner, JP Ryan

**Shoes:**  Most expensive item after stays/jumps, and probably the last thing you’ll buy.  Black leather. Rough out for poor impressions, smooth out for middling and upper class impressions.  Can be tied or buckled shut- buckles usually sold separately.

Sources:  Burnley and Trowbridge, Flying Canoe, Fugawee

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NOTE:  It is often easier and more economical to purchase modern shoes that will pass for period shoes.  These can be difficult to find but are worth the search.  Monk strap shoes and clogs work well.  However, do not attempt to convert modern shoes to period-appropriate ones.  It’s more work than it’s worth, and you’d be better off saving up for reproduction shoes.

**Stays/Jumps:** A MUST if you intend to wear a gown, jacket, or caraco- and get the stays FIRST.  Any gown or jacket must be fitted to you while you are in your stays, otherwise it will not fit properly.  Creates a flat front and a smooth, inverted cone shape to the torso while supporting the bust and back.  Can be fully boned or partially/half-boned, with straps or strapless.  Ideally should be made to your specific measurements, not from pre-made sizes.  Probably the most expensive item you will own.  “Jumps” may refer to a garment with no boning- make sure you get one that is at least partially boned.

Sources:  18th Century Gowns, Silly Sisters, Ghost Forge (though I’ve heard they can take a while to get back to you), Village Green Clothier, Reconstructing History

Patterns:  JP Ryan, Mill Farm, Reconstructing History

 NOTE: Some women are unable to wear stays because of medical or other reasons. In such cases, a shortgown or bedgown is certainly acceptable, but you may also have a gown or jacket fitted to you if you wish. Rancocas Merchant will fit a gown to you without stays or jumps.

**Gown:**Universal fitted ladies’ garment of the 18th century.  It has been suggested that women wore gowns more often than they wore shortgowns, bedgowns, or jackets, even if they were poor.  Open or closed front, en forreau (back panel is one long, continuous piece of fabric), or bodice and skirt cut separately (this became popular after 1770). Cotton, linen, fustian, or wool (see below for colors).  The robe a l’anglaise (fitted back) gown is more appropriate for camp than the a la francaise or sack back gown, which is better for formal occasions.  ALWAYS worn with petticoats.

Sources:  18th Century Gowns, Rancocas Merchant, Village Green Clothier, Silly Sisters, Smiling Fox Forge, Smoke and Fire, Jas Townsend, Ghost Forge

Patterns: JP Ryan Robe A l’Anglaise, Mill Farm Robe Polonaise, Fig Leaf Open Robe- do your research first!  Some patterns are more appropriate than others.

**Jacket:** Fitted work garment for lower and middling class, or undress garment for upper middling and upper class.  Linen, cotton, fustian, or wool (see below for colors).  May have been more common than gowns among German women, except on formal occasions.  Can be pinned or laced shut at center front, or have a stomacher.  May also button closed at center front if you are doing a German impression (need more research on this). A long version of this garment is sometimes referred to as a caraco (the French word for jacket).

Sources:  18th Century Gowns, Village Green Clothier, Rancocas Merchant, Smiling Fox Forge, Ghost Forge

Patterns:  JP Ryan, Mill Farm

**Riding Habit:** Traveling, riding, and casual garment of the upper class, modeled after men’s frocks.  Usually made of wool.

Sources: 18th Century Gowns, Village Green Clothier (will make custom ones on request)

Patterns: Mill Farm

**Cold Weather Garments:**

Most of our official events take place in the spring through the fall, but there are a few winter events. In cold or inclement weather, the following items may prove useful:

**Cloak:**  Woolen broadcloth, unlined, short or long (a short one stays closed more easily and is more convenient for camp), with or without a hood (the hood is usually lined), tied closed in front (not closed with a clasp).

Sources:  18th Century Gowns, Village Green Clothier. Most companies (such as Jas Townsend) sell lined cloaks, which aren’t strictly accurate. Clasps should be replaced with ribbon or tape ties- there is no evidence for clasps closing cloaks in the 18th century.

Patterns:  Mill Farm. Directions in Fitting and Proper and Tidings from the 18th Century.  Feel free to piece the cloak together- many extant examples were pieced to save fabric.

**Mantle/Mantelet:**  What we would refer to as a cape (“cape” then referred to a flap of fabric over the shoulders as part of a cloak or coat).  Made of wool for warmth, but thinner, lacy ones were also worn for style.

Sources:  18th Century Gowns, Rancocas Merchant

Patterns:  there is one diagrammed in Costume Close-up

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**Shawl:** Always made from fabric in the 18th century, as opposed to the knitted ones of the 19th century (the same thing goes for scarves).  A hemmed rectangle or triangle of wool fabric will serve nicely.

Sources:  Scarlet Scarab (available in lots of colors)

**Blanket Coat:** Coat made from an entire wool blanket.

Wool Blanket:  Standard twin/full size wool blanket, any period appropriate color (see below), but grey and brown seem particularly common. Works great in a pinch- just wrap it around your shoulders. Take care that it is 100% wool- do a burn test. Many “wool” blankets are actually synthetic blends.

Sources:  Army/Navy surpluses are a great source- I like Cheaper Than Dirt and Sportsman’s Guide.

**Mitts:** Elbow length arm/hand warmers, no fingers but a separate thumb or at least a thumb hole, may be knitted or sewn.

Sources:  Rancocas Merchant

Patterns:  Mill Farm (sewn), Kannik’s Korner (sewn), Mara Riley (knitted)

**Cap Cover:** small hood worn over a cap for extra head warmth, with a drawstring to tie it snug. As seen in Fragonard’s The Chocolate Girl  and Joseph Stephan’s Horse Race Especially good for a German impression.

Sources:  None that I am currently aware of.

Patterns:  Directions in Fitting and Proper (under Woman’s Hood).

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**Notes on Fabric Materials/Colors/Weaves:**

Every single item that you wear while in camp MUST be made of natural fibers, i.e., linen, wool, or cotton. This is not only for the sake of historical accuracy, but more importantly for the sake of safety.  Man-made fibers have a tendency to melt when they come in contact with an open flame, whereas natural ones will smolder and turn to ash.  We all try to be as safe as we can around the fire, but accidents do happen, and it isn’t hard to imagine how unpleasant a hot, melted petticoat would be stuck to your legs.  (On the other hand, if you are constructing a ball gown or some similar garment that won’t be worn around an open fire and you aren’t too concerned with accuracy, as long as it looks natural, go nuts.  Who’s going to know?)

When deciding what material use for an 18th century garment, there are a number of things to consider.  Plain weave linen is by far my personal favorite, because it is easy to work with and sew, cool to wear in hot weather, and comes in a variety of weights to choose from.  There is a common misconception among reenactors that because linen is difficult to dye, only certain colors are “safe”: blues, browns, and sometimes greys.  There is sufficient documentation to suggest, however, that linen was available in a wide variety of colors.  Professional dyers of the 18th century were able to produce any color that we have today (with the exception of neons and fluorescents.)

Wool is warmer and less clammy than linen in cold or damp weather because it is, to a certain degree, waterproof (which makes it such a good material for coats and cloaks).  Wool also comes in a variety of weaves and weights.  Plain weaves and twills are equally period appropriate.  Worsted or summer weight works well for petticoats and gowns and is surprisingly cool (though it still does not breathe as well as linen or cotton).  Flannels are a good choice for winter wear and insulating layers.  Broadcloth, a heavy wool (not the cheap cotton broadcloth we see in fabric stores today), should be reserved for cloaks and coats.

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A thing or two should be said here about cotton. Many reenactors opt to purchase cotton garments when they are starting out, because they tend to be cheaper.  There is a great deal of contention among living historians as to whether cotton is an appropriate choice for 18th century garments.  Many contend that cotton was too expensive for most people to wear.  I feel that cotton is an appropriate choice for most garments, provided that you choice a cotton with the right weight.  The cotton of the 18th century bore little resemblance to much of the cotton fabric available today- the individual threads were coarser and the weave was not as tight.  Some upholstery-weight cotton works well.  Another appropriate and affordable choice is fustian (a 50/50 linen-cotton blend- 96 Warehouse sells some really lovely ones for only $4/yd). Beware of the cheap cotton broadcloth that is so widely available today and used by quilters.  Yes, it is natural fiber, but it has entirely the wrong weight and feel for 18th century garments.  I recommend that undergarments such as shirts and shifts always be made of linen, despite the fact that it is more expensive, because it tends to be cooler and wick moisture away from the skin far better than cotton.  However, I am told that some people find linen itchy or irritating.  Ultimately, this is entirely a personal choice, and while linen is preferred for many garments, cotton is certainly acceptable.

You also need to be careful about prints.  Most prints available in your average fabric store simply do not resemble anything that was available in the 18th century.  In fact, until you’ve done a fair amount of research on period prints, it is better to stay away from them altogether than risk wearing something that isn’t correct.  One period-appropriate print you will find in a modern fabric store is Toile de Jouy, a white or ecru fabric with a monochromatic print, usually depicting pastoral scenes.  These were available in the 18th century, but were only used as upholstery, never as clothing.  Therefore, unless you are portraying a sofa, it is best to avoid them.  If you absolutely must have a printed cotton gown/jacket/whatever, Wm Booth Draper sells some very affordable, very appropriate prints (see list of links below).  Rancocas Merchant, 18th Century Gowns, and Village Green Clothier all sell garments made of cotton prints that closely approximate what was available during the 18th century.  When it comes to other sutlers, buyer beware.  There are a number of books on the subject of prints that you may want to consult before choosing a printed fabric or garment.

Lace is another item that requires a great deal of research.  As of this writing, I know too little about 18th century lace to comment on what is period correct and what is not.  The proprietresses of Rancocas Merchant (Sue Hueskin), 18th Century Gowns (April Thomas), and Village Green Clothier (Sharon Ann Burnston) all meticulously research all their trimmings, but I would approach any other sutler with caution when it comes to lace.

Remember, just because a sutler sells it, does not mean it is period correct!

Colors:

* Shift:  white or off-white
* Petticoats:  solid or striped, may be a print only if it matches a gown or caraco
* Shortgown/Bedgown:  solid, striped, or printed
* Apron:  white, solid, striped, or checked
* Cap:  white
* Neckerchief:  white, solid, striped, or checked
* Gown/Jacket/Caraco:  white, solid, striped, or printed
* Cloak:  solid, often red
* Cap Cover:  solid, may be trimmed (black is good for a German impression)

Sources:

* *Fitting and Proper* by Sharon Ann Burnston
* *Rural Pennsylvania Clothing* by Ellen J. Gehret
* *Tidings from the 18th Century*by Beth Gilgun
* *Had On and Took With Her* by Sue Hueskin and Karen Mullian
* *Costume Close-up* by Linda Baumgarten, John Watson, and Florine Carr
* *La Couturiere Parisienne*
* *18th Century New England Lif*e
* *The Great Pattern Review*
* Various e-mails and conversations with Sue Hueksin, April Thomas, Sharon Ann Burnston, Mara Riley, and the ladies of the 18th Century Woman Yahoo Group

Fabric and Trimmings:

 (excellent source for inexpensive, high quality linen)

 (linen, wool, cotton, linsey-woolsey, tape, ribbon, thread, notions galore)

 (linen, wool, cotton, silk, ribbon, tape)

  (huge selection of historical fabrics, best to call)