

Sewing a Built-In Bra with Cups

By: daughterfish

<http://www.burdastyle.com/techniques/sewing-a-built-in-bra-with-c>



Iâ€™m a huge fan of clothes that simplify my life. It was a revelation, over a decade ago, when I tried on a store-bought tank top with a built-in shelf bra â€” it was so comfortable, easy to wear, and it never showed tacky bra straps! Inspired by some of my favorite yoga tops and vintage bathing suits with built-in bras, Iâ€™ve been experimenting with building shelf bras with cups (for more support and shape) into tanks, t-shirts, and bodysuits (hereâ€™s one of my first “maillots”:

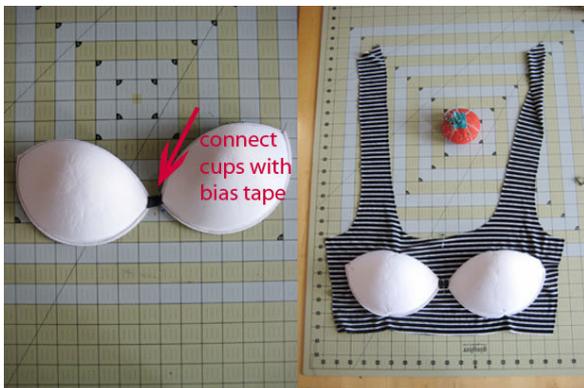
“<http://www.burdastyle.com/projects/the-how-do-you-bardot-maillot/#8221>; from last summer). I decided to try my method with Burdaâ€™s top with crosswise bra straps (07/2010 #115), which has a great, sporty design. This pattern has a backline that would show regular bra straps. Iâ€™ve shared a tutorial for built-in bras on my blog, but Burdaâ€™s tank pattern allowed me to expand on this method. I connected the cups with bias tape and added elastic straps to make this bra super supportive. In fact, I think even larger chested women would feel comfortable wearing this pattern. In addition to wearing this tank as a top with a skirt or jeans, I think the pattern could easily be used to make a yoga top, tankini (with quick-drying swimsuit cups), or even a sporty dress. Note: The pattern comes with a dress variation (07/2010 #113).

Step 1 — Prepare and cut the pattern



If you’re making a tank (not a dress), you only need to print pages 7 (for the test square), 11-13, 17-19, 23-25, and 29 of the PDF pattern. Unmodified, this pattern is supposed to fit loosely; however, I modified the pattern so it’s tighter (so the bra fits snugly). I would usually wear a Burda size 38 (US size 6); but I cut the pattern to a size 34 (US size 2), essentially shaving off about $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch from each side of the front and back bodice pieces. I made the back bodice piece even smaller, by folding it in 2 inches along the center back fold. This is because the front of the chest is larger than the back, which is particularly important when making a fitted bra. I took the extra sizing out of the center line, so that I wouldn’t interfere with the side curve of the pattern. I added a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch seam allowance to the pattern. For the bra pieces use the same tank top pattern, but just use the top half portion. (I measured 7 inches down from the underarm of the front and back bodice pieces). Draw a line across the front and back bodice pattern to mark where to cut for the bra pieces.

Step 3 — Connect and position cups



Connect the cups by sewing them together with a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch length of bias tape. This will give your built-in bra more structure, and keep your girls from wandering ungracefully to either side of your shirt. Lay your front bra piece on a flat surface, wrong side up. Position your bra cups, right side out, on the front bra piece. Make sure the bra cups are positioned so that they’ll nicely fit your breasts once you have the bra on. (I always hold the cups up to my girls to get the right angle, and then mimic that placement on the front bra piece.) For this pattern, I positioned the top of the cups about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches from the top edge of the neckline (this includes the $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch seam allowance I added to the pattern). Experiment with the placement of the cups and pin them in place. At this point, you can again hold the bra front to yourself to see if the cups are close to where they need to be.

Step 4 — Sew the cups



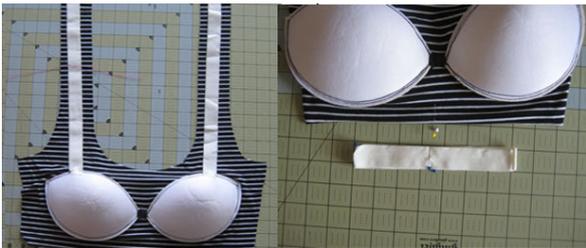
Baste the cups onto the front bra piece, using a long machine straight stitch, just around the edge of the cups. Basting will ensure you can easily remove the cups if you’ve got the wrong placement. As you sew, stretch the jersey fabric slightly so it lies smoothly under the bra cups and the bias-tape connector. If you don’t stretch the fabric, the jersey can tend to ripple and bunch up under the bias tape. I like to start sewing from the inside edge of the cups, next to the bias tape, toward the outside of the cups. Once you’re sure you have the right placement. Sew the cups on with a stretch stitch.

Step 5 — Cut away the excess fabric



Cut away the fabric that’s covering the inside of the bra cups. I like to snip a section toward the middle of the cup and cut away from there, around the inside edge of the cup. Note: If you’ve lined your cups with the same fabric as the bra, as you can see I did in the picture at top right, they’ll blend in nicely with the bra. I have a "tutorial for lining cups": <http://daughterfish.com/?p=3290> on my blog.

Step 6 — Add elastic



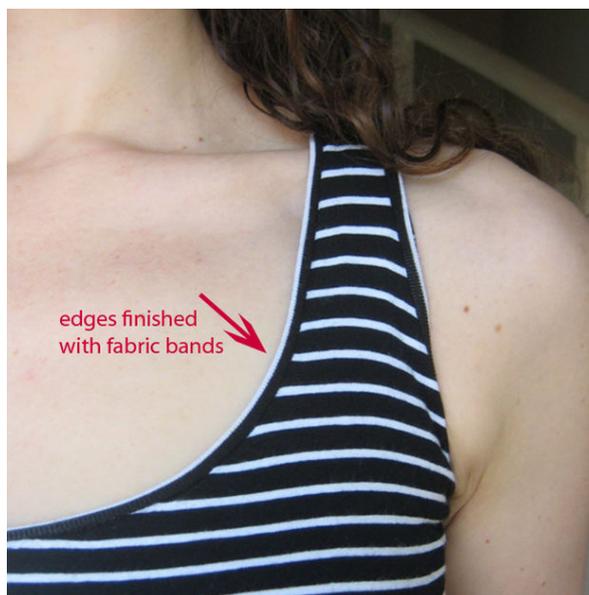
For the shoulder straps, I used sturdy, 1-inch-wide elastic. I simply cut the elastic to the same length of the bra/tank straps, and secured the elastic to the top edges of the cups with a zigzag stitch. Next, sew the bra and tank top pieces together. Right sides facing, sew your front and back bodice pieces together, and your front and back bra pieces together. At this point, it's a good idea to slip on the bra to see if it feels like it will fit snugly (keeping in mind that you're still going to attach an elastic band around the bottom). If the bra is not snug enough, take it in on the sides. **HOWEVER**, don't tighten the top edge of the bra; the top edge of the bra and the top edge of the tank top need to be the exact same size in order to avoid creating ripples once they are sewn together. For the elastic band at the bottom of the bra, wrap the elastic around your ribcage, just below your breasts, stretching it slightly, so that it feels snug but comfortable. Cut the elastic to this length. Butt the ends of the elastic and use a zigzag stitch to secure them. Divide the elastic into fourths and mark with pins. Divide the bottom of the bra into fourths and mark with pins. Pin the right side of the elastic band to the wrong side of the bottom edge of the bra (at the four pin marks). Using a stretch stitch or zigzag, sew the bottom edge of the elastic band to the bottom edge of the bra, stretching the elastic between the four marks. Fold the top edge of the elastic to the right side of the bra, so the elastic band lays flat. If the band doesn't lay flat, use a hot iron to press the fold where the band and bra meet. Sew the top edge of the elastic band to the bra.

Step 7 — Baste then sew bra to tank



With the tank top inside out, and the bra right side out, slip the bra over the tank top. Line up the neckline and straps of the bra and tank and pin in place. Line up the underarm seams of the bra and tank and pin in place. At this point, I sandwiched the elastic straps between the bra and tank straps, pinning the elastic in place along the center of the straps. Baste the neckline and straps of the bra and tank together. This will keep the tank and bra from slipping apart as you finish the neckline and straps.

Step 8 — Finish the edge of the tank



I like to finish all edges with folded strips of fabric. I find this gives a cleaner look than I can achieve topstitching with a twin needle on my home sewing machine and serger. For this tank top, I cut the bands so that one white strip runs down the center of the band. Once the band is folded in half, there's just a thin peep of white at the top edge of the band. I actually sewed the strips $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in from the edges to get rid of the seam allowance I had added (my serger cut off the excess fabric). When adding fabric bands, stretch the bands slightly on the curves around the neck and arms; this will help the bands lay flat. Finish the tank by attaching the straps to the back of the tank. The elastic bands should make it easy to adjust the straps so they provide maximum support.

Step 2 — Working with stripes and lining bra cups



When cutting out striped jersey on the fold, I line up my stripes and pin them before cutting out my pattern. This will ensure the stripes on the shirt are indeed horizontal. If the cups you find are scratchy, or you just don't like the way they look, you can line your cups with the same fabric as your bra. I have a tutorial for this on my site.

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