



Stuffing Technique

by Gloria J. "Mimi" Winer

Introduction

Stuffing a doll is an art all by itself. Several dollmakers have written books about it. Of course, we all have our own techniques, and none of us do it quite the same way. If you want this doll to come out really well, try doing it my way.

It also helps if you use the best stuffing available — Airtex Premium or Buffalo Batt Super Fluff. Both of these have no lumps or unexploded fibers.

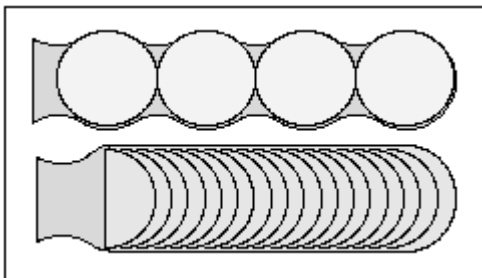
How to Stuff: The Nesting Technique

→ Attention

While it is possible to do this with your fingers, it is easier to do this with a hemostat.

Always nest the stuffing for a smooth skin. Each time you put more stuffing in the doll, hollow out the center like a nest with your fingers or by opening and closing the jaws of the hemostat. Then put more stuffing into the hollowed out center.

Think of it this way: if you put a bunch of tennis balls into a sock, you'd have a lumpy sock. But if you cut the tennis balls in half and then stacked them inside one another, the surface would be smooth and strong.



Hint

File your nails smooth before starting. It helps prevent snags. If you keep your nails short, your fingers won't hurt as much from the work of pushing in stuffing.



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The doll should be stuffed firm but not hard. It should feel about as firm as a ripe slicing tomato. If you just stuff it as full as you possibly can, and then add about ten percent more, it should be almost firm enough.

Touching Up the Stuffing

It is much easier to make a doll if you have the right tools. The most important tools for a dollmaker (after the sewing machine) are the stuffing tool and the hemostat.

I make my stuffing tool from a Stanley #64-846 screwdriver. It is about 6 inches long with a straight blade about 1/8-inch wide. The blade has straight sides without any little "ears."

The Stanley screwdriver has a plastic handle. I drill a hole length wise in the end of the handle and use a double-ended dowel screw to attach a large, round, wooden drawer pull knob to make it fit my hand comfortably.



This is the kind of screwdriver that they use for those little screws on the connectors on the back of a computer, so you may be able to "borrow" one from somebody who uses a computer. You can use the screwdriver just the way it comes from the store, or you can add the knob to make it more comfortable.

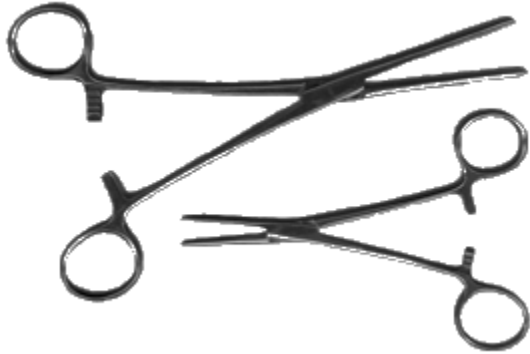
I wrap a small amount of stuffing around the tip to stuff fingers and make knuckles. I can slip a larger amount of stuffing underneath the doll's skin to fill in soft spots, even after I have finished sculpting. (It fits between sculpting threads.) I can also use it to reach under the doll's skin to straighten or align seams.



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A medium sized hemostat (clamp or forceps) is useful for turning fingers, inserting foot plates, inserting wads of stuffing, inserting pom poms, and removing stuffing. You can get them at any surgical supply store and at some Radio Shack stores.



Ideally, you should have several in different sizes. If you only get one, get a medium size (5" to 8"). Look for long, thin, straight jaws. The 6", straight Kelly hemostat is my favorite.

The hemostat is particularly useful for stuffing around an armature where your fingers won't fit.

- Take a wad of stuffing in the jaws and insert the stuffing into the doll.
- Unlock the jaws and pull the hemostat back away from the stuffing.
- Close the jaws and push them into the center of the wad.
- Open and close the jaws while twisting the hemostat to hollow out the center into a nest.
- Then put more stuffing into the middle and do it again.

Firmness of Stuffing

The doll should be stuffed firm but not hard. It should feel about as firm as a ripe, slicing tomato. If you just stuff it as full as you possibly can and then add about fifteen percent more, it should be almost firm enough.



Mimi's Handbook for Dollmakers

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Removing Stuffing

A small hemostat (clamp) is useful for removing stuffing.

Reusing Stuffing

Airtex Premium or Buffalo Batt Super Fluff can be reused.

If you remove any other type of stuffing for any reason (including other Airtex and Buffalo Batt types), don't reuse it in the doll because it will lump and show through the skin. Save used stuffing for teddy bears or projects requiring heavier skins.

Aching Fingers

File your nails smooth before starting. It helps prevent snags. If you keep your nails short, your fingers won't hurt as much from the work of pushing in stuffing.