

Wearing and Taking Care of Your Kilt



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Removing the basting

If I have mailed the kilt to you, I have left the white basting threads in to hold the pleats during shipping. To remove them, slip a blunt-tipped tool such as a knitting needle, crochet hook, or the handle end of a pair of tweezers under the threads and pull them out, snipping the thread where needed. It's easy to snag the tartan, so be sure not to use a knife or a pair of pointed scissors.



Donning your kilt

A well-made and well-fitting kilt can look dreadful if it is not worn properly. Here are some suggestions for putting on your kilt correctly:

- First and foremost, remember that the pleats go in the **back**. Don't laugh. Many a first-time kilt wearer has had the initial impulse to put the pleats in the front.
- Put the underapron strap through the buttonhole *and* the buckle before you haul on the strap to pull the kilt tight. That way, you won't tear the buttonhole. *Pull the underapron strap as tight as you can before buckling the apron strap.* Many men don't wear their kilts tight enough, and their kilts tend to sag, especially in the back. If you can't get your kilt buckled tight enough to keep it from slipping down onto your hips, let me know, and I can easily move the buckles.
- Wear your kilt at the right height. A kilt is a 19th century garment made to be worn much higher than a pair of jeans. The top will ride about 2" *higher* than your true waist, not *at* your waist, and the bottom edge will just graze the top of your kneecap. Many men buckle their kilts on too low. If you wear your kilt loose and low, your kilt will graze the tops of your hose, and there won't be any "knee" in between the kilt and the hose (and it will look like a skirt instead of a kilt!). In the pictures above, the kilt on the left looks good. The kilt on the right is not worn properly and looks a mess because it's buckled below the belly, the way many men wear their jeans. Kilts are not tailored to be worn that way.
- Check to make sure that the underapron is not hanging below the apron (as it is in the kilt above right). If it is, just reach behind your belt and pull the underapron up a little at the waist.

- If your kilt has a hip buckle, wear the hip strap a bit loose. It's the waist straps and buckles that keep the kilt from falling off - the hip strap is purely decorative and just helps keep the fringe edge in place, so there's no need to pull it tight. And a person with a tummy looks slimmer in a kilt when the apron hangs straight down from the waist, rather than being pulled in under the belly.
- Wear your kilt with the center front stripe centered. Once you've buckled your kilt, check the location of the center front stripe, and give the kilt a twist one way or the other in order to center the stripe. If the kilt fits perfectly, the center back stripe (if the kilt is pleated to the sett) should automatically center when the center front stripe is aligned.

Wearing sporran, belt, hose, flashes, pin, and bonnet

Many first-time kilt owners are unsure about how to wear their accessories, and many long-time kilt owners, in fact, wear them incorrectly. Here's the proper way:

- **Sporran.** Put the sporran on first, because the sporran strap is worn *under* the belt at the back of the kilt. The straps of the sporran can be run through the sporran loops, if the kilt has them. If your kilt has no sporran loops, and you are worried about your sporran taking an unexpected excursion to your ankles, loop the sporran strap over the top of the kilt buckles before you put on your belt.
- **Belt.** The belt is purely decorative and is worn over the sporran strap. The top of the belt should be aligned with the top of the kilt. Ideally, a kilt belt should not be put through loops on the back of the kilt. Over time, putting a belt through what were originally designed to be sporran loops distorts the back of the kilt, causing the kilt hem to pull up directly below the loops and to no longer hold a straight hemline. If you don't believe this, surreptitiously examine a number of kilts at the next Highland gathering you attend.
- **Hose.** Different hose are made to be folded differently at the cuff, but, however you fold yours, make the cuff deep – you don't want to look like you're wearing a bagel. And don't pull them up too far. The tops of your hose should come only to the top of the widest part of your calves, not all the way to the bend at your knee. A good rule of thumb is three fingers below the knee (photo, previous page on the right). The hose in the kilt pic on the previous page, left, are worn at the right height. The gray hose to the right ride too high.
- **Flashes.** When you put your flashes (*not flashers*) on, the leading edge of the flashes should line up with the center front line of your shin, rather than sitting on the side of your leg (photo, previous page on the right).
- **Pin.** A kilt pin is a decorative item meant to weight the corner of the apron to keep it from flapping. **Don't** use it to pin the apron to the kilt underneath – this can cause the kilt to tear if you catch the kilt on something. Highland dancers do *not* wear pins in competition.
- **Bonnet.** If you wear a Glengarry bonnet, remember that it is a military head covering meant to be worn in military fashion, which means tipped forward to nearly completely cover your forehead. If you put two fingers horizontally starting at the deepest indent in the bridge of your nose, your Glen should just come to your second finger. Alternatively, you can measure one finger above your eye brow. Looks very sharp, even though it feels weird at first, but that's the way it has to be done. If you have bangs, make sure that you sweep them to the side or tuck them under the rim of the Glen, rather than leaving them sticking out as a fringe. I've included a picture on the previous page of Carolyn in her US Air Force Pipe Band uniform with a properly worn Glen as viewed from the side. You know that, as a military group, they have to have it right!

What should I wear under my kilt?

Wear what you feel comfortable wearing under your kilt, and don't let anyone browbeat you into "going commando" if you don't want to. Many people wear underwear or dark-colored Lycra exercise shorts such as bicycle shorts. This also keeps the somewhat itchy tartan off your skin. Dancers wear dark-colored dance trunks, with blouses or shirts tucked into the trunks. Wearing something under your kilt will also keep it cleaner, and you won't run the risk of inadvertently flashing someone, but this is, of course, a personal choice.

Keep your kilt looking nice

It's easier to keep a kilt looking nice than it is to deal with spots and wrinkles after having treated it in shabby fashion. Here are a few suggestions:

- If you are going to a Highland gathering, consider wearing something else in the car, and putting your kilt on when you get there. The pleats will thank you.
- When you sit down, get into the habit of sliding both hands down your backside as you sit, smoothing the pleats flat before you sit. This is a hard habit for men to acquire!
- When your kilt is sweaty, don't fold it and hang it up in a garment bag. As soon as possible after wearing, lay the kilt out to air and dry thoroughly. Laying it out flat on top of other items on the drive back from a Highland games is a good idea.
- Once your kilt has aired, fold it in half at the waist, right sides together, and then fold it again. Hang it in a good skirt hanger. Folding it inside out keeps the good side out of harm's way. This XMarks post <http://www.xmarksthescot.com/forum/f139/how-hang-your-kilt-28264/> shows a dandy way to hang your kilt with a pair of inexpensive skirt hangers.
- Store your kilt in a roomy garment bag. Don't jam it in with sixteen other items. The same goes for travelling. Invest in a second garment bag, rather than putting all of your Highland clothing into the same garment bag.
- When you are not wearing your kilt, keep it in a zipped garment bag to keep it safe from wool moths (unless you are lucky enough to have a cedar closet!!).

Re-pressing the pleats

Unfortunately, most dry cleaners and pressers do a crummy job pressing the pleats on a kilt. If pressed improperly, the pleats will hang incorrectly and give the back of the kilt a wavy look instead of the nice straight, smooth look a kilt should have.

You can touch up pleats yourself with a steam iron. If you choose to do so, lay the kilt flat on the ironing board with the pleats running the length of the board and the stitched portion of the pleats extending off the board to the left. Arrange the pleats so that each pleat is straight and parallel to its neighbor. Be sure that each pleat is the same width all the way down (the pleats should *not* splay). Lay a damp press cloth over the kilt, and *press firmly*, without sliding the iron. Move the press cloth and repeat. Then, turn the kilt over and press the pleats from the back side. Lay the kilt flat until it is dry.

If pleats need serious pressing, the pleats should really be basted together first. Start at the apron side of the pleats and successively baste pleats together along 3 or 4 lines parallel to the bottom edge of the kilt. Be sure that each pleat is the same width at the bottom of the kilt as it is at the

bottom of the stitched portion of the pleat and that stripes are absolutely straight in the pleats. This doesn't take as long as you might think it would. Press as indicated above. This is a much better solution than having a cleaner press the pleats.

What to do when your kilt gets dirty

Don't have your kilt dry cleaned if you can avoid it. Dry cleaning leaves a subtle residue on the kilt, and your kilt will soil more easily after it has been dry-cleaned. And truly, if you air dry your kilt after wearing and you don't put it all sweaty into a garment bag (and you wear something under your kilt), a kilt should not need dry cleaning for many years.

If you can't avoid having it dry cleaned, at least tell the cleaner NOT to press your kilt. The pleats are very likely to come back perfectly creased but in the wrong places or with wiggly stripes. When you get your kilt back unpressed from the cleaner, baste the pleats and press the kilt yourself according to the instructions above.

As alternatives to dry-cleaning, try the following:

Perspiration stains and odor

- Try airing your kilt first, before you move on to more drastic measures. Airing your kilt periodically will help keep your kilt smelling nice. Prevention also helps – don't fold and hang a sweaty kilt. Air dry it thoroughly first.
- Put a little ammonia in water, and soak a press cloth in the mixture. Press the lining side with the press cloth between the kilt and the iron.
- The colors on a kilt also perk up when you press with a cloth soaked in a dilute mixture of ammonia and water.

Spots

- For small spot stains, try a Q-Tip with a little ammonia diluted with water.
- For blood and other hard-to-remove stains, try a Q-Tip dipped in an enzyme detergent such as Era. Be sure to spot-rinse the area well.

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