



## Mexican Dress Pattern

from

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## Read Complete Directions Twice Before You Reach For The Scissors!

Unlike a typical commercial sewing pattern, this Mexican dress pattern does not contain templates. Because it is made entirely out of five rectangles, this pattern can be accomplished simply by taking measurements and following my step-by-step directions. You've never made a dress as easy as this one before!

My Mexican dress was made from plain cotton broadcloth that I purchased from my local quilting store. Cotton muslin, or even a cotton print will also work just fine with this dress.

Accomplished seamstresses will likely find this dress to be so simply constructed that they could sew it in their sleep. No darts, gathering, or fancy fitting! But, this is also the perfect chance for a beginner to become more confident with using their sewing machine to create clothing.

I hope that my easy-to-follow directions and the conversational tone of the instructions in this pattern will make sewing this dress as fun as sewing with a friend.



## Materials Required for this Project:

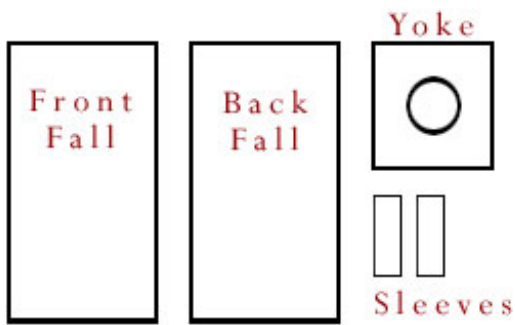
- Cotton broadcloth, muslin or other lightweight cotton.\* See below.
- 1 spool white cotton all purpose thread
- A large ruler
- Dressmaker's measuring tape
- Washable fabric marking pen or pencil
- Fabric cutting scissors
- Packet of 1/4" elastic
- A safety pin
- Sewing pins
- Iron
- Embroidery hoop
- Embroidery needle
- 3 skeins each of 6 strand cotton hand embroidery floss in the following colors: spring green, olive green, dark forest green, dark royal blue, dark turquoise, sky blue, periwinkle, bright Christmas red, dark brick red, canary yellow, yellow-orange, tangerine orange

### \* How much fabric do you need to buy?

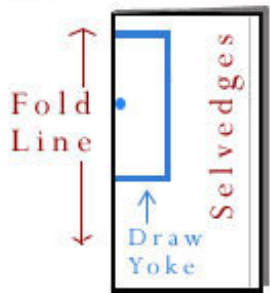
I made my Mexican dress from about 3 yards of 45" wide fabric, with a few scraps left over. I am 5'3", with petite measurements. If you are a medium-height or tall person, I would suggest buying 4 yards of fabric to be on the safe side.

This pattern can also be used to make a tunic-length garment or a blouse. Depending upon your height, altering the directions to make a shorter garment will require a great deal less yardage of fabric.

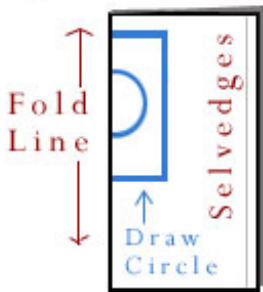
These are the five pieces of the dress:



**A**



**B**



**C**



## Measuring & Cutting

### The Yoke

Using your dressmaker's measuring tape, measure from the top of your shoulder to 1" below underarm. Write this number down. My measurement was 7". Add  $\frac{5}{8}$ " to your number. That is your the total height of your yoke piece. Write the words *Total 1* and your measurement total.

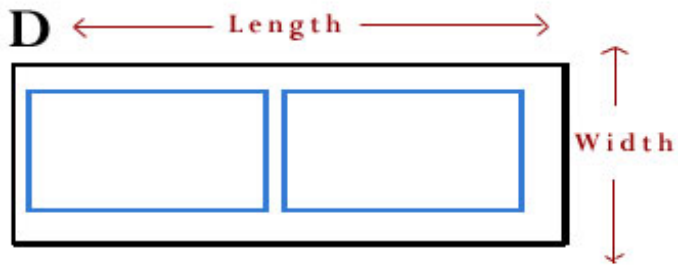
Again, with the measuring tape, measure across the torso from underarm to underarm, 1" below underarm. Write this number down. Add  $1 \frac{1}{4}$ " to it. This is the total width of your yoke piece. Mine was  $15 \frac{1}{4}$ ". Write the words *Total 2* and your measurement total.

This piece is cut on the fold. That means, fold your fabric in half lengthwise so that it is perfectly even and the selvedges line up.

Using your fabric marking pen and ruler, draw a rectangle along the fold line that is the depth of *Total 1* and the width of *Total 2*. My rectangle was  $7 \frac{5}{8}$ " by  $15 \frac{1}{4}$ ". Make your rectangle your size. With your fabric pen, mark a dot in the exact center of the rectangle next to the fold line. **See Illustration A.**

The neck hole you cut out of the center of the yoke piece needs to be at least  $8 \frac{1}{2}$ " wide. If your head circumference is larger than average, you can make the hole a bit bigger. In order to make a circle that is  $8 \frac{1}{2}$ " wide, look at a piece of printer paper/computer paper. This paper measures  $8 \frac{1}{2}$ " x 11". I was able to find a dish in my house that was approximately this wide. Any circular object that you can trace around will do if you do not have a fancy arc ruler. The depth of the neckline needs to be about  $4 \frac{1}{2}$ " at its deepest point. Using a ruler, I moved my round dish  $4 \frac{1}{2}$ " inward from the fold line and traced around it with my fabric pen. So, my curved line ended up being  $8 \frac{1}{2}$ " wide and  $4 \frac{1}{2}$ " deep. You can cut your circular shape out of paper first, and then trace around it, or you can simply draw it on the fabric. **See Illustration B.**

When you have these lines drawn, cut out the piece, including the circular hole, and then open it up. You should have ended up with a yoke piece that looks like **Illustration C.**



### Front and Back Falls

With your dressmaker's measuring tape, measure from one inch below underarm down to the top of your foot. Add 1 5/8" to this number. Write down *Total 3* and the total number of your measurement.

Take the number you wrote down for *Total 2*, above when you were making your yoke piece. Add 10" to this number. The sum of this makes your *Total 4* measurement. Write it down.

Using your ruler and fabric marking pen, draw two rectangles that are the length of *Total 3* and the width of *Total 4*. Cut them out. These two big rectangles are your front and back falls! **See Illustration D.**

### Sleeves

We saved the easiest part for last. It doesn't even need an illustration. Cut out two matching rectangles that are 6" wide and 24" long. These are your sleeves.

Once you have accomplished all of the above steps, you have cut out all of the pieces of your Mexican peasant dress. Time to get out the sewing machine!

### E

Top Edge  
of Front  
Fall



## Sewing the Dress

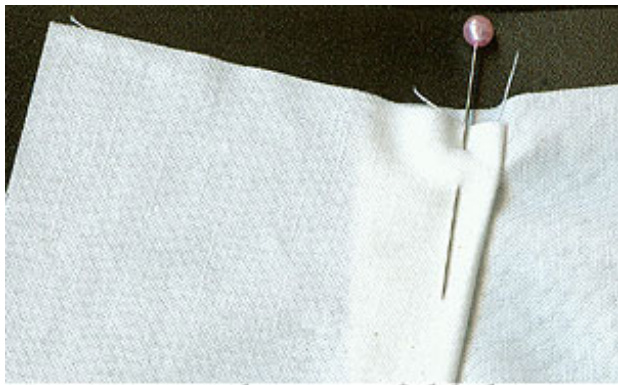
### Step 1: Pleating Front and Back Falls

Did you ever fold pleats into a piece of paper to make a fan when you were a child? Then you can sew the six easy pleats in the front and back fall pieces of this dress. The pleats serve both to give the gown shape and to make the width at the top of the two fall pieces shrink in so that it matches the width of the bottom of the yoke piece.

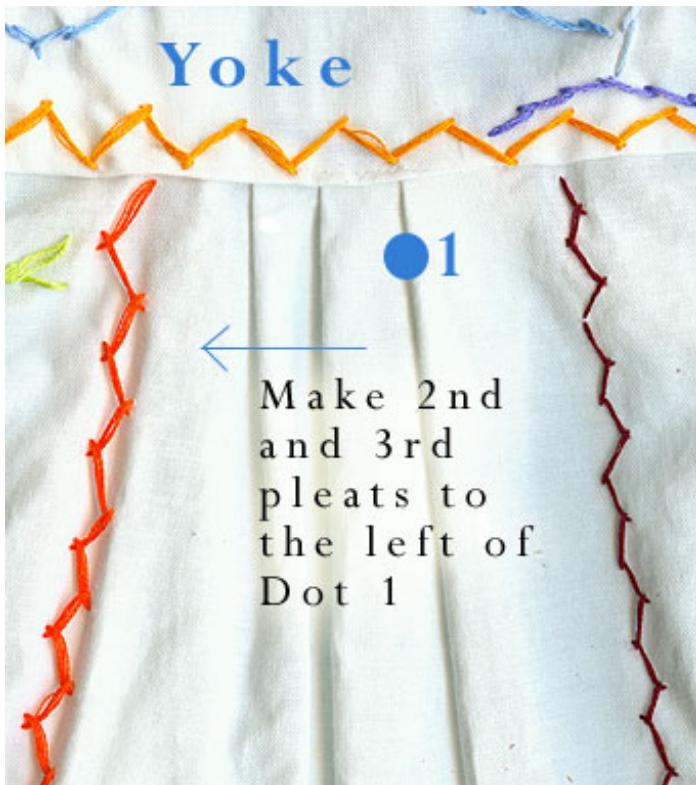
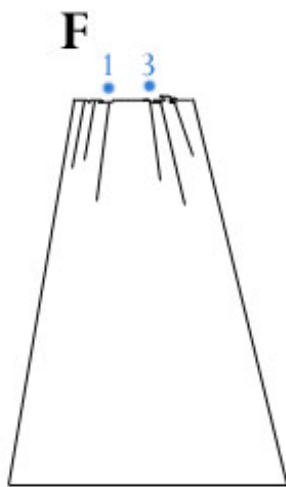
With a ruler, divide the top edge of your front fall piece into 4 equal parts. Make a series of 3 equally spaced dots with your fabric marking pencil as shown in **Illustration E.**

If you've never made a pleat before, the photograph shown here illustrates the basic concept. You simply overlap the fabric along the top edge and stick a pin in it to keep it held in place. Dot 1 in **Illustration E** shows where you will take the first pleat in your dress. You will be making 3 pleats in the Dot 1 area and 3 pleats in the Dot 3 area. The center area is left flat.

Here comes the most challenging thing you will have to do in this whole project. The end result you are trying to achieve with the pleats is to make your front fall **exactly** match the width of the bottom of your yoke piece (remember *Total 2*



\* Note: When you fold the fabric to make a pleat, fold it toward the center of the dress.



from above). Because everyone's measurements will be different, the width of the pleats you will take will be unique to you.

Remember when you added 10" to the width of *Total 2* in order to find the measurements for your falls? You now need to use the pleats to cinch in the fabric to take that 10" away again from the upper edge of your front fall.

Mathematically, how this works out is that each of the six pleats will need to take a little less than  $1 \frac{3}{4}$ " width out of the top edge of the fall. This means that the overlap of fabric in each pleat will look like approximately  $\frac{7}{8}$ " in the front and  $\frac{7}{8}$ " in the back when you fold the fabric to make the pleat.

**Illustration F** shows what happens to the shape of your front fall piece when you have taken all 6 pleats. After you take the pleat at Dot 1, take 2 more to the left of it. Then, take the first pleat at Dot 3 and make 2 more to the right of it. You may have to do some finessing to get it just right.

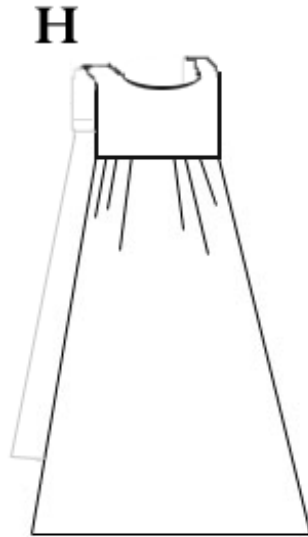
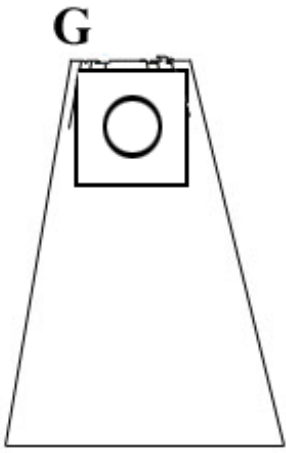
When you have pinned all 6 pleats, sew a  $\frac{3}{8}$ " row of stitches all along the top edge of the front fall to secure the pleats.

\* Don't feel blue if your pleats aren't perfect. Mine aren't, and the pleats in the authentic Mexican dress I based this pattern on were just the opposite of perfect! Just do your best, and the overall effect will be beautiful.

To make this perfectly clear, look at the photograph on the left to see the end result you are aiming for. Isn't that pretty?

When you have completed the front fall, you do the exact same thing to the back fall piece. However, **for a better fit**, I would suggest making a slight adjustment to the placement of Dot 1 and Dot 3 to accommodate the shoulder blades. I moved both Dot 1 and Dot 3 one half inch out toward the edges of the falls to make the space a bit wider between the shoulder blades. This slight adjustment on my dress makes it fit very nicely over my shoulder blades in back.

Congratulations! The hard part of the dress is over.



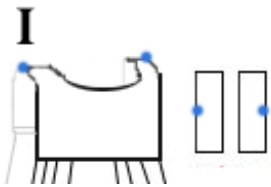
### Step 2: Attaching the Yoke

First, let's get some sewing terminology straight. The **right side** of fabric means the front side. The **wrong side** means the back side. On a printed piece of fabric, the right side would be printed and the wrong side would be faded.

Lay the right side of one edge of the yoke on top of the right side of your front fall, so that the top edges match up perfectly. Pin and sew a 5/8" seam across the top edge. See **Illustration G**.

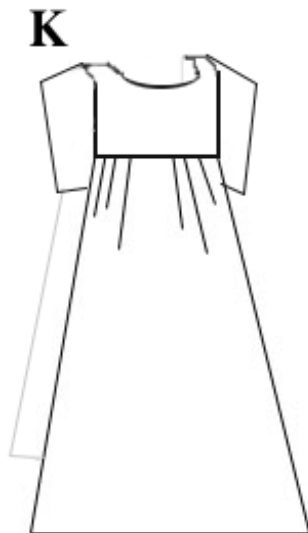
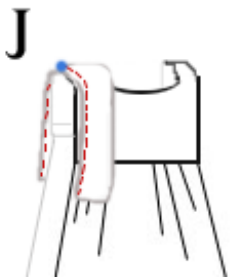
Then, do the same to attach the opposite edge of the yoke to the back fall. When both seams are sewn, take a warm iron and press the seams upward toward the yoke to make them nice and flat.

When you finish Step 2, your garment should look like **Illustration H**.



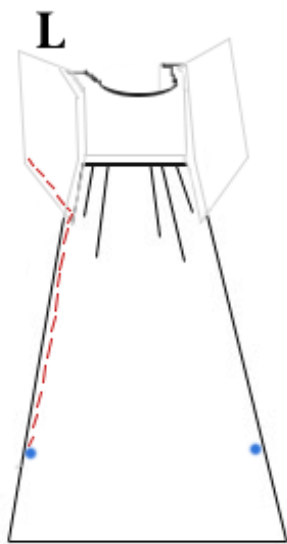
### Step 3: Attaching the Sleeves

First, take your fabric marking pen and mark a dot in the exact center of the shoulders on the yoke. Then, mark a dot in the exact centers of the sleeve pieces. See **Illustration I**.



*With right sides facing each other*, place one sleeve piece on top of the yoke and fall, matching up your marked dots, as shown in **Illustration J**. Sew a 5/8" seam all along the edge as shown. Repeat this process for the other sleeve, and your sleeves are now attached.

Your garment should now look like **Illustration K**.



All that remains at this point is to sew the long seam shown in **Illustration L** to close up the sleeves and the sides of your Mexican dress. Before sewing, take a ruler and measure 10" up from the bottom hem of the front and back of the dress. Make a dot with your fabric marking pen as shown.

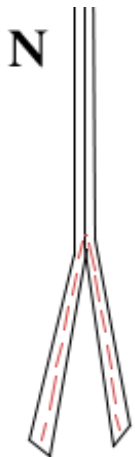
*With garment turned inside out*, sew your long 5/8" seam from the edge of the sleeve, pivoting on the machine at the bottom of the sleeve where it meets the dress, and continuing the seam down to the dot you marked with your fabric pen. Open seam out flat and press with a warm iron to make it nice and smooth.

Your dress is now completely sewn together. At this point, try it on. If you need to make any adjustments to the width across the yoke or falls, do it now. All that remains is to take care of the finishing details.



#### Step 4: Finishing the Rolled Neckline

This is a very simple neckline. *With garment turned inside out*, roll the edges of the neckline back 1/4". Then, roll a second time another 1/4" so that no raw edge is exposed. Sew all along this rolled hem to secure the neckline as shown in **Illustration M**. Press with a warm iron.



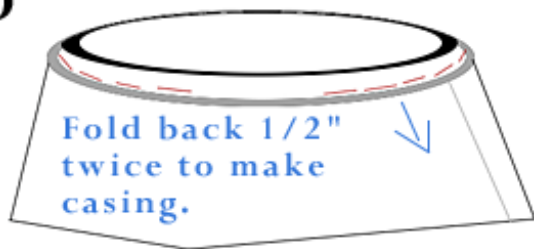
#### Step 5: Finishing the Side Slits and Hem

These openings near the bottom of the dress provide wonderful ease of movement in walking. *With garment turned inside out*, fold over edge of fabric twice so that no raw edges are exposed. The size of the folds will be wider at the hem and will taper to nothing where your marking pen dot was placed, thus creating a triangle. The width of my fold at the bottom hem is about 1/2" and then it is folded over again the same width so that no raw edge is exposed.

Once you have your double fold pinned in place, start sewing from the bottom hem up to the top of the triangle, pivot on your sewing machine and continue sewing down the other side, all along the fold, to secure. See **Illustration N**. Repeat this process for the second slit.

\*Note: If you are using this full-length dress pattern to make a tunic length garment or blouse, side slits will need to be estimated much shorter.

You can now turn up the bottom hem of your dress so that the edge is not raw. *With garment turned inside out*, turn edge up 1/2" and then turn it again another 1/2" so that no raw edges are exposed. Pin and sew along the edge of the hem. Do this for both the front and back of your dress. Press with a warm iron.

**O****Step 6: Finishing the Sleeves**

*With garment turned inside out*, make a casing by folding back the raw edge of the sleeve opening twice. Each fold should be 1/2" wide. A casing is just a little pocket-like tube into which you can insert elastic, ribbon, or trim. Secure your casing with pins and then sew all along the edge of the casing **leaving 1" unsewn**. This unsewn inch is where you will be inserting the elastic. See **Illustration O**.

**P**

Elastic Shown in Blue



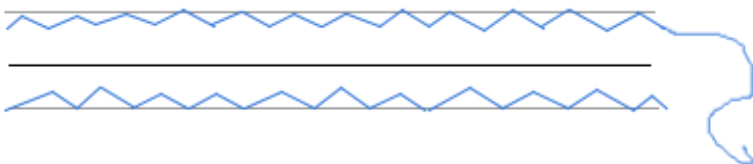
With your dressmaker's measuring tape, measure the circumference of the thickest part of your upper arm. Write this number down and add 1" to it. Cut 2 pieces of 1/4" elastic this total length. Take one piece and attach a safety pin to the end that you will be inserting into the casing.

The bulk of the safety pin will enable you to thread the elastic along inside of the casing so that it comes out the other side of the unsewn opening. This will gather up the sleeve into a nice little puff. See **Illustration P**.

When the safety pin end of the elastic comes out the other side, hand sew the two elastic ends together. Stitch back and forth over this several times to strongly secure the edges of the elastic so that they will not snap. Stuff these ends up under the casing and then finish the last inch of the casing you had left unsewn, either by hand or on your sewing machine. Repeat this process for the second sleeve.

**Q**

Zigzag stitch along raw edges

**Step 7: Finishing the Raw Edges**

Your last step involves finishing the raw edges of the seams that you've made in order to prevent fraying of the fabric. The yoke seams, the sleeve seams, and the long side seam all have raw edges. In order to protect them, sew a zig zag stitch along every raw edge in your garment. This will make your dress far more durable. See **Illustration Q**.

Congratulations! You have now completely sewn your traditional Mexican dress. Take a moment to enjoy this accomplishment before moving on to the really fun part: embroidering the dress.

**Embroidering Your Dress**

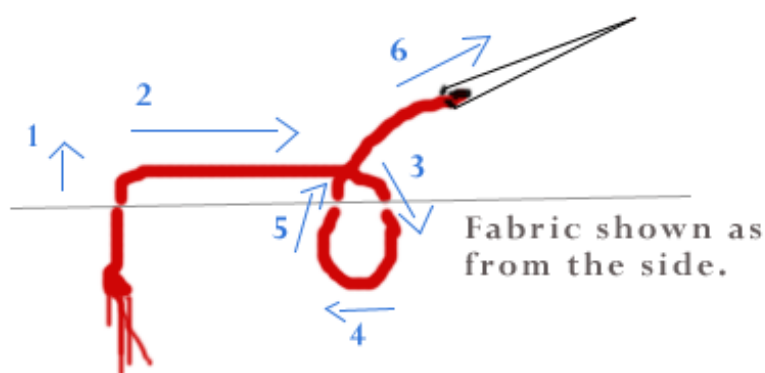
As you may have read at [www.themexicandress.com](http://www.themexicandress.com), I created my dress by closely puzzling over an authentic Mexican dress that had been given to me as a gift from Oaxaca. This dress was already a second hand treasure when it came to me, but despite a little wear, it had held up well. Examining the embroidery of this original dress showed me that the seamstress was far from being an expert, and yet, the overall visual impact is bold, bright, and stunning.

Only two basic embroidery stitches were used to create the design on the original dress, and I stuck with these two stitches to create my own, personalized embroidery pattern for my dress.

If you are new to embroidery, let me give you a quick tutorial on these two stitches here. My personal preference is for Anchor brand 6 strand cotton embroidery thread, but any brand will be fine. Before threading your needle, cut off a piece of thread about 15" - 20" long. Separate the thread into two pinches of 3 strands each and then pull slowly so that you end up with two 15" - 20" lengths from your 6 thread strand. Thread the needle so that the needle is slid to the dead center of the strands and then tie the ends together in a knot. In this way, you are embroidering with the six strands, and this makes nice, fat stitches. This is how my original dress from Mexico was embroidered.

### Stem Stitch:

The photograph below left illustrates a basic stem stitch, which I use to create flower stems, vines, and the blue and periwinkle clouds shown here. To create a stem stitch, come up with your needle from underneath the fabric, and take a stitch going back down into the fabric about 1/2" away. Then, come back up from underneath, right beside where your needle went down, only about 1/8" back along the stitch. The illustration below right shows, step by step, the process of making a stem stitch. After you've made your first stitch, simply continue on in the same manner to create long flowing lines of stitching that can curve and angle in wonderful ways. When you come to the end of your thread or the end of a stitched motif, simply tie a knot in the thread right where it touches the fabric on the inside of your dress and trim excess thread off.

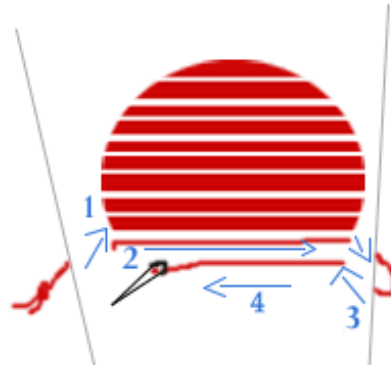


### Satin Stitch:

Satin stitch is the traditional stitch used to fill in shapes with color. On my dress, I used satin stitch for the birds, flowers, and leaves. The photograph below left shows a detailed close-up of one of my flowers worked in satin stitch. The illustration below right shows the steps of making satin stitch.

*Step 1:* Come up through the fabric from underneath. *Step 2:* Take a stitch the width of the area you are filling in. *Step 3:* Come back up through the fabric right beside where you went down in Step 2. *Step 4:* Take your second stitch going in the opposite direction. Widen and lengthen the stitches appropriately to fill in your outlined shape.

Fabric shown from top

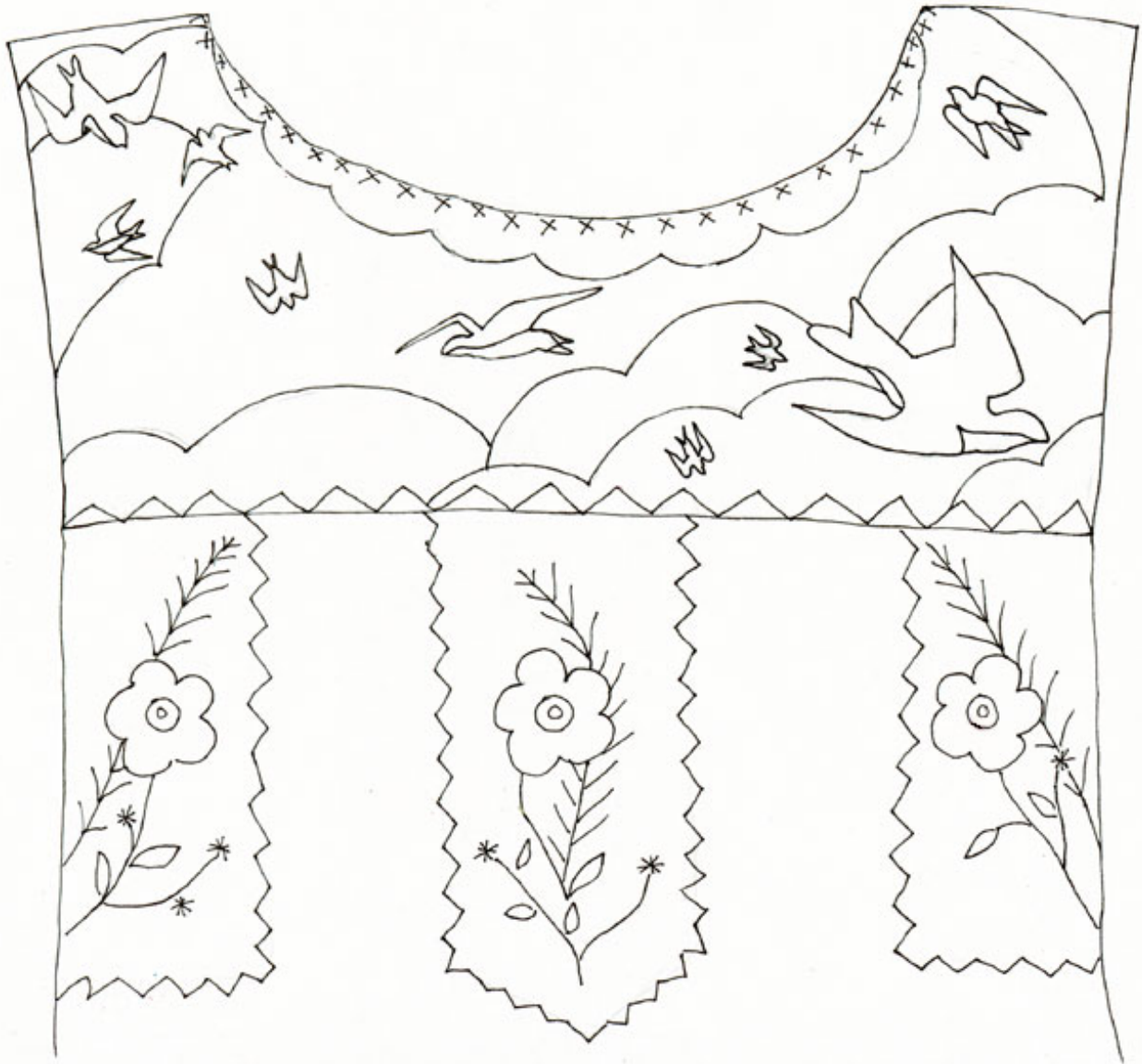


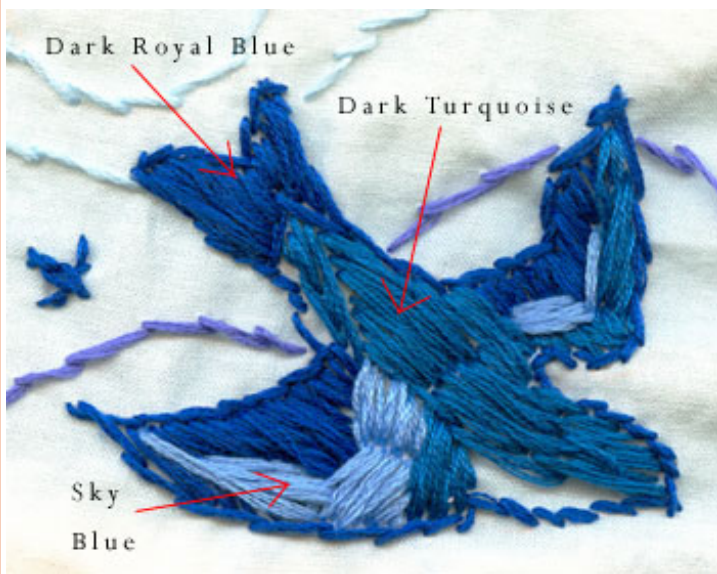




Now we're ready to move forward with embroidering our dress. It may be that you will want to create your own embroidery pattern, based on symbols that have a special meaning to you. However, for those of you who would like to recreate my design, I have provided all of the essentials here.

There are three main embroidery locations on this dress: the yoke, between the pleats, and in the center of the front fall. I will provide you here both with a basic black and white outline of the designs for these three areas and a detailed color photograph. \* Threads I chose are listed in the list of required materials at the beginning of this tutorial. Let's start with the basic pattern for the yoke and pleat area. You can take the black and white drawing here and trace it onto your dress with a fabric marker, or you can simply use this diagram to work from, free hand. I drew my concept onto my dress and just started working away on it.





### A Special Note on Swallows:

Tree Swallows are beautiful birds. Their colors are like sapphires above and diamonds below. I worked my swallows by stem stitching around the outline of each bird and then filling in with satin stitch in a combination of the three colors shown in these accompanying photographs. By using a combination of dark royal blue, dark turquoise, and sky blue, the swallows take on a jewel tone effect that is truly remarkable.

The clouds are worked in stem stitch in all 4 of the blues on our list. The X's go all the way around the neckline, front and back, and are simply worked by crossing stitches in our yellow orange thread. The zig zag that runs along the bottom of the yoke in front and in back is also worked in yellow orange, and is simply a stem stitch where instead of going in a straight line, you work the stitches up and down in a zig zag.

These two photographs on the left show the up-close detail of the embroidery that goes to either side and in the middle of the pleated area of your dress. The side boxes with the tangerine orange zig zag border should each begin just a little beyond your furthest over pleat. My boxes are 7" high. The forget-me-not flowers are worked in sky blue, canary yellow, and tangerine orange with dark forest green stems and leaves. The spring green frond is made with a stem stitch and then simple arrow-like stitches making up the twigs coming out from the stem. Make one of these



boxes on each side of the dress as shown in our black and white pattern above. The central box follows the same pattern and the zig zag is done in dark brick red.

The large embroidered area in the center of the front fall measures 16" high by 16" wide. It is worked in all of the embroidery thread colors we have purchased. Forget-Me-Nots, Bleeding Hearts, Wild Calendula, and new-sprung ferns are our subjects of botanical interest here, along with a pair of lovely tree swallows.

As with the above, we will give you here both a black and white outline of the design and then a detailed color photograph.





The yellow orange calendula and the tiny flowers encircling the wreath at the top and making buds along the vines are simply worked by crossing your stitches over one another like an 8 or 12-pointed star. The old-fashioned bleeding hearts are embroidered in the bright Christmas red. You may choose to use different colors or different flowers for a completely different look, but the above should give you a basic idea to work from. As you can see from my detailed photos, I am no expert at embroidery. I just wanted to have fun and make something beautiful, and followed my inspiration where it took me.



To finish the dress, I embroidered three rows of zig zags near the bottom. I did them in yellow orange, tangerine orange, and dark brick red. They are on both the front and the back of the dress, and give that finishing touch that makes the garment look complete.

Your Mexican dress is now finished and ready to wear! I so hope you've enjoyed this project. I would love to see a photo of your finished dress. You can email me through my website here: [www.themexicandress.com](http://www.themexicandress.com) and I will post a photo of your one-of-a-kind dress on my website.

Hand launder and line dry this dress. Chances are, this will make the fabric slightly stiff, so when the dress is thoroughly dry, toss it in the dryer for 5 minutes to soften.

Thank you for supporting [www.themexicandress.com](http://www.themexicandress.com). Please tell your friends!