

# The Secret Strength of Silk Organza



This delicate fabric adds weightless support to your garments without increasing bulk


**BY MARLA KAZELL**  
*(from issue #124)*

If you envision frilly little girls' dresses, crisp sheer collars, or a translucent evening concoction when you hear the name "silk organza," reconsider. Silk organza is a fabulous workhorse fabric that you can layer inside a garment to add invisible, weightless support and strength. Among other things, silk organza will hold the shape of an edge, sleeve cap, or buttonhole. I'll show you several ways it can greatly improve the results of your sewing.

The incredible silkworm produces a filament strand far stronger than its delicate appearance and size would suggest. When this strand is woven into organza, it produces a fabric that's powerful and almost transparent. Silk organza is washable or dry-cleanable, withstands high heat and steam, and can be dyed any color.

Nylon and polyester organzas work for some of the same applications I'll describe but not as well, because they never press as flat or crisply as silk. A yard of silk organza costs only around \$5—every inch of which is usable, so go for the best.

To prepare your organza for use, you should preshrink it. If you want to maintain its crisp hand, preshrink it with steam and then dry-clean your finished garment. For a softer hand, gently machine-wash the organza.

I recommend keeping a supply of silk organza as a basic sewing tool. That way, it's always available to help you construct almost any article of clothing. 

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## Create bulk-free seam or hem finishes

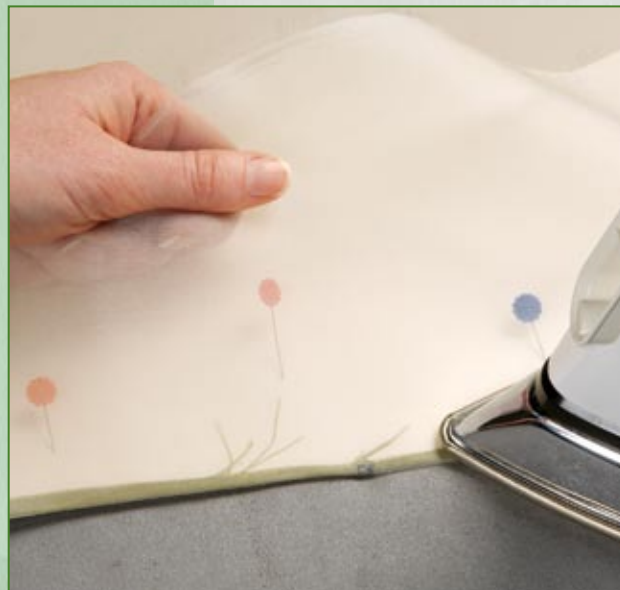
For a clean, bulk-free seam or hem finish on an unlined garment, use organza for a Hong Kong finish (see “Jacket-Facing Solutions,” issue no. 123, for information on how to create a Hong Kong finish). To finish a set-in sleeve armhole made in sheer fabric, trim the armhole seam allowances down to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch wide and cover them with an organza bias binding.



## Make a great press cloth

Silk organza makes the best press cloth. It can withstand high iron temperatures and steam. It is lightweight and see-through yet protects your fabric from damage.

Use it to press back narrow edges without burning your fingers. To do this, place a single layer of organza on your ironing board. Lay your fabric facedown 4 inches or more from the edge of the organza and parallel with the edges; then lay a cardstock template (file folders work perfectly) along the foldline of the edge you want to press. You can hold the cardstock in position by pinning through it into the ironing board. With one hand, fold the organza over the cardstock edge; with the other hand, press the fold.

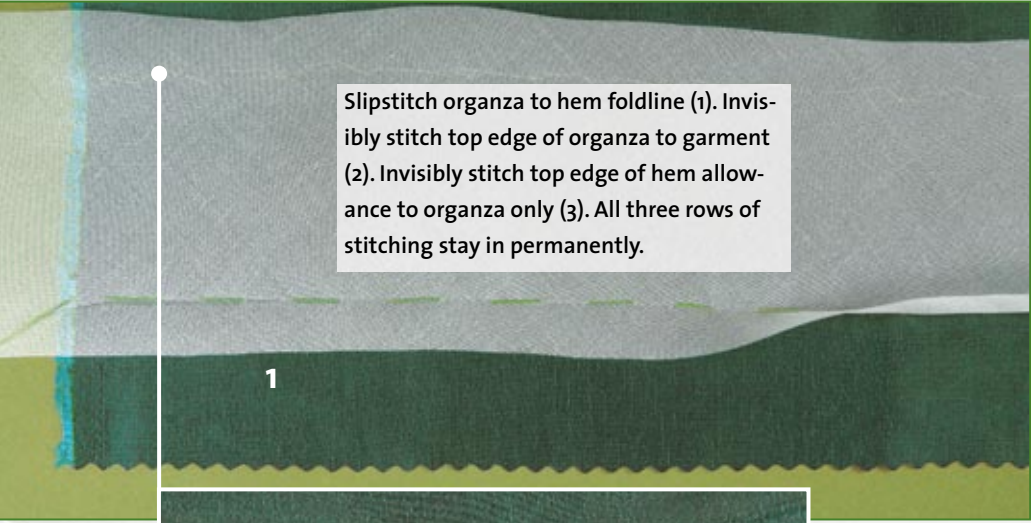


## Use as an interfacing for hems

Organza makes a perfect interfacing for pant, skirt, and dress hems. Position a 3- to 5-inch-wide strip of bias-cut organza between the hem allowance and garment, as shown below, to provide a cushion that prevents the hem-allowance edge from leaving a ridge on the right side of the garment.

You can use silk organza as you would any other sew-in interfacing. It's lightweight but can stabilize and support a neckline, a collar, or buttonholes on a facing.

As an interfacing, organza can both strengthen a facing and clean-finish its outer edge. Cut matching facing pattern pieces from the fashion fabric and organza, and pin them right sides together. Stitch along the outer edge of the facing with a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seam allowance, and press the seam allowance open. Turn the facing right side out, roll the edge of the seam slightly to the organza side, and press the edge flat. Sew the facing to the garment as usual.



Slipstitch organza to hem foldline (1). Invisibly stitch top edge of organza to garment (2). Invisibly stitch top edge of hem allowance to organza only (3). All three rows of stitching stay in permanently.

1



2



3

## Temporarily bind raw edges

When constructing a garment from fabric that ravel easily, fold organza strips around the cut edges and hand-baste them temporarily into place with a running stitch. Scrap organza works well for this technique. It keeps the seam allowances from raveling before you can stitch and finish them.

You can also use this technique to temporarily hold a neckline in place and keep it from stretching before a collar, facing, or final binding is applied.

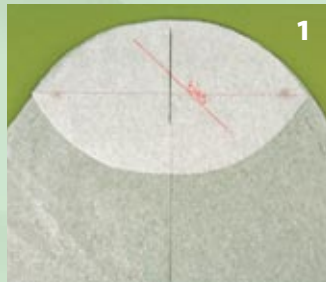


## Add support to fabric

Underlining a garment with organza adds support, crispness, or slight weight to a fabric. It supports lightweight or limp fabrics for tailored styles, stabilizes loosely woven fabrics to prevent sagging or stretching, and adds opaqueness to sheer or light-colored fabrics.

Underlining linen with organza helps reduce wrinkling. It allows construction details like hem stitches to be concealed from the outside of a garment, because you stitch only to the organza and not through to the fashion fabric.

To underline, cut a pattern piece in organza and pin it to the wrong side of the corresponding fashion-fabric piece. Lay the double layer flat with the organza on top. Roll the seam edge toward the organza side to allow for the turn of cloth, and hand- or machine-baste  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the edge. Treat the double layer as one as you construct the garment.



1

## Shape sleeve heads

Organza adds soft, springy support to a gathered or pleated sleeve cap. Using the sleeve-cap pattern as a guide, draw a straight line connecting the two notches. Fold a piece of organza on the bias, and position the fold along the line you just drew (1). Follow the sleeve-cap cutting line to cut the organza into a shape that resembles a football when unfolded.

Position a single layer of the organza along the sleeve cap, and from the right side of the sleeve, stitch gathering rows through both fabric and organza (2). The other side of the football remains unattached inside the sleeve.

For firmer support for a gathered sleeve, use a different sleeve head. Cut a bias strip of organza 12 to 14 inches long and 5 inches wide. Fold down 2 inches, and stitch two to three rows of gathering stitches close to the fold through both layers. Pull up the gathering threads (3) until the sleeve head is the desired length—6 to 7 inches—knot the threads at each end, and machine-stitch over the gathers to secure.

After sewing in the sleeve (shown detached), pin the folded head edge to the sleeve-cap seam allowance (4), following the seam. Loosely float-stitch the sleeve head to the armhole stitching line (5).



2



3



4



5

## Provide lining for sheers

Use organza for lining sheer fabrics, especially prints. It adds some opaqueness but keeps the look sheer without a second layer of print showing through.

A layer of organza on a shoulder yoke adds support to the garment. Enclose the yoke seams, and trim them to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch.

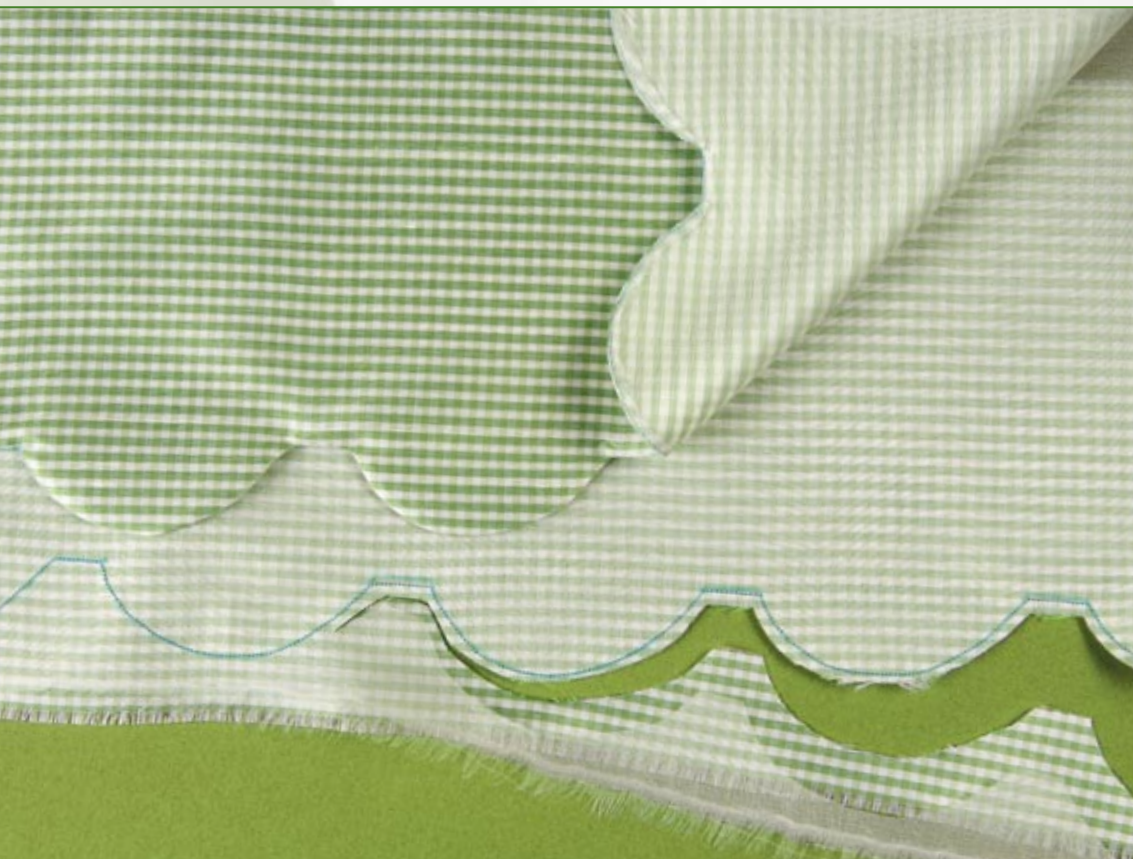
Eliminate the need for a hem finish on a sleeve by lining it to the edge with organza. Stitch the sleeve and lining right sides together at the finished hemline. Press the seam open, and trim seam allowances to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch. With right sides together, sew the sleeve and lining in one continuous seam. Press the seam open, fold wrong sides together along the cuff seam, and press the hem edge.



*Wrong*

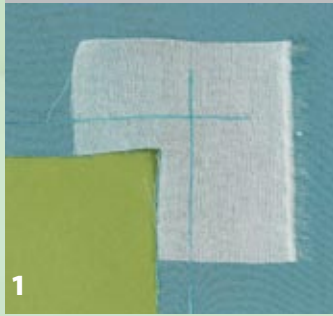


*Right*



## Secure edges and openings

Organza makes a delicate, shaped facing. Draw the edge shape on the organza. Position the organza on the right side of the fabric, and stitch over the drawn lines with a short stitch length. Trim close to the stitching through both layers; clip into the corners and around curves, and turn the organza to the wrong side. Roll the seam to the underside, and press the edge. This same process also works for clean, flat edges on various openings, such as bound buttonholes, design inserts, or welt pockets.



1 *Stabilize.*



2 *Press and clip.*



3 *Stitch the corner.*



4 *Press into place.*

## Reinforce clipped corners

Inside corners such as the shoulder/neckline point of a shawl collar, a square arm-hole, or the point of a basque waistline must be clipped. To stabilize and protect this delicate cutting, pin a square of organza to the right side of the fabric at the corner. Mark the corner.

To staystitch around the corner, use a short stitch length, start and end about 1 inch from either side of the corner, and pivot at the point with the needle down (1). Clip through both layers of the seam allowance into the corner. Press the organza toward the seam allowance (2).

Continue the construction, matching the corner points and stitching as directed, keeping the organza pressed away from the seamline (3). When the final seam is pressed into place, the organza helps fill in the gap created by clipping into the corner. The inset corner is now perfectly sewn (4).



## Stabilize seams

When seams need to be stabilized to prevent stretching, cut or tear crossgrain strips of organza  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch to 1 inch wide to use as stay tape. Tearing strips results in enough raveling to soften the edges and prevent a ridge from showing through.

Use organza strips on V-necks, diagonal slash pockets, and shoulder seams. For curved seams, shape the crossgrain strips with a steam iron, gently stretching one edge and shrinking the other, following the curved shape on your paper pattern piece.

Cut the strips to the length of the seamline, measuring the paper pattern, not the garment. Pin the stay tape to the wrong side of the garment, centering the tape over the seamline. Ease in any fullness that may occur if the fashion fabric stretches, and hand- or machine-baste in place. The stay remains in the garment permanently.