



Guidelines for Native Women's Clothing and Accoutrement:

The basic requirements for an accurate portrayal of an 18th century southeastern native woman are listed here. Also included are some basic ideas and suggestions for some items that are less essential but effective to add to your "kit" to improve your portrayal. This is **not** intended to be a complete analysis of the material goods of Southeastern Natives during the era, nor an analysis of differences between the native cultures of the Southeast. It is merely a starting point for you to build your "kit" from. If you have documentation for other clothing and accoutrement, please use that as a guideline as well. We also welcome additions or suggestions to this page, or the sharing of information to add it to our organizational knowledge-base-in-development. We will strive to be "common, everyday, and plain" first and foremost, but this does not mean that decorative (or decorated) items are not acceptable. It means that a convoluted excuse or rationale for using an object, including "spoils of war" should be avoided.

Basic Clothes:

Trade shirt - White or navy/white checked linen "trade" shirt. Neck and/or wrist ruffles are a dress-up addition. Because there doesn't seem to be a type shirt specifically made for women, it should fit as a man's shirt worn by a woman would. Cotton was also available towards the end of the Revolutionary War period, but was less common than linen. If you're going to spend a lot of time in the woods and want to reduce the glow of a white shirt, soak it in tea or a mild sumac leaf bath with a cup of salt, or use a "Natural" linen material rather than bright white to make the shirt in the first place. Don't go crazy with the walnuts though. There doesn't seem to be evidence of native people worrying about blending in; it came naturally ☺

Many sutlers and tailors sell these for a reasonable price for the effort involved in making one, or Beth Gilgun's "Tidings from the 18th Century" has an excellent pattern for a simple shirt. There are also good patterns for 18th century shirts available if you need a paper pattern. Hand sewing visible seams at the neckline and shoulder is recommended. You might want a thinner linen shirt for summer and a heavier, coarse linen for winter wear, as modesty and personal comfort allows.

Chemise: As an alternative to the man-tailored trade shirt, a European style chemise, in white linen, correct Indian calico (including the common white calico), or other appropriate fabrics may be worn. Patterns for these are commonly available online.

Wool wrap skirt – Original native wrap skirts were of native manufacture, created from the stroud (strowds and other names) that was traded by the yard or ell. Though other colors may have been available, the most common colors used were red, blue, or black - the preferred colors for wool according

to Timberlake were red and blue. Red should be fairly bright, or the color of a British “redcoat”; blue is usually a navy blue, as it is indigo dyed. Look for a light- to medium-weight wool, like broadcloth, as it is commonly available from places like 96 District Storehouse or Burnley and Trowbridge. When worn, the skirt will be knee length with a good fold (at least 4” for security) over the top. You will wrap around your body one and a half times. Secure it around your waist with a strap, leather thong or small buckle belt, and fold the extra over. For extra stay-put power, you may pin it with a small safety pin. Bind the edges or decorate with one or more rows of silk ribbon, worsted tape, ferreting, or similar material around the bottom and visible outside edge. Silk ribbon occurs most often on trade and gift lists, but wool tape/ferreting appears every once in awhile. (Thanks to various sources on Native List and elsewhere for pointers on these instructions—I’ve never actually worn a wrap skirt)

Wool leggings are a good choice for winter wear, but not required in summer. They should be side-seam construction. You have the same choice of colors as the wrap skirt, but the legging color doesn’t necessarily match the skirt. Leggings should reach between a hand’ width above the knee to mid-thigh and be sewn to fit close to the leg; allow at least a three-inch flap on the sides. There is not any documentation for how to hold women’s leggings up; the method is covered by the skirt in period paintings. It’s probably easiest to use the same method as men’s, but that requires a waist belt under the skirt. Simply tying them above the knee probably works just as well. Leggings can be left plain or decorated with silk ribbon, wool tape, or beading if you like. The decoration runs down the flaps and around the bottom. Binding the edge with a contrasting color ribbon looks nice too. Instructions for men’s leggings, courtesy of Dave Mott, are available [here](#).

Belts and Fingerwoven sashes don’t seem to have been used by women. If you can find documentation, I’m sure many people would appreciate it.

Leg Garters/ties: Like men’s, these can vary from a simple strip of wool cloth or leather to expensive fingerwoven articles. Start simple, and do your homework before purchasing the high ticket items.

Footwear

Center seam pucker-toe deerskin or elk skin moccasins are most appropriate, though shoes appear on gift and trade lists. Barefoot is also completely appropriate year-round, especially in the summer when it’s comfortable.

A good moccasin pattern created by Dave Mott is available [here](#) on our site, or you can see the well-known "Darry Wood" moccasin instructions on [Native Tech's site](#). Dave’s instructions are easier to follow though.

Braintanned deer hide is a first choice, but commercially tanned elk hide can make excellent moccasins, especially if you rough the smooth side with sandpaper or a pumice stone. Other moccasin styles are not clearly documented, so if you choose to use them, please be prepared to document their use in the time period and cultural group.

If using shoes, you should purchase a mid-late 18th c. shoe and either use buckles or lace them up. [Fugawee](#) make a very affordable (though not cheap) shoe that will last you for years. They run a little large and wide in my experience, so talk to the company before purchasing.

Outerwear:

Items such as blankets, cloth wraps/mantles known as matchcoats, and even full dress coats were traded or given to native people. The most common of these was the matchcoat. Luckily, this can also be one of the less expensive items as well.

Matchcoat: The simplest outerwear used by almost all native people was a blanket or matchcoat. A full-width piece of Stroud, duffel, or their modern equivalents that is as long as the person is tall (about two yards) makes an excellent matchcoat. You may hem the edges, let them fray, or bind them with silk ribbon. Decoration with silk ribbon near the ends is one way to dress up as well. As with all trade wool, wool colors most common were dark blue, red, and black, in that order. Ribbon appeared in many different colors, but yellow, gold, red, and blue seem to be most common. You can see instructions for matchcoat designs [here](#) on our site, courtesy of Dave Mott. As an alternative, you can wrap in a small trade blanket, as in the von Reck paintings of Creek people in the 1730's.

***Hint:** When you buy cloth for leggings and/or wrap skirt, buy two yards extra and you'll have a matchcoat too. Wash your wool in warm water and tumble it very briefly in a dryer after it has dripped dry to "full" it before you cut it or add ribbon decoration.*

Shortgowns, bedgowns, shifts and chemises are optional garments that appear occasionally on trade lists. The former are outer clothing, the latter replace the shirt as mentioned above. They do not seem to be very common, but are acceptable. Stick with solids or stripes or carefully researched prints for shortgowns/bedgowns, and white linen or one of the period documented calicos for shifts and chemises.

Stockings - Worsted stockings may be used in place of leggings, but should be less common than leggings in the camp.

Hair

The clearest hairstyle documented describes women wearing their hair long, parted in the middle, pulled back and clubbed. You may wrap the club with silk ribbon, a strip of trade cloth (wool, linen, or cotton) or use wool tape. For formal occasions, silver hair plates or other decoration is appropriate. You will probably want to use a hair dressing to keep the hair smooth and looking well-kept. Bear grease is totally PC, but modern stuff can work too. It also helps to darken hair, which should appear as close to jet black as possible.

Physical adornment:

Physical adornment consists of jewelry and body paint. In village council or treaty event scenarios, jewelry would have been common. In a battle reenactment or hunting situation, personal adornment would have been simple and plain. There is some evidence of tattooing among women, but considerable research should be done before something as permanent as tattooing.

Jewelry: Ear rings of the closed-bottom ball and cone type are very common in 18th century archaeological sites. Many early examples are shorter and wider than modern reproductions. The "wheel" type earring is a late century item, but **may** be appropriate for late Revolutionary War events--more research would be helpful in this area.

Strands of beads documentable to the period are common for dress wear. "Pound" beads (approx 6/0 or 8/0) in white, dark blue, light ("Carolina") blue, red, and black were common, though other colors show up as well. This is an area that we can help with, and strands of beads are inexpensive additions to your outfit.

Brass welding rod bent into wrist bracelets are a very cheap method of dressing up. Round silver ring brooches are inexpensive, and were often used as "change" in trades. Other silver or brass items such as finger rings, pins, arm and wrist bands, etc. can be high cost items that should be carefully researched, but inexpensive items worn at appropriate times can be just the extra touch.

We've found no reference to women wearing nose rings in the south. If you run across some, please share it; we know several people who would like to find it.

Paint: Paint use by women is only occasionally mentioned. If you choose to use it, use red ochre or vermilion powder, mixed with oil, bear grease or something similar. If you are sun-sensitive, a sunscreen might be a good medium to use also. Paint should be applied only to the part of the hair, around the edge of the forehead. If you're a single, "available" woman, red spots on the cheeks signify that you are, though there are some negative connotations associated with this.

Personal items:

Personal items such as pipes and tobacco, combs, small trade items, etc. appear regularly in accounts and lists from the period. These small, usually low cost items can be the added "bang" for little buck. Do your research before you buy, even if the item is inexpensive.

Things to avoid:

Belt and neck knives. I know, you want a way to carry your knife. There doesn't seem to be any documentation for women carrying their knives around with them. Make a simple sheath and keep the knife in a work bag or basket.

Purses: I don't mean leather Gucci purses, but bags for personal items. A small bag can be tucked into the top of the skirt, out of sight, but there isn't documentation for small bags worn on a belt or around the neck/arm/shoulders. You can make a small or large twined bags and keep items in, or use period-documentable baskets or a gourd container.