

PUTTING TOGETHER A 1920s COSTUME

- **Your closet**
- **1920s-style costumes (buying & renting)**
- **Vintage 1920s clothing & accessories**
- **New or used clothing that can pass as 1920s**
- **Reproductions of 1920s clothing & accessories**
- **Make your own headwear and/or outfit**

YOUR CLOSET

Be sure to peruse the other PDFs with photos of period dress and accessories. You may find that you have most of your ideal costume right in your closet! Many 1920s garments were similar to ones we own today. This is particularly true for men's clothing. Some modern women's dresses with an undefined or low waist can be given a 1920s look by tying a sash around the hips, or adding an artificial flower corsage at the shoulder, or by tacking a sash with fringed ends over one shoulder. Or, for instance, you can take a skirt that has a 1920s look (straight cut, bias cut, asymmetrical, poufy, or tiered) and you can add a sleeveless top over it to make it look like an ensemble with a dropped waist.

Also, for the Ladies: you don't need a bobbed hairdo to get the 1920s look. Check the section on HAIRSTYLES & MAKEUP.

COSTUME SHOPS/RENTALS

The quality varies at costume shops, and it is not always that cheap to rent. 1920s-style costumes can be overpriced for the quality. However, costume shops can be good places to go to acquire accessories, wigs, etc.

Dorothy's Boutique

www.dorothysboutique.biz
190 Massachusetts Ave
Boston, MA 02115
(617) 262-9255

Costume Company

489 Mass Avenue
Arlington Center
<http://www.costumecompany.com/index.html>
(781) 643-9422

Boston Costume/The Garment District

www.bostoncostume.com
200 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 482-1632

There are many online costume stores. The most affordable, authentic-looking flapper costume I have found on the web, at least from what I can tell from the small photo, is at www.bonniestreasures.com, look under Costumes & Wigs category for "1920s Charleston Flapper Costume."

LOCAL VINTAGE CLOTHING STORES

Bobby From Boston

19 Thayer St, South End
(@ 450 Harrison building)
(617) 423-9299

NOTE: Bobby only takes cash and checks.

If you are a **FELLA**, you should visit this store, either to get an outfit or get ideas. They have EVERYTHING, and it's like a step into the past. Great for period-look ties (bow ties galore!), suspenders, straw bowlers, vests, suits, shoes, etc. Prices aren't dirt cheap, but also not incredibly expensive. If you are a **JANE**, Bobby says he has some high-quality 1920s dresses in storage. He says he'd sell them for between \$350-\$500 (cheaper than the usual \$1000+)

The Garment District/Boston Costume

200 Broadway (near MIT)
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 876-5230
www.garmentdistrict.com

The Garment District has very little real 1920s clothing, but you may find later clothes that can pass as 1920s, especially accessories.

Oona's

1210 Massachusetts Ave (Harvard Square)
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 491-2654

This longtime establishment has a good selection of men's and women's vintage, although very little stuff from the 1920s. They have lots of good accessories for men and women.

Café Society

131 Cypress St (several block walk from Brookline Village T)
Brookline, MA 02445
(617) 738-7186

This store has a nice selection of vintage clothing, although very little from the 1920s. Is a good place for men's clothing & accessories at prices a little cheaper than at *Bobby from Boston*, although not as large a selection. For women, they have no 1920s dresses, but do have some 1920s women's costume jewelry (priced moderately to expensive).

VINTAGE ONLINE

e-Bay

E-Bay is the best place to look for real 1920s clothing at cheaper prices, but of course one must search...

Go to the CLOTHING, SHOES, & ACCESSORIES category, subcategory VINTAGE. Within VINTAGE, there are further subcategories for Women's vintage clothing, Men's vintage clothing, Men's vintage shoes, Women's vintage shoes, etc. Within those categories, you can designate date, e.g. the period "1920-1938." Be sure to look both in the regular auctions and in e-Bay "Stores." Some e-Bay "Stores" don't list all their stuff in the main auctions.

PRICES: If you are savvy, you can get decent 1920s clothing & accessories for \$20 - \$100. Ornatly beaded, knee-length dresses (popular 1926-28) that are in excellent shape usually have lots of people bidding on them and go for \$250 and up.

SIZING: You should know all your measurements and all the measurements in inches or centimeters of any garment you bid on, as most sellers of vintage clothing do not offer returns or exchanges. Old dress sizes do not correspond to today's sizes. Also, don't forget that 1920s hats usually run small, so you should measure your head and know the measurement of the hat you are buying. ("Small," "medium," or "large" is not enough information.) Ditto for shoes – get detailed inside measurements.

CONDITION: Be sure to find out about whether or not the garment has any flaws (tears, weakening fabric, holes, stains, old-clothing odors), and whether the item comes from a household with smoking and animals (e.g. if you are allergic). Many vintage items have problems and are in need of repairs.

INCORRECT DATING: Many dealers mistake clothing from later dates for 1920s clothing, and thus price it too high. This is especially true for women's clothing (dresses, hats), because there were multiple 1920s revivals between the 1950s and the 1990s. If you need help, e-mail Carrie a link to the item.

Online dealers of vintage clothing & accessories for women & men

1920s clothing/accessories for sale on these sites. Read above about what to consider when buying vintage clothing online.

<http://bobbydene.com>

www.anothertimevintageapparel.com

<http://tangerineboutique.com>

www.hemlockvintage.com

www.1860-1960.com

www.pastperfectvintage.com

www.antiquedress.com

www.victorianelegance.com

www.vintagemartini.com

www.davenportandco.com

www.vintagetextile.com

www.robinclaytonvintage.com

www.antique-fashion.com

www.timewarp.com

www.bonnies-treasures.com

www.isadoras.com (pricy, good for ideas)

www.woodlandfarmsantiques.com

www.jabotsboutique.com
(good for vintage men's ties)

FASHIONABLE REPRODUCTIONS of BEADED DRESSES

www.unique-vintage.com. Sells beaded dresses with a '20s flair (some are based on actual 1920s garments) as well as slips to go under sheer dresses. Also sells dresses with allover fringe, but they appear to be mini-dresses.

<http://stores.ebay.com/LeLuxe-Clothing>. Ditto to above. They sell beaded headbands based on an original pattern.

www.threadsintime.net They carry some pretty good 1920s inspired dresses, although they might be a little bit on the mini-dress side....

GALS: MAKE YOUR OWN COSTUME

If you can't sew, or don't have time, try hiring a local seamstress.

www.pastpatterns.com

This company offers sewing patterns taken from actual period clothing. Good selection of women's dresses from the '20s, dated to the original year of the pattern. Check both the 1920s and the 1930s sections, the latter of which has several nice patterns dating from 1929-31. Some patterns come in multiple sizes, but most come in one size based on the original pattern copied. Of those one-size patterns, there are dresses for all sizes btw bust size 32" - size 42". Cost: \$13 - \$19.

www.longago.com

This is the website for Harper House Vintage Costuming. In the 1920s section, they sell other companies patterns, as well as their own patterns for 1920s hats and cloches taken from original designs.

www.folkwear.com

This company's "retro" patterns have some garments based on 1920s styles, but are not copied from actual vintage patterns, and so are sometimes influenced by 1980s taste (when they were first published). Mostly, they are pretty good, and you may find a style you like better than at Past Patterns.

www.rockinghorse-farm.com

This company has one package of three 1920s dress patterns, sized XS up to 26.

There are several websites selling actual vintage patterns; these are more expensive than Past Patterns reproduction patterns. If you are interested, I can send you a list.

FABRIC STORES:

Winmill Fabrics in Chinatown has a decent selection, with a few synthetic taffetas and silk satins that can pass as 1920s fabrics. There are multiple fabric stores in the burbs. Also consider famed Rhode Island fabric store, **Lorraine Fabrics**, which is supposed to have a great supply of designer fabrics at low prices. Drive is about an hour each way.

ACCESSORIES

MEN'S ACCESSORIES

For info about men's accessories (shoes, hats, ties, etc) see the handout 1920s MEN'S FASHIONS.

WOMEN'S ACCESSORIES

WOMEN'S SHOES

See the handout 1920s WOMEN'S SHOES

Continue for more accessories...

WOMEN'S HEADWEAR

Women: Cloches, brimmed hats, evening caps

- It is rare to find real 20s women's headgear in vintage stores around Boston. Best place to get the Real McCoy at online stores and e-Bay. Vintage hats usually run much smaller than today's hats. Be sure to get all measurements and know the condition before buying.
- Another good option is to make your own hat based on period patterns. Carrie Alyea has some reprinted 1920s sewing guides with instructions for cloches and other hats.
- Hire a local milliner: try Marie Galvin at Galvanized Headwear, 450 Harrison Ave in the South End. www.galvanizedhats.com.
- Occasionally modern hats work. Most modern "cloches" are not shaped like 20s cloches, but some are closer than others. There's a hat that looks 1920s at Urban Outfitters. Go to www.urbanoutfitters.com and type in "Scrunch Linen Beanie." \$24. It would be easy to decorate.

Women: Headpieces, headbands, tiaras

- Make your own with feathers or flowers. See below.
- Wrap a shiny, metallic, or solid color scarf around your head and secure it with a pin.
- There are a lot of shiny/metallic/colorful/jeweled headbands on the market now, and some of them might work as a 1920s headband, and you could even attach feathers or flowers.
- Vintage versions occasionally pop up on e-Bay.
- Costume shops usually have "flapper" headbands made from sequined elastic with feathers.

IF YOU WANT A VINTAGE HAT, NOTE: 1920s hats tend to run smaller than hats today. Be sure to know your head measurement and that of the hat. Also, many dealers confuse women's post-1950s cloche hats with 1920s hats. One good way to tell the age of a hat is its lining. 1920s hats are almost always lined in silk or artificial silk, but hats from the 1950s and 1960s are usually unlined.

MAKE-YOUR-OWN

Modern ribbon, trims, etc. can be obtained from **Windsor Button** in Downtown Crossing. When I last visited they didn't have a great selection of flowers/feather trim that would work on 20s costumes. However, they do have a large selection of synthetic fringe. Some of the colors look less like modern synthetics than others,

You can also find some pretty good feather and flower trims at the craft store **Michael's** in Everett (off 93, Mystic View Road shopping plaza).

For vintage feathers and millinery/corsage flowers, visit:

<http://stores.ebay.com/Vintage-Feathers-and-More>

<http://stores.ebay.com/Vintage-Millinery-Flowers-Shoppe>

Also, try using a modern headband or scarf and decorating it with some vintage pieces or pins for a vintage look.

WOMEN'S UNDERWEAR

If you are busty/curvy, try to wear underwear that flattens you out and streamlines your figure. Curvy women at the time continued to wear full-body corsets (although less heavily boned than in early periods). Less curvy women, or as they put it in the 20s, those who were “firm,” wore silk or rayon step-in one-piece teddies.

WOMEN'S STOCKINGS

Curvy women who still wore heavier foundation garments continued to clip their stockings to their long corsets as women had in the past. Panty hose weren't introduced to the fashion market until 1959, but these are the best choice unless you'd like to wear a garter belt or try to find a full-body corset.

Less curvy women, having switched to teddies, which were too flimsy to clip stocking to, started holding up their stockings with garters above the knee (think silk wedding garters in colors, often with amusing decorations). Younger, more daring types rolled their stockings down either just above or just below the knee, holding them in place with more plain garters (like our modern day hair elastics).

As for color, more traditional and demure gals continued to wear the more opaque colors of the 1910s, while more fashion-forward types started wearing more “nude” colors for evening wear. A shiny pair is good, as they look more like the silk hose of the period. Daywear stockings often had patterns and were a bit more opaque. Women occasionally wore colored sheer hose (green, red, etc), so if you find a pair that really compliments your outfit, go for it! Sheer black was sometimes worn too, but more often in the earlier 20s. Fishnet stockings weren't worn in the 1920s, as far as I can tell.

Other details: seams up the back of stockings, or designs up the back like diamonds, are good. Many stockings also continued the Victorian/Edwardian style of “clocks” up the sides over the ankles (see photo). Also, there was a fad for painting portraits, animals, etc. onto the thigh of one stocking.



If you want to wear stockings rather than pantyhose with your costume, and don't want to purchase a pair of real stockings, try cutting a pair of cheap (but tight) pantyhose at the thigh.

JEWELRY

You probably have jewelry at home that could pass as 1920s jewelry, and if not, you can borrow from a friend or easily find reproductions or vintage pieces at reasonable prices.

Pearls: Despite the stereotype that all 20s gals wore long rope pearls (36” - 45” length), most pearl necklaces were shorter - everything from 14” to 26”. In general, longer strands were more popular in the first half of the decade, and shorter in the second half (following the length of the hemlines). When long strands of pearls were worn, they were sometimes paired with a shorter pearl necklace, or were wrapped around the neck twice.

Other necklaces: women wore a wide variety of necklaces, usually between 15” and 20”: glass & crystal beads, deco styles rhinestone & glass stones, marcasite, metal filigree, bakelite plastic, Chinese-influenced carved beads, Egyptian revival, etc. A style popular

with students and flappers was the long “sautoir” necklace made out of flat, hand-woven seed beads (based on Native American styles).

Earrings, bracelets, rings: Earrings either weren’t worn (as hair was covering the ears) or for evening sometimes dangly earrings were worn. 1920s earrings had screw-backs. Lots of styles were around, and there are plenty of imitation deco dangly earrings on the market for pierced ears. Other good accessories are sparkly or bangle bracelets (for the wrist or upper arm), and rings that are either classic or deco.

Brooches/hat pins/shoe clips: brooches were often worn, and especially hat pins – either brooches on a hat, or pins designed specifically for hats. Deco-looking or vintage shoe clips are a great way to make your modern shoes look vintage!

BOAS, SCARVES, & SHAWLS

If you want a feather boa, the cheapest ones I’ve found are at **Garment District** in Cambridge. Boas also sold for higher prices at **Windsor Button** in Downtown Crossing. The boas sold these days are of much cheaper quality than 1920s ostrich boas, so if you want something that looks fancier, go for a long silky or velvet neck-scarf or period-look shawl or wrap. Or, just go without.