

Girdle Books

What is this for?

The purpose of this class is to help you construct something that you can use to keep a few small items close to you at all times, while in garb, and not shatter the medieval ambiance while doing it. I am not an expert in girdle books I am just a hobbyist who has done enough reading to pull off a good mundanity cover.



History (taken from Wikipedia): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girdle_book

Girdle books were small portable books worn by medieval European monks, clergymen and aristocratic nobles as a popular accessory to medieval costume, between the 13th and 16th centuries. They consisted of a book whose leather binding continued loose below the cover of the book in a long tapered tail with a large knot at the end which could be tucked into one's girdle or belt. The knot was usually strips of leather woven together for durability. The book hung upside down and backwards so that when swung upwards it was ready for reading. The books were normally religious: a cleric's daily Office, or for lay persons (especially women) a Book of Hours. One of the best known texts to become a girdle book is Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy, although it is the only surviving philosophical/theological girdle book. Women especially wore the girdle book out of convenience since it was already fashionable, at least in the 15th century, to wear a girdle belt above the waistline. A book secured on the girdle belt served both the utilitarian function of enabling hands-free carrying and protecting valuable books from theft and the elements. It also made a visible statement of social position, wealth and learning (or at least literacy). Authoritative figures, saints or apostles like St. Jerome were often depicted holding girdle books. Girdle books also appeared to be a fashionable accessory for lay women, adding to the decorative efforts already invested in the creation of a girdle belt. Artistic depictions of the girdle book confirm their popularity as an accessory.

Girdle books first appeared in the late 13th century and gained popularity through the 15th sometimes becoming ostentatious jewel-encrusted presentation books and falling out of favor late in the 16th century, when printed books had become much more common. Another possible reason for their decline was the relatively small number of specialized girdle-protected texts becoming outdated with little need to replace them. In an environment of increasingly cheap printing it was simpler to replicate texts than spend time preserving individual manuscripts. The intricately constructed girdle bindings were simply impractical after a certain point.

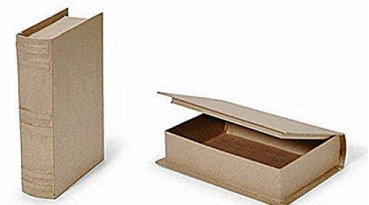
There are hundreds of artistic representations of girdle books. Their popularity in art indicates a much wider distribution and adoption of the girdle book as a binding than surviving copies suggest. A list of 150 examples "shows the proportion of representation in painting and in sculpture [as] almost equal." However, only 23 medieval girdle books have survived in their original binding, the oldest datable example being from Kastl, Germany (ca. 1453). At least part of the reason for the small number of surviving examples stems from the fact that the use of the girdle book was largely confined to a narrow area from the Netherlands to the Upper Rhine Valley.

Decide what you are carrying:

For our purposes, the first thing you need to do is decide what it is you are carrying. Myself, I have to be able to keep my phone on me for medical reasons, so this is effectively a mundanity cover for my smart phone. I have also heard people ask about it for insulin carriage, small item supplies, or medication. All are perfectly acceptable.

Base material:

You need to either purchase a "book box" type of item the correct shape or size to hold what you want, or you can make it. I recommend using white glue and several layers of cereal box cardboard, or a single layer of durable, corrugated cardboard. Examples can be found at stores like Jo Ann Fabrics, Hobby Lobby, or



Amazon.com.

If you construct your own, I advise you to build it around the specific item(s) you want to carry.

Fabric:

Trust me, you don't want to use real leather for this. Its expensive, hard to work with, and probably will last longer than the book itself. Historical examples include fabric and leather, and modernly there are synthetic examples of both cloth and faux leather that can serve as a cost efficient investment for us. As a rule of thumb, I always budget one yard square for a book. That's insanely more than you will actually need, but trust me, getting half that much will mean you don't have enough if you make a mistake.

Construction: At its core, all known girdle books had the same basic components.

Cover: the cover was a durable material, usually something already known as a good book binding material, and often times water resistant.

A "tail": The book was covered normally, just like any bound book of the age, but the bottom edge of the cover was left long, and then knotted or otherwise bound. This is the part that hangs from the book.

A latch, strap, buckle, or hook: By design, the book was meant to hang freely and protect the pages from wear or damage. Towards this end, all examples of girdle books has some means of latching or tying the covers shut to protect the pages.

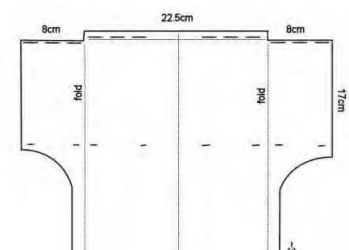
A "head": This is not an official title, but all known examples had some variation of a ball, head, knot, or other "fixture" at the end of the tail to both control the end of the loose fabric, and to help give the wearer something to tuck under his belt.



Construction:

First, cut the fabric large, with lots of extra for all eventualities. You'll want to position the book for the first step in the gluing so that it is several inches from any edge of the fabric.

1. Glue one cover face first. Use White glue, or tacky glue. Cover the whole surface, press the material into place, then set it under a book or other moderate weight and let it dry *overnight*.
2. Glue the spine, working slowly, and using close pins or light clamps if you have to in order to hold the material in place. A good, sticky white glue that's been allowed to get a little dry and super sticky works really well here in my opinion.
3. As soon as the spine is in place (but not dry), glue the remaining cover, and use the same weights to hold that down and let the glue dry *overnight*.
4. Once the cover gluing is dry, fold down one edge, and glue it to the inside face of the cover. Use a razor or scissor to trim it right up to the edge of the "pages". Let it dry, and then do the next edge. This will be a slow, tedious process as you let the glue dry, and you will want close pins to help hold it in place. The curve of the back spine will probably take some work to get in tucked over properly.
5. Once you have three edges trimmed up and glued in place, you can



then trim the tail to shape. The included pattern is only one example of the type of trim pattern you can use. As I said before, I recommend trimming after you glue the cover faces in place.

6. Make the head. There are multiple ways to finish the head of a girdle book. Some historical examples were just a knot, others were leather end woven into a hard ball. And a few examples exist where the end is shown to have a metal loop, or bar through it.