



costume

The Renaissance period was not only a great time of enlightenment of the sciences and arts but fashion was affected by these changing times as well. Clothing became extravagant, especially if you were wealthy or a nobleman. New shapes and bright colors were used, and Spanish trends were the latest fashion.

The male costume of the Renaissance consisted of a doublet (a close-fitting garment resembling a waistcoat) and hose. The sleeves were detachable and a white linen ruffle encircled the neckline. At this time, the greatest sign of a man's wealth was the clothing he wore: the finest fabrics, jewels, belt buckles, medallions and rings. Only the nobles could buy silk, wear jewelry or buy sable and ermine fur. It was the law! Even if you were a wealthy merchant, you couldn't buy the clothes only a nobleman was allowed to wear.

Women's clothing was extravagant too, with low-cut tops that held the rest of the body pinched in. Women's skirts swelled out like tents, and underneath of the entire outer costume was a set of complicated underclothes that must have been very uncomfortable.

Armor worn by knights changed during the Renaissance as well. Bars of iron and steel were hammered into flat plates shaped to cover the body. The plates were curved to fit the body exactly, and were then polished and decorated. There were at least nineteen main parts to a suit of plate armor. This gave more freedom of movement, not to mention maximum defense. Some suits of armor weighed so much that it actually took a crane to hoist the knight onto his horse!

Peasant clothing of the Renaissance was much different from the clothing of the wealthy and noblemen. These lower-class citizens were often dressed in dull-colored clothing made from natural fibers like cotton, wool or flax.

Peasant Costume

Fabrics: Fabrics were coarsely woven. The lower classes mostly spun their own yarn and wove their own cloth. They also wore leather when they could get it from hunting.

Colors: Colors for dyeing fabrics were obtained from vegetable sources and consisted mainly of earth colors and muted tones. Shirts and shifts were left undyed because they were likely to be washed more often. As there was seldom enough time or money to buy or make a lot of cloth at one time, the color of one garment hardly ever matched the color of another.

*If making your own Peasant Costume, you would not want to use prints, velours, sheers, gingham, seersucker, gauze or polyesters. Velvets satins, and brocades would also not be appropriate for peasants. If you choose to use leather it should be of a natural shade. No fluorescent colors, reds, blacks, purple, pastels, bright or modern-looking colors. Shirts and shifts should be natural, not bright white.

Ornamentation: Trim on peasant clothes was simple and usually consisted of embroidery or plain strips of contrasting fabric sewn to the edges of things to set them off. Most often, there was no trim or adornment of any kind. Trim, if used, should be simple and rustic, not shiny or patterned. It goes without saying that peasants had no jewelry or ornaments on their clothing. At one's belt would be a pouch, a small knife for eating purposes, and perhaps a tankard and/or objects pertaining to one's profession. When choosing these, be aware of your position and carry simple items.

Footwear: Shoes should be sturdy, comfortable working shoes, either leather "earth-shoe" type shoes, boots, or "kung-fu" style cloth shoes.

Headwear: Muffin caps and coifs, either alone or with a large straw hat, was the most common style for peasants. Women's hair should be tucked under the hat or tied back-not loose.

MEN'S CLOTHING:

- *A shift or shirt, long-sleeved, full-bodied
- *Breeches, either baggy, knee length with hose or long and cross gartered from ankle to knee
- *A Jerkin, with or without removable sleeves
- *Appropriate headwear and footwear
- *A belt with pouch, knife, and other appropriate accessories

WOMEN'S CLOTHING

- *A long-sleeve shift
- *Two skirts with the upper skirt, usually newer than the underskirt, tucked up out of the dirt
- *A tight-fitting, scoop or square-necked bodice with or without removable sleeves
- *An apron, if working
- *Appropriate headwear and footwear, with cotton tights
- *A belt with pouch and other appropriate accessories and a basket

This broad category consists of lower middle class, whose clothing would be similar to peasants, to upper middle class, who resemble nobility.

A note about sumptuary laws: These laws, equivalent to a luxury tax, are very important to keep in mind, particularly if you are constructing your own middle class costume. Essentially a mandatory dress code of the different classes within society, they dedicated the fabrics, trim, colors, and a decoration a person could wear. People who wanted to get around the laws could pay a fine, called a sumptuary tax, but bear in mind that one would have to be able to afford to do this .

Fabrics: If making a costume, again, you would want to use only 100% natural fabrics and vary the textures for the most authentic look. Lower middle classes used fabrics similar to that of the peasants, but less coarse and sometimes purchased from a professional weaver. The best fabrics are wool, woven cottons, raw silk, textured natural fabrics, leather and linen. For the upper middle class, fabrics remain the wools and linens but are of finer quality, and can include bits of silk and velvet. Remember the sumptuary laws when adding particularly rich fabrics to any middle class costume.

Do not use prints, velours, sheers, gingham, seersucker, gauze, or polyesters. Keep silks, brocades, and velvets to a minimum.

Colors: Fabric colors may be more intense than for peasants, but the nature of the vegetable dyes was such that colors would still be subdued-again, earth tones and muted shades. And they, of course, all faded with time and washing. True black was a very difficult color to maintain and was therefore, restricted to those with money to afford it. For the upper middle class, colors could move into more jewel tones, but not bright, and black for formal occasions.

Do not use fluorescent colors, purples, pastels, bright or modern-looking colors. Keep black to a minimum. Shirts and shifts can be natural for lower class and white for the upper middle class.

Ornamentation: Trims were simple, such as ribbon and embroidery, and always colored-gold and silver metallic threads or trim were far too expensive as was lace. As ones moves up in the middle class, trims can become more ornate and include the gold, silver and lace for those able to afford the sumptuary tax required. Jewelry also varies as one moves up in the middle class. The lower middle class would have little if any jewelry and it would be simple in design. The upper middle class would wear more ornate jewelry. Belts with pouches, eating knives, tankards, etc. were also included.

Footwear: Loafer-type shoes, boots, and kung-fu style shoes, adorned with decorative buckles or shoe roses for the upper class.

MEN'S CLOTHING:

*For the lower middle class, your costume should include the same basic garments as described for peasants, but they would be cleaner, neater, and newer. The shirt or shift could have a neck ruffle on the collar and the jerkin or doublet would be more fitted and perhaps made of the same material as the breeches.

*For the upper middle class, your costume should include a shirt made of fine linen or cotton with the neck and wrist ruffles and perhaps a touch of beadwork, embroidery or lace, if you can afford it. Over the shirt will be a close-fitting doublet and breeches or slops.

*Headwear: A coif with a flat cap or straw hat over it for the lower middle class, adorned with a feather or two. A flap-cap or tall-crowned, small-brimmed hat with feathers and a fancy hatband for the upper middle class.

WOMEN'S CLOTHING:

*For the lower middle class, your costume should include the same basic garments as described for peasants, but they would be cleaner, neater and newer. Fabrics would be less coarse than those used by peasants. Your bodice and skirts fit better and can be made of matching fabrics and one of your skirts might be decorated or made from a richer material than the other skirt.

*You can also wear a modest bum roll under the skirts and have boning or a busk down the front of your bodice to have the effect of a corset.

*For the upper middle class, your costume should include a high-necked chemise of fine cotton, linen, or silk with neck and wrist ruffles and perhaps embroidery and lace, if you can afford it. Over the chemise will be a bum roll, hoop skirt, and petticoats—just like the noblewomen but in a less exaggerated style—and a tight-fitting bodice.

*Headwear: There are many styles from which to choose, for the simple muffin cap and straw hat of the peasant to more elaborately embroidered and decorated caul, French hoods, and tall hats worn by noblewomen.

Upper class and nobility costume

The nobility were the fashion setters of the land. Many literally wore their fortunes on their backs, with clothing heavily beaded, jeweled, and embroidered. The men and women could afford the clothes they liked—so long as no one tried to outshine the King and Queen!

If you are considering adorning an upper class costume, bear in mind the cost and complexity involved as well as your role in a country market fair.

Fabrics: Fabrics can be quite glorious, though they should still be 100% natural. In addition to the usual wools and linens one can include silk, satin, brocade, damask, and velvet. **Do not** use prints, velour, sheers, gingham, seersucker, gauze, silver or gold lame', or polyesters.

Colors: Colors were brilliant, but not loud. Black was most popular for formal wear. Remember that the colors were still made from vegetable and mineral sources so their intensity would be much less than those made from modern dyes. Think rich and deep, rather than bright. **Do not** use fluorescent colors, purple, pastels, bright or modern-looking colors.

Ornamentation: Jewelry was abundant, including gold chains, brooches, rings, strands of pearls, earrings, and jeweled buttons. Clothing was also heavily beaded, trimmed and embroidered.

MEN'S CLOTHING:

A nobleman's costume should consist of a shirt made of fine linen, cotton or silk with lace-edged neck and wrist ruffles.

A ruff could be either part of the shirt or separate from it.

The doublet was close-fitting, with matching removable sleeves and much ornamentation.

Breeches came in several styles—slops that came to mid-thigh, padded Venetian breeches that reach the knees, or panted slops.

Accessories can include a pouch, dagger or sword, gloves, pomander, and, of course, jewelry.

Headwear: Hats might be a flat cap or high-crowned, narrow-brimmed tall hat, with elaborately trimmed hat bands and feathers.

WOMEN'S CLOTHING:

A noble-woman's costume should consist of a chemise made of fine linen, cotton, or silk and including lace trim, embroidery, and/or beading.

The ruff can be part of the collar or separate from it.

Over the chemise will go the petticoat, hoop skirt, bum roll, corset, elaborately decorated underskirt, overskirt, bodice and sleeves.

Accessories can include a pouch, pomander, fan, hand mirror, gloves and, of course, jewelry.

Headwear: Many noblewomen wore wigs and long hair was kept covered. Many hat styles were available, all of which would be elaborately trimmed and decorated, including the flat cap, French hood, high-crowned tall hat, caul, and pill-box style hat with a veil.