



How to Sew a Button: And Other Nifty Things Your Grandmother Knew

Erin Bried

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“Waste not, want not” with this guide to saving money, taking heart, and enjoying the simple pleasures of life.

Nowadays, many of us “outsource” basic tasks. Food is instant, ready-made, and processed with unhealthy additives. Dry cleaners press shirts, delivery guys bring pizza, gardeners tend flowers, and, yes, tailors sew on those pesky buttons. But life can be much simpler, sweeter, and richer—and a lot more fun, too! As your grandmother might say, now is not the time to be careless with your money, and it actually pays to learn how to do things yourself!

Practical and empowering, **How to Sew a Button** collects the treasured wisdom of nanas, bubbies, and grandmas from all across the country—as well as modern-day experts—and shares more than one hundred step-by-step essential tips for cooking, cleaning, gardening, and entertaining, including how to

- polish your image by shining your own shoes
- grow your own vegetables (and stash your bounty for the winter)
- sweeten your day by making your own jam
- use baking soda and vinegar to clean your house without toxic chemicals
- feel beautiful by perfecting your posture
- roll your own piecrust and find a slice of heaven
- fold a fitted sheet to crisp perfection
- waltz without stepping on any toes

Complete with helpful illustrations and brimming with nostalgic charm, **How to Sew a Button** provides calm and comfort in uncertain times. By doing things yourself, with care and attention, you and your loved ones will feel the pleasing rewards of a job well done.

How to Sew a Button: And Other Nifty Things Your Grandmother Knew Details

Date : Published December 15th 2009 by Ballantine Books (first published 2009)

ISBN : 9780345518750

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Format : Paperback 278 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Reference, Self Help, How To, Art, Crafts

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From Reader Review How to Sew a Button: And Other Nifty Things Your Grandmother Knew for online ebook

Emilie says

I expected to like this book much more than I did. I really agree on the overall premise. I think we could learn a lot and utilize our resources much better if we took a cue from the older generations. I know many women who can't sew a button.

One of the issues is with the writing style which is forcefully cheeky. Sometimes you find this forced humor funny and other times, annoying. Also, the book is peppered with illustrations of various retro women engaging in the tasks being explained, but what it really could have used are a few illustrations to clarify the more complicated instructions.

There is some very useful information in this book, but not any you wouldn't find through a google search in a much more clear and concise manner with pictures included.

Dara says

I liked the concept of this book, but not the execution. Instructions are either ludicrously simple (how to shop locally: join a CSA or shop at the farmer's market. REALLY????!?? Also explained: how to plan a weekly menu (instructions: pick recipes for 7 days (seriously, that's in there))) or useless without pictures or more detailed instructions (I have absolutely no clue what the "how to darn a sock" instructions were describing).

Aric says

Ummm... sexism?

I was curious about this book having read one of her other books "How to Build a Fire: And Other Handy Things Your Grandfather Knew". Looking at the cover to this one had me concerned that it was targeted to a purely female audience; right down to the choice of pink for the primary color on the cover.

Well, it kind of is I suppose but there are a lot of tasks detailed here that I know MY grandma never did. Cleaning fish? Right. She would gladly fry it for you in that tasty, heart rotting oil everyone cooked with back in the day but one of her rules was if you catch it, you clean it.

In short: useful stuff to know no matter what your orientation is but there is a lot tailored to female specific tasks. Think lipstick and centerpieces I guess.

Lorraine says

I thought this was ok but a lot of info you could just get online if the problem came up.

Mike says

I'm sure (and I'll check once I've written this review) that I "discovered" this do-it-yourself guide via one of my Goodreads friends. I probably did not read a synopsis of it, so I was unaware that it was written as girl-to-girl advice. Nonetheless, I stuck it out cover-to-cover as most of the topics are of equal use to all genders.

I was fortunate enough to know both of my Grandmothers (plus one Great-Grandmother) and like those whose wisdom is ensconced in this book they had their own special skills and knowledge. They came from different backgrounds and cultures, but by the magic of city living they ended up across the street from each other (which is how you-know-who met the other you-know-who.)

I had one specific motive in reading this book. Despite knowing how to thread a needle properly, I never felt capable of sewing on a button. Sure, I could have (and may still) look it up on the ubiquitous web, but I wasn't in any great rush or need to do so.

Thinking about this book is easy: all the subjects are well-grouped and each one is kept short with well-described steps. Most have a section of additional tips or hints, also. The book is kept slim by avoiding diagrams (except for the occasional decorative illustration), but this is also one of its weaknesses. There are some instructions that need an illustration or two to aid in visualizing the method, process, or action and because they are lacking, I imagine those trying said complex tasks will augment this book with the ever-present Internet. I think that the 5 or 10 places that it might have helped would have moved my ranking up at least a full star. But, overall this is a very readable and informative book.

Here are a few things that I thought were excellent:

The section on button sewing was nice, short, and hopefully accurate. (In the past I always ended stitches with more of a knot to tie off the thread.) I have a shirt to test it out on.

I found the recipe for pie dough to be a simpler one than found in many cookbooks. It matches well with my recollection of how my maternal grandmother made hers. As much as I adore JC, I am going to have to try it!

The household cleaning suggestions (using only simple, everyday chemicals) are not unique to this book, but presented well and use the same basic items over and over. If they work for you you'll save a ton of dough!

Here's one item that I thought should have been "fixed".

The "Save for Later" subject exhorts you to open a new savings account that is FDIC insured, "has no minimum fees, and, if you can, at least 4 percent interest rate".

Now this book was published in 2009, long after passbook savings accounts stopped paying anything more than 1% interest. And, in this post-Great Recession world, a cursory check of current high-yield savings accounts shows 2% (for an under 18 yr-old) as the maximum rate quoted, with adult rates topping out in the 1.5-to-1.0% range. Yes, it is a quibble, but one that jarred me out of my reading pleasure.

I hope it brings you some good ideas, nice thoughts about your grandmothers, mothers, and great

grandmothers (should you be so lucky), and a whole lot of fun trying things out.

Three and one-half (3.5) Stars for *How to Sew A Button and Other Nifty Things Your Grandmother Knew*. Good Luck!

Catrina says

A cute and quirky book to get you thinking about knowledge that is being lost with modern conveniences. As some people commented, it is far from being an end-all in cooking, sewing, or socializing; more like dipping one's toes into a pond of tradition. I personally found the sections about canning, darning and gardening especially helpful. And though this isn't a book most people consume whole, I nibbled at it all the way through, piece by piece, for some light night time reading. Can't wait to try to make some jam!

Sannie says

I would actually give this book 3.5 stars because there are a lot of helpful tips. There are a lot of nifty little tricks that I never knew about, like using vinegar and baking soda for everything with cleaning, or how to clean an oven properly.

However, Erin Bried writes with a bit too much familiarity; it's almost as if she is writing the book as tips to her friends. I can understand the appeal, but the little interjections got annoying at some points. I also think she is writing it for a politically more liberal-minded audience, which I don't think is necessarily fair. At one point, she made a comment about Fox News which I thought was unnecessary. I'm not defending Fox News but for people who are more politically conservative, the book can come off almost as preachy. It's as if Bried thinks that politically conservative women should know how to sew a button already and that only liberals are the ones who would read a book like this. I don't think that's true.

How to Sew a Button is really for people who have no idea how to do a lot of these little things; for me, I thought the cooking and cleaning tips were the most helpful, though how to hem pants is pretty handy. It's not just a book for women, either; men could definitely learn how to fold sheets properly too. It's definitely for the super modern person (there are mentions of iPhones and Facebook as asides), but it would have helped with some illustrations to really show how some things work.

As long as you don't take the preachiness to heart, it's a great guide for simple things in life that we really should know how to do but just don't have time for.

Alethea says

This was one of those faintly aggrivating books that don't quite get the balance right between interesting information and witty voice. I think perhaps I'm not the best target audience, as I already know much of what's included; it seems to be rather a graduation-gift type book. I was really hoping for something with a little more substance--since there's some neat things to be learned from the grandmothers who survived the depression and World War Two and the Cold War and the Sixties and...

Kayla says

The male version contains all kinds of useful information about how to do well at work, how to provide for your family, how to be a role model, etc.

The female version contains tips and tricks on cleaning your house, saving money, and hosting parties.

I found the male version more applicable and useful to my life as a modern female with a job and financial responsibilities -- please don't give your daughter the female version of this book unless you don't think she's very capable.

I should have seen this coming after seeing that the biographies of the "grandfathers" are 3x as long as the "grandmothers".

These books enforce unfortunate stereotypes - don't force your children into these pigeon holes.

Jenn Estepp says

i'm pretty sure that i heard about this book in an issue of *real simple* magazine. and, if i hadn't than i should have because it's a lot like reading *real simple*, only not as good. i.e. a few bits of "oo, fab idea" nestled amidst lots of painfully obvious bits that you should've learned in elementary school. and, everything was just so random and simplified - although written in a tone which i think was supposed to be snarky and fun, sort "you go girl!;" only instead of being snarky and fun, it was grating. and the stuff i'd like to try out, the information was so limited that if i really wanted to try it out, i'd just get a real book on the subject (say, canning or quilting or whatever).

and, overall that just annoys me, because i think the title and the premise are kinda cool and, if executed differently, could have been awesome. alas, alack.

Alice says

I like the idea of this book a lot, and some of the helpful info in the last half helped it earn the last star, but overall I wasn't as impressed as I wanted to be. For one thing, many of the tasks chosen seemed to speak to an audience of helpless people. On the other hand, though, too many of the tasks are things that really can't/shouldn't be explained without pictures in a few pages or less (see: brewing beer, knitting, butchery, among others). If someone really didn't know how to do these things (like how I don't know how to carve a turkey because I'm a vegetarian), the descriptions would be difficult to follow and in some cases lacking critical information needed to complete it successfully. (For the record, I do know what a turkey looks like, and I tried to follow along mentally, but without pictures it was hopeless.)

My second major complaint is that this book was a little heterosexist (paraphrase: your neighbors might be weird, like two men living together; how to tie your husband's tie), and even though I'm totally comfortable in my role as 1950s housewife, the gender assumptions still made me a little uncomfortable (really? it's so important for women greet their husbands at the door with a smile when they get home?).

Overall, a handy entertaining little read (I really liked the writing style), but not useful as a reference for any of the things it purports to teach you to do.

Marfita says

I must be somebody's grandma because I know most of this stuff. While Bried offers a list of the actual grandmothers who contributed information and stories, it is apparently her own attempts at humor that I found annoying. It's a sad, sad commentary that these "skills" are becoming lost. The most interesting piece was the one on making dandelion wine, which my own grandfather used to do. He swore that the dandelions they found in cemeteries made the best wine. That may only have been to trick my mother into helping to clear family graves. [He also said that "cuttings" you nipped off without permission grew the best.] Only read this if you have no idea how to sew, knit, cook, wash dishes/clothes, and save money. I don't think it's worth reading it just for pleasure. For advanced information on cleaning, check out *The Queen of Clean* (Linda Cobb). Find a new use for Tang (r).

Sophie says

I agree with some of the other reviewers that this was a neat idea, but it could have been executed a bit better. For starters I would have loved more diagrams - some things like knitting, hemming, and folding a fitted sheet really deserved pictures.

Content-wise there were highs and lows, in my opinion. I wasn't expecting such a substantial cooking section... I kinda figured anyone looking to make a pie would buy a cookbook. Also the author mentioned pilling on sweaters in the introduction, but never gave a handy solution. (And it must have been a misprint, but my copy said that one of the grandmothers was born in 1929, and married in 1940 - at the age of 11?) But I will definitely try out some of the cleaning tricks and make more use of vinegar and baking soda.

Also to comment on some of the other reviews that some of the content was really simple - well, what did you expect with a title like *How to Sew a Button*?

Finally, I actually enjoyed the author's conversational approach and sense of humor, but I understand that it may be off-putting to some. It does seem to be a trend with magazine writers-turned-authors (and bloggers, for that matter) to be that casual, and it doesn't always come across well in full books.

Overall this was a very quick read with some helpful information, but I can't imagine it would be helpful for anyone who's already successfully running their own home (without a maid, chef, and two nannies at their beck and call).

Jen • Just One More Page says

[That was an adorable read!

Not only was it super informative and REALLY useful for learning how to do timeless home ec skills, the language and wording was just hilarious. It didn't sound sterile, like so many how-tos do, and instead was

worded like I was writing it myself. Nothing was disrespectful or condescending, and everything was explained and detailed down to the finest points, so that there's really no doubt in how to do much of anything

Mollie *scoutrmom* says

I love the tone of this book, what might have been a dry how-to manual is brimming with humor. For instance, a recipe on page three calls for "1 egg (beaten but not conquered)". Step two begins with, "Did that take you forever?" Step four instructs, "Pop a few blueberries into your mouth...."

Instructions for preparing a chicken include these words of wisdom, "If you're temporarily grossed out, there's no kind way to say this: Get over yourself." and these words of encouragement, "It's hard to cluck it up."

I liked the directions for making dandelion wine, I might want to do that someday. Lord knows we have plenty of dandelions!

I found this on the "new nonfiction" shelf of the public library, labeled as dewey decimal no. 640 B853.
