

6 things to do with a plain white t-shirt

Simple can be Best! **Anya Brighouse** turns her resourcefulness to another subject. This time it is a plain white t-shirt. Have a look at these six clever ideas for creating cheerful designs for kids' everyday wear

I am writing this in the middle of the most gorgeous summer. The school holidays are just about finished and the kids are soon to be back at school! Fabulous! The house will return to some sort of order... and I will miss those days of sunny chaos.

As a rule during the holidays when we are at the beach, we try to make as much of our food as possible. I have learnt that baking and cooking are great distraction for kids. My daughter will get up in the morning to load up the breadmaker so we have fresh bread for lunch. If we wanted biscuits, someone would choose a recipe and we would make it. It is a wonderful time when there are no other distractions (we don't have a phone). Meals are simple because the kids choose and make them. These holidays made me think about my own childhood. And a lot about my own Mother. I had a great childhood - for which I am very grateful. My Mother was always baking for us, and always up to her eyeballs in something creative. We have been through many phases - my Mum doing macrame, pottery, fabric painting,

dressmaking, quilting and a myriad of other things that kept her creative and thrifty mind busy. I have realised, as I slide into my 40's that much of me is actually my mother. During my 20's I would have been horrified by this - but now I understand what a great gift an easy, uncomplicated childhood is. I am very proud now to say that I am very much my mother's daughter. I hope one day my daughter will feel the same way. Writing this particular article also made me think about Mum because many of the ideas are things that she would have done.

So here we go, six things to do with a plain white t-shirt;

1 buttons, stitches and bows

In her sewing room (it took up most of my parents bedroom) Mum had this old toffee box full of buttons. I used to love to spill them all out and look at them. People gave them to her, and she gathered clothes from op shops and cut off the buttons. It gave me the idea for the button t-shirt.



T-shirts from top: button, stitches and bows, tie dying madness and fabric paint



Tea and lace

A heritage from my mother's larder, now loved by my children (and all of my friend's children - and their parents) is lemon and orange cordial. My mum's best friend Jean gave her the recipe when they were young mums themselves. It had been given to Jean by her own Mum. Now my sister and I (and even my brother) make it for our own children. It is summer in a bottle. And my kids call it 'Oumà's Juice' after her. I thought you might appreciate the recipe.

- OUMA'S JUICE**
- juice and rind of 2 oranges (this is a minimum - you can use more)
 - juice and rind of 2 lemons (again - a minimum)
 - 1.5 kg of sugar
 - 4 tblspns Epsom Salts (buy from a chemist)
 - 2 tblspns Tartaric Acid
 - 1 tblespn Citric Acid
 - 6 cups of boiling water
- Dissolve the sugar, Epsom Salts, Tartaric and Citric Acid in the boiling water. Add the juice and rind when it has cooled. Strain if you like. Bottle. Add to water and ice. Enjoy.
- For my Mum, Mara Mayo*



The buttons I used came from Spotlight and are just randomly stitched on. I also did the small white vest with a red running stitch around the armholes and neckline, then added a small red bow. The vest is a BONDS vest - two for \$8.

2 tie-dyeing madness

Mum did the tie-dye thing in the 70's. We flew to the UK when I was a child and I remember my Mum in a long sleeved t-shirt dress that she had tie dyed in green and yellow that she wore with her 'Mr Scholl clogs'. I thought she was very slim and stylish. (which she was) So that is where I got the tie-dyed 't' idea from. I just googled tie-dyeing and got all sorts of interesting information. I used rubber bands to tie the shirt up and then suspended only half of the shirt in the dye so that the main colour was very strong. Again the dye came from Spotlight and the t-shirt from POSTIE PLUS for \$9.

3 tea and lace

Most of our clothes were handmade, and I have vivid memories of visiting the local fabric shop to buy fabric and patterns. My sister and I were always allowed to choose our own combinations so everything was unique. It's probably why I dislike chain store clothing now. It was mum who taught me to sew - I was never as patient as her and to this day I still can't put in a zip or do buttonholes. I am intrinsically lazy so I always try and find the easiest way to do something - get the most amount of effect for the least amount of effort. That I definitely didn't get from my Mother... So for this shirt I used a t-shirt from the WAREHOUSE at \$8 and I dyed it in tea so that we got the soft cream colour instead of the bright white. Again I got the info off the internet and I had fun trying it a few times before I got it right. The lovely lace pieces are from GEOFF'S EMPORIUM and are collar lace. There is a most amazing lace shop in Onehunga. It is full of all sorts of bits and pieces and is well worth a look for some little treasure.

4 fabric paint

My mother was very fond of muslin for a while there in the 70s. It was cheap and easy to sew. I have memories of these fabulous dresses Mum made for us out of cheesecloth with lots of frills and purple ricrac around the edges. She also painted flowers all over the front. It was my going out dress for that summer. So I did t-shirts for the boys. You can use fabric paint, but in this case I used RESENE 'JAGUAR' lumbersider. My boys are mad for transformers at present so I put the 'autobots' insignia on Theo's 'T'. I did a skull and cross bones for Charlie's 'T'. I just got a shape off the internet and cut it out in tracing paper - then drew round it on to the t-shirt. You can also cut the shape out in cardboard and then use it like a stamp like I did with the skull and crossbones.

5 quilting squares

Quilting has been a big part of my Mum's creative life - she did community quilting with her friends as a fundraiser and there were always little piles of fabric cut to size around the place ready for use - or stacks of fabric that had caught her eye and she just had to keep. We were never sure if she had to keep them because they were beautiful or because they were cheap! So I just used some spare fabric ironed into shape, and sewed it straight onto the t-shirt. Easy, quick and a great little effect. This could easily be adapted for a boy's t-shirt - SPOTLIGHT have great skull and crossbones fabric at the moment...

6 flower power

One of the strongest memories I have as a child (if not the strongest) is of collecting violets for Mum to put in a bottle green vase she kept in the kitchen. She grew them beside the back step, and I always thought they were just so perfect and beautiful. Even now if I ever see violets I buy them and think of Mum... so I took a lei apart and arranged it to look like a flower with a button in the middle. ■

The lovely RESENE colours we used were PRIMETIME (the fabulous turquoise), JAGUAR (the scary black), JALAPENO (my new favourite red) and CLOCKWORK (sunny orange)



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