

How-to make Faux Wheat Stalks



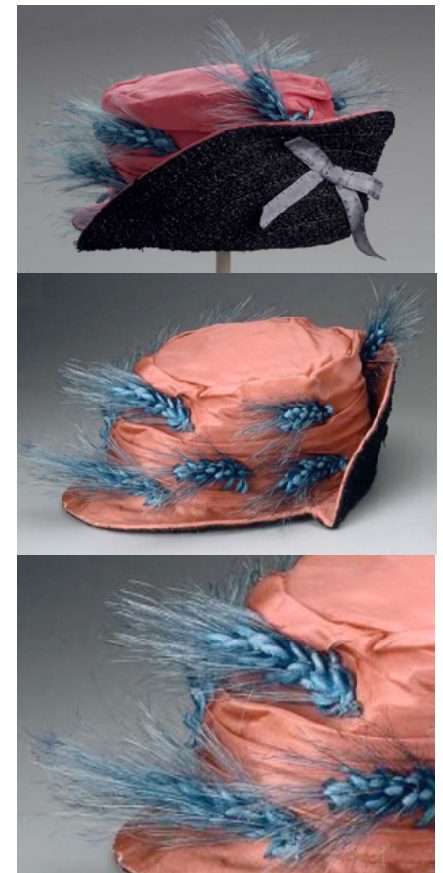
The use of wheat in millinery goes back centuries. While the stems of the wheat stalk are primarily used to make up the hat itself, decorations can use the entire stalk including the head. The 1795 fashion plate below most likely used real dried wheat stalks. But I wanted to see if there were examples of wheat alternatives used in historical pieces and find a way to make faux straw. I searched Museum collections for uses of faux straw to decorate hats. I found the example on the bottom-left from the Snowhill Manor Collection which not only has silk flowers, but faux straw made of folded paper for the kernels and horsehair for the beard.

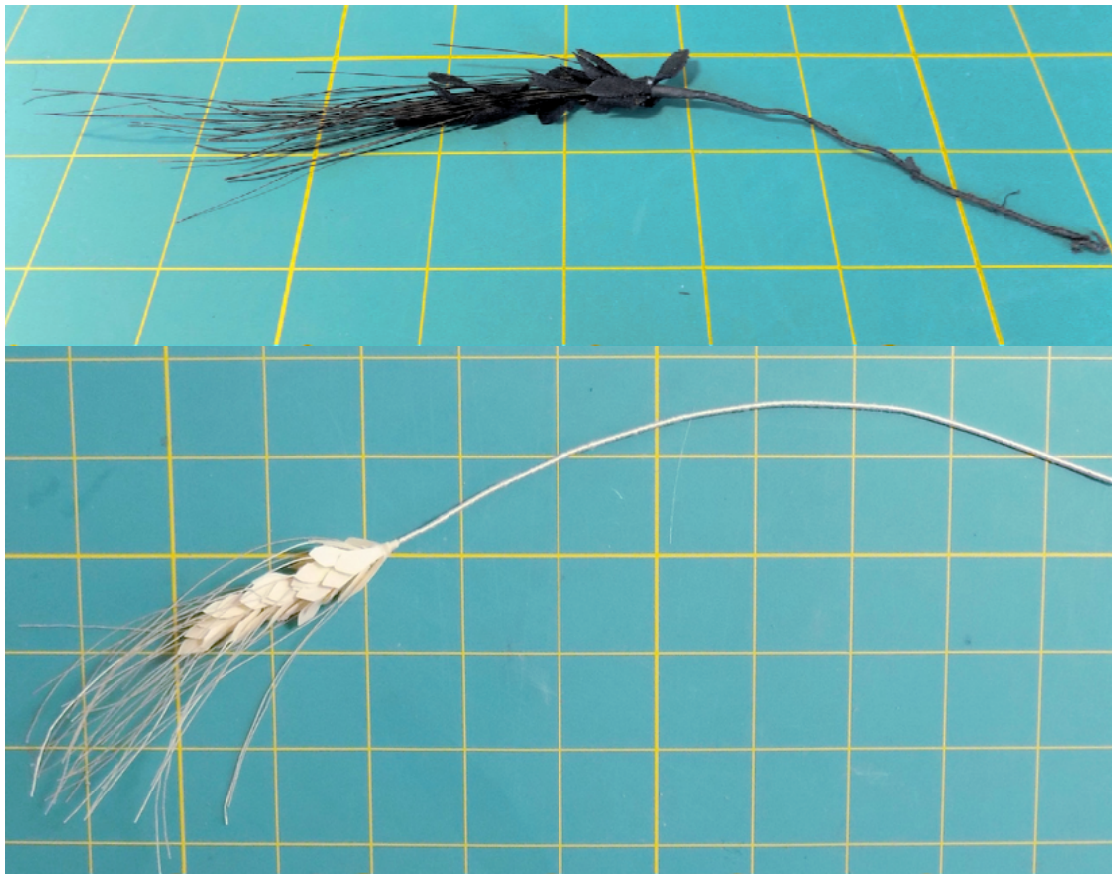


Below-right is a 1915 example from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston with a very realistic example of died straw heads. I was fortunate enough to find an example of faux straw, and included a picture of the vintage black millinery faux straw at the top of the next page. This example is from a slightly later period, and I used it as a template to follow in making my own faux straw in a more natural color.



Snowhill Manor © National Trust / Richard Blakey





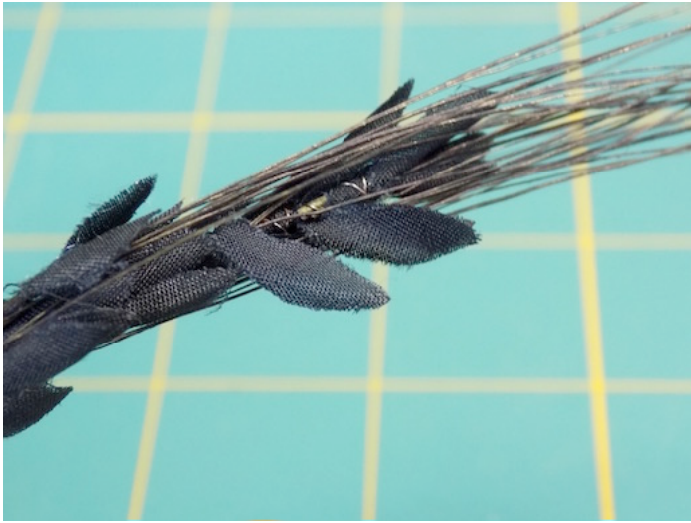
In the two photos above, I show the original black faux wheat example and a picture of a single stalk of the ones I made.

Below is a picture of the 3 straw stalks I made along with some straw flowers on straw threads.

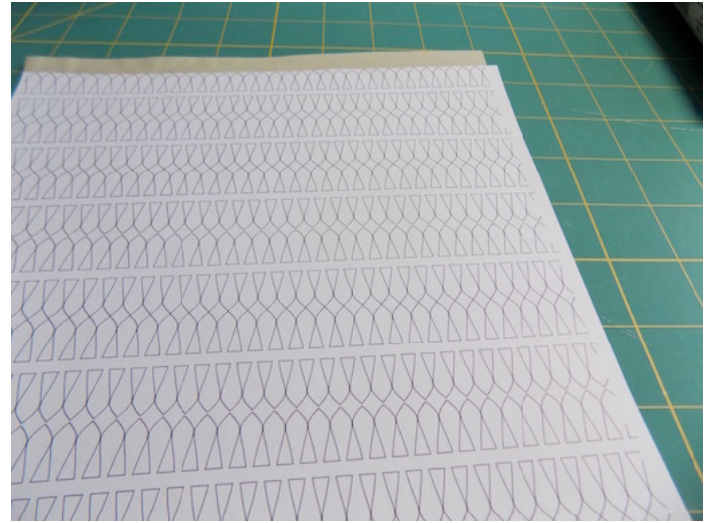
Using stiffened fabric for the kernels and wire for the stem covered with flat silk thread was a no brainer, but what should I use for the beard? For my piece, I chose burnt ostrich barbs, although I later discovered the caption on the Snowhill hat and saw they used horsehair. I would switch to horsehair if I were to make more in the future. Horsehair would be a lot less work compared to the burnt ostrich barbs. You can order horsehair thru suppliers that sell basket making supplies, in either light or dark, and you will receive a lot. If you are not planning to make a lot of faux straw heads, the ostrich route might be better. You can make your own burnt ostrich feathers by following my article on my site <https://outofaportrait.com/burnt-ostrich-geese/> and then cut the barbs from the stems.



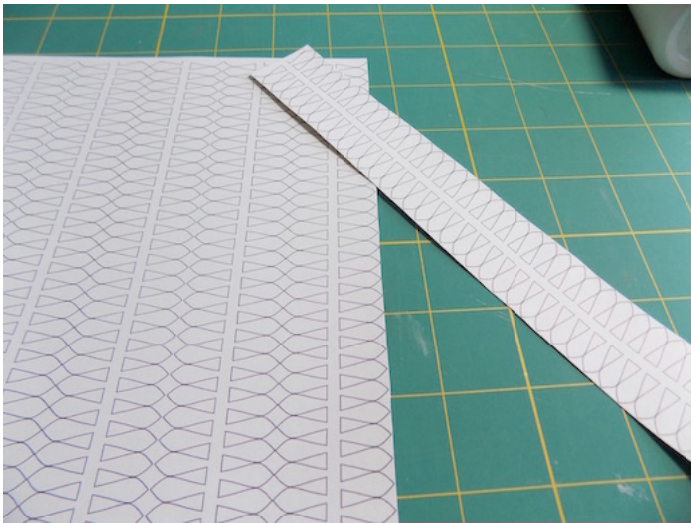
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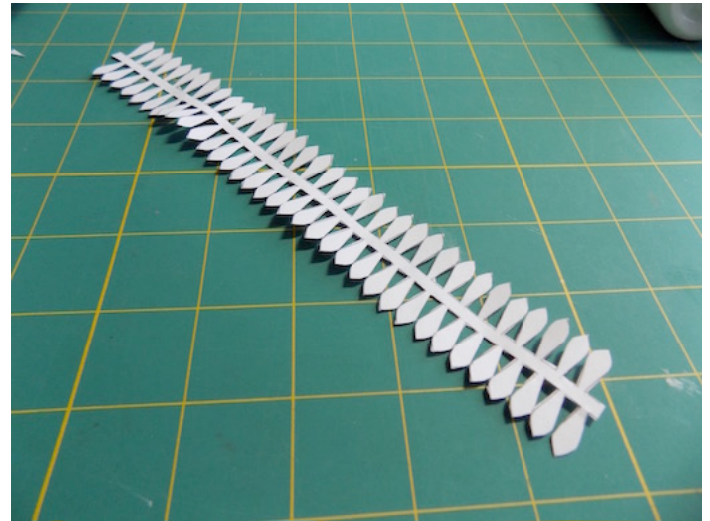
I started by copying the shape of the kernels from the vintage example and created a series of connected shapes so I could add them in a strip to my wire. Once I had a drawing, I added several to a page and printed them onto a label. I added the artwork for the label at the end of this article. You might want to print it on a low tack label to make it easy to pull off.



I stuck the label to a page size piece of stiffened silk taffeta. It was stiffened with thinned PVA (white craft) glue, but you could use a product like Stiffy fabric stiffener. I'm thinking that it might be best to add the label to a piece of stiffened fabric that has been cut to size on bias.

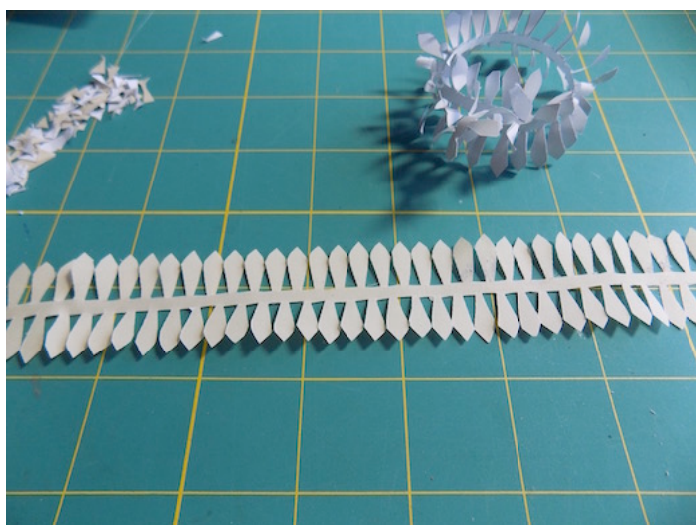


I could then cut away one strip of shapes.

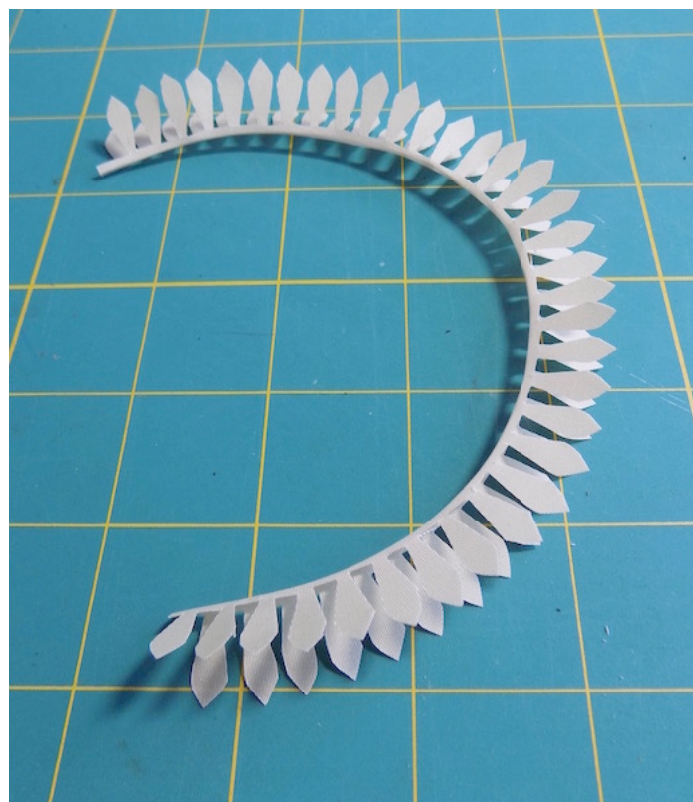


Then cut away the extra silk/label.

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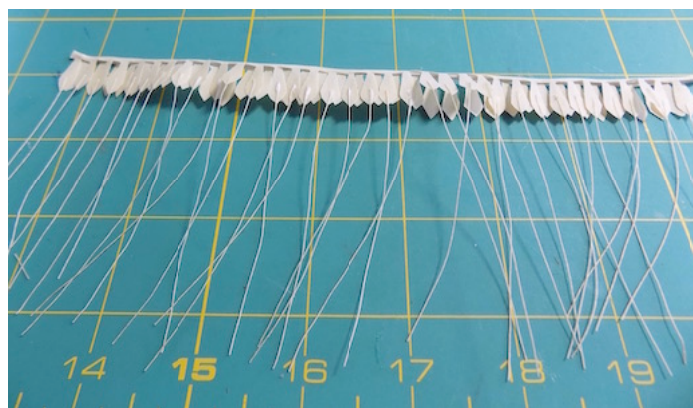
I then removed the label.



Then I pressed the strip in half long ways.



I brushed a thin line of glue down the center and glued the press closed.

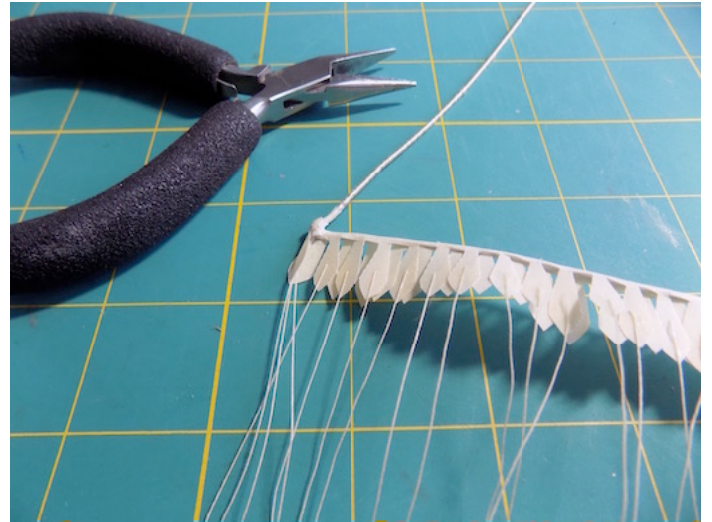


I glued the base of one Ostrich barb onto every section.

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To prep the wire, which was thread covered florist wire, I covered it with flat silk thread by gluing it at the start and wrapping it around until I got the bottom of the wire and then gluing it again. The wire on the left is silk thread covered and the one on the right is how the thread covered florist wire comes.



I glued the end of the covered wire to the end of the strip. When it was dry, I started rolling the wire and creating a spiral down the wire.



This is what it looked like just before I added more glue to stick the silk to the stem and finish the head.



This is what the completed head of wheat looked like.

This template will create enough strips for 6 heads on a single page label.

