



“FEEL THE FABRIC...EMBRACE THE CULTURE”

# IT'S A WRAP!

by Lisa Shepard Stewart

Where would we natural hair enthusiasts be without our favorite headwraps? Not only do they keep us looking neat and culturally relevant, but they're also the perfect rescue on those lazy hair days. If you're like me, referring to your lifestyle as "hectic" is an understatement, to the point where those regularly scheduled hair-re-twisting sessions aren't quite so "regular" anymore, or for anyone in "transitional" hairstyle stages.

Another plus: in the midst of the winter season, full-cover headwraps do a better job of keeping in body heat than regular winter hats. I've come to rely on my collection of African fabrics to give me a pulled-together look, no matter what my hair decides to do any given moment. There are lots of options today for headwraps, to match every mood or occasion, so let's explore a few:



- African Cotton Prints & Batiks: These are probably the most common fabric for headwraps, and because they are sold by the yard, you can customize the size you want – figure on 1/8 yard for a simple headband style, to 2 or even 3 yards for a towering wrap, ala early Erykah Badu. Another advantage of using fabric by the yard is that your headdress can match a simple sarong style skirt or an entire garment if you are a sewing enthusiast.
- Cotton Knit: Flexible interlock knit (T-shirt fabric) is a comfortable choice because of the stretch factor. Some wrappers find it easier to maneuver knit fabric, tucking in the ends, etc. for a more secure wrap, as compared to the cotton prints above.
- Bogolan (Mudcloth): Look for the softer, slightly thinner pieces for easier wrapping. Heavy weights or stiff mudcloths will have less "give" to wrap smoothly around your head.

There are specific wrapped styles called gelee or gale (pronounced GAY-lay) worn mostly in West Africa. These are regal styles, sometimes worn for spiritual reasons, sometimes for protection from the sun, other times simply as a fashion statement. While some gelee styles are folded, tucked and "done" in a particular fashion, the beauty of headwraps is that you can tie them any way you like. Simply tie and tuck on the ends so they feel secure on your head.

Often, those new to head wrapping tend to wrap the fabric too tightly, resulting in discomfort, including pain in the head or neck.



To remedy this, try knit fabrics that, like knit garments, will "give" or conform to your shape without constricting it. The other alternative is to use a woven fabric, pulling the diagonally opposite ends to create a bias stretch, which offers more give than wrapping the fabric on the straight grain.

For a wrap that begins at the front of the head, begin with the fabric just above your eyebrows, wrap it to the back and tie as desired. Then push the wrap back on your head either just to the hairline or beyond it so that the hairline is visible. For a dressier look, add a decorative jeweled hatpin to help secure a more voluminous headwrap.

Enjoy the style and ease that headwraps offer all year round. Collect a wardrobe of fabrics that becomes an exciting extension of your overall look and your lifestyle!

Lisa Shepard Stewart is an author, designer and instructor based in New Jersey. In her how-to project books, Lisa encourages others to express themselves creatively through culturally relevant techniques and materials. She promotes her work through workshops, trunk shows and special events both in the US and internationally. Visit [www.CulturedExpressions.com](http://www.CulturedExpressions.com); call 1-866-MUDCLOTH; or write PO Box 356, Rahway, NJ 07065