Keep Your Cool!
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Chill out on hot days with a simple, cooling neck scarf. Keep Your Cool!

IMAGINE CHILLING OUT ON A SWELTERING SUMMER DAY with a cool moist cloth on the back of your neck. You can feel cool and look great wearing an attractive neck scarf filled with hidden water-soaked polymer crystals. The scarf is an easy, fast project made from readily available materials. Whip up several for guests at your next barbeque, or join a charity project and sew some for U.S. troops.

Nontoxic polyacrylamide granules, often called crystals, are concealed in the casing of a cotton neck scarf. When the scarf is soaked in water, the granules absorb the water, expand, and turn into a crystalline gel. The cotton fabric absorbs water from the gel, then the water evaporates for a cooling effect. Scarves stay cool and moist for hours due to the polyacrylamide's water-retaining properties.

The Elements

Finished cooling scarves measure approximately 1 1/2"x43" and will fit an average adult. For larger sizes, use the measurements in parentheses.

You can make the scarf with lightweight, single-face tie ends or heartier, double-face ties. Single-face ties require hemming, but minimal turning. Double-face ties are narrower and require more turning but no hemming, and they conceal the fabric wrong side and the back of any embellishments. You can cut the tie ends into points or curves, or create a unique shape.

Choose tightly woven 100% cotton fabric for its water-absorbing and cooling properties. Avoid loosely woven fabrics--the gel could seep through a loose weave. Scarves are worn wet, so select colorfast fabrics so the dyes won't bleed onto clothing or skin. Look for prints in popular motifs, such as red, white and blue for summer holidays, or sport themes for wearing to outdoor events.

Choose medium-size crystals for best results. Granule size and water quality can impact how well the crystals absorb water. Water with a high mineral content can impede water absorption. Experiment to determine the optimal amount of crystals per scarf by making a sample casing.

To make the test sample, cut a 4"x15" (4"x17") piece of fabric. Fold the fabric in half lengthwise and stitch 1/2" from one short end and from the long cut edges. Pour a scant teaspoon of the crystals into the open end, fold down the open end 1/2" and pin.

Submerge the casing upright in a tall container of water for 15 to 30 minutes. The casing should be plump after soaking, but not oozing. Using too many crystals or soaking too long may force the crystal gel through the fabric, making the fabric feel slimy. Adjust the crystal amount as needed to fill, but not over fill the casing.

MATERIALS
• 1/8 yard of 44/45" 100% cotton fabric, prewashed
• Approximately 7/8 teaspoon of medium-size polyacrylamide crystals for an average scarf, or 1 1/8 teaspoons for a large scarf (see "Sources" at the end of this article).
• Matching all-purpose thread
• Air- or water-soluble marker
• Ruler
• French curve (optional for curved-end tie)
• Bodkin or tube-turner
• Point turner (optional for double-face construction)

**tip:** Polyacrylamide crystals are nontoxic, but they can create a fine dust. Ted Douglas, president of Watersorb/Polymers Inc., suggests wearing a dust mask when handling the crystals. For best results wear gloves and safety glasses, remove contact lenses, and wash hands after use. For further information, see the Material Safety Data Sheet on the Watersorb/Polymers Inc. Web site

Polyacrylamide crystals are available in Michigan City at Hobby Lobby in Dunes Plaza. They sell a 45-gram container that makes 2-1/2 gallons of “gel” for only $4.99.
Cutting

**Cut a 4"x44" fabric strip** for each scarf. Fold the strip in half widthwise matching the short ends. Snip-mark both long edges 7" (8") from the fold (1). The area between the snips will be the casing.

To create narrow-point tie ends (for single-face ties only), fold the strip in half lengthwise and mark each end 1/4" from the fold. Mark the long raw edges 12" from each end. Using the ruler, draw a line connecting the marks (2). Cut on the lines through both layers.

To create curved- or angled-end ties, fold the strip in half lengthwise and mark the long raw edge 2" from the end. Using the French curve (for curved-end ties) or the ruler (for angled-end ties), draw a line from the cut edge at the fold to the 2" mark (3). Cut on the line through both layers. Repeat for the remaining scarf end.
Single-face Tie

Fold the strip in half lengthwise, right sides together and matching the snip marks. Using a medium-length stitch and 1/2" seam allowances, stitch between the marks to form the casing; clip the seam allowances at the marks to, but not through, the stitching (4). Press the seam open.

Stitch a 1/4" double hem on the scarf ends, or roll-hem the ends on a serger or sewing machine. Turn the scarf right side out, center the casing seam and press.

Create the casing by stitching across the scarf at one end of the casing seam (5). Using a teaspoon, carefully pour the crystals into the casing open end. To protect your machine and contain spills, work over a bowl, away from your sewing machine.

Close the casing by stitching across the scarf at the opposite end of the casing seam, pushing the crystals to the far casing end out of the needle area.
Double-layer Tie Ends

Cut a 4”x44” fabric strip for each scarf. Embellish the tie ends, if desired. These tie ends will be a bit stiffer than the single-layer ties. Fold the strip in half lengthwise, right sides together, matching the casing marks. Using a medium straight stitch, sew a 1/2” seam along the raw edges, leaving a 3” opening outside of the casing area for turning and filling (6). Trim corners; turn and press.

With the 3” opening at one end, stitch across the scarf 14 1/2” from the opposite scarf end (7).

Holding the opening end of the scarf upright, use a teaspoon to pour the crystals into the casing. Stitch across the scarf 14 1/2” from the upper end to close the casing, pushing the crystals to the far end of the casing, away from the needle. Hand whipstitch, or machine edgestitch the opening closed (8).
Be Cool!

**Soak the casing or the entire scarf** in cold or ice water for 15 to 30 minutes, or until the crystals turn to gel; avoid over-soaking. Distribute the gel along the casing with your fingers. Lay the scarf on a hand towel to absorb any dripping water, then tie the scarf loosely around your neck. To keep the casing cool while wearing, roll it to redistribute the gel or dip it in cold water for a few minutes.

**Refrigerate extra cooling scarves** for breezeless humid days. When one scarf reaches body temperature, swap it for a cool one.

**Store wet scarves in an open plastic bag**, hang them to dry, or store them in the refrigerator. After several days of drying, the crystals will return to solid form.

**Hand-wash crystal-filled scarves** using a few drops of liquid detergent. Rinse well and hang to dry. Don't machine-wash or dry. Press the casing only after the gel is completely crystalized. Shake the crystals to one end of the casing to press the opposite end. Then flip and repeat. Don't iron the crystals or expose them to iron temperatures.

**What is it?**

Polyacrylamide is a super-absorbent, nontoxic polymer that was developed in the 1960s to retain water in arid soil. Polyacrylamide holds up to 400 times its weight in water—one pound of polymer can hold up to 48 gallons of rain water! Different forms of polymer are widely used in many industries and in numerous products, such as disposable diapers, hot and cold compresses, toothpaste, cosmetics and flower arrangements.

**Who needs 'em?**

Join a charity project and make much-appreciated cooling scarves for U.S. troops in the Middle East. The Ships Project collects and sends cooling scarves and other handmade items monthly. Visit [www.wtv-zone.com/kjsb/bataan.html](http://www.wtv-zone.com/kjsb/bataan.html) for specifications and mailing information, or write to Ellen Harpin, Dept. SN, Box 564, Goldenrod, FL 32733-0564.

Cooling scarves are fast-moving, especially at outdoor fairs. Choose fabrics in popular colors and motifs. To speed assembly for mass production, use the single-face construction method and serge-finish all edges prior to sewing the casing. Package the scarves in a plastic bag with directions for wear and washing. Fill a cooler with ice water and prepare a few scarves for passersby to try.
Embellishing Try embellishing scarf ties with embroidery designs, names or monograms. Choose colorfast threads and small designs with light to medium stitch density. A finished single-face tie end will be approximately 3" wide. A finished double-face tie end will be about 1 1/2" wide. Choose the embellishment placement and size accordingly.

Let the scarf tie inspire creativity. Echo the shape of the tie with trim or decorative machine stitching. Add beads, small appliqués or embroidery test samples on the tie ends.

Make the scarf ties of contrasting fabric, or piece the scarf tie for a patchwork look. Minimize piecing in the casing area, as gel may seep through the seams.

"Fasten" Accessories: Make a scarf "clip" from hair accessories, use a lapel pin, or slip the scarf ends through a ring or ribbon loop adorned with a button or charm to fasten the tie around your neck. Do not puncture the fabric in the gel area.

**SOURCES**

Polyacrylamide crystals are available under many brand names. Look for them in the garden section of home-improvement centers, discount department stores, nurseries, or in the candle, fragrance or flower areas in craft stores. Check packaging for granule size and to verify there are no additives. Expect approximately 115 teaspoons per pound of medium-size granules. For mail-order or Internet purchases, and for other project ideas:

Cooldanna Dry Gel from Roshgo Corporation, (678) 867-0461, [www.roshgo.com](http://www.roshgo.com).

Medium Granules from Watersorb/Polymers Inc., (501) 623-9995, [www.watersorb.com](http://www.watersorb.com).

Polymer Crystals from The Artistic Shop LLC, (262) 691-1353, [www.theartisticshop.com](http://www.theartisticshop.com).


Linda Vielhaber is an occupational therapist and the owner of Whitepaw Designs, a sewing company that designs patterns and sells hand-sewn gifts. She has been enchanted by sewing since age 5, when she awoke one morning and found handmade doll dresses on her bed. She lives in Sterling Heights, MI, with her husband and three dogs.