

Introduction to Spanish Armor in Florida

Once the Spanish disembarked after landing in *La Florida*, they ventured inland in search of gold and other riches. Explorers and their soldiers wore protective clothing and headwear and carried weapons for fighting. Although some officers may have had suits of metal plate armor, common soldiers wore chain mail shirts and thick cotton armor.

A thick padded jacket, called a *gambeson*, would have been the first layer of protection for a common soldier. This jacket is made up of many layers of wool or linen that are tightly sewn together. Gambesons were cheap and easily made, and could even be made abroad with local materials such as palmetto leaves for stuffing. It is, however, a fairly stiff garment and can get very warm inside. But it provides excellent protection from slashing attacks from blades as well as piercing attacks from arrows or spears. It also greatly helps in making the next layer of armor more tolerable to wear.

Atop the gambeson is a riveted mail shirt, called a *hauberk*. This shirt is made from many small interconnected rings that have each been individually riveted together. These can weigh a lot and so a hauberk would not be worn without a gambeson as it helps distribute that weight across the shoulders and protects the skin from rubbing against the metal. An individual would also likely have a belt to help put some of that weight on the hips and not just on the shoulders. The mail armor is designed to provide even more protection against slashing and stabbing attacks, as it is nearly impossible to cut through and difficult to break open, although smaller arrows or spear points could pierce through it. In Europe though, by the time Spaniards came to Florida this type of armor was becoming obsolete due to the wide usage of firearms, and so they were freed up to be used as a relatively cheap, but not necessarily effective option against native people's weaponry.

The final piece of armor, and possibly the most easily recognizable 'Conquistador' element of all, is the helmet – specifically called a *morion*. The helmet has a tall tapered peak and wide brims which provide protection from downward blows and also provide a small, but welcome, amount of shade. This is the most important piece of armor as any blow to the head could be very damaging.

As you might imagine, walking around Florida in all of this would quickly become uncomfortable. To help remedy this some of the Spaniards took to cutting off the sleeves of the hauberk or gambeson, dumping the chainmail entirely, or foregoing any torso protection, hoping that their own combat skills might be enough to protect them. However, they would likely not abandon the vitally important helmet because if they did there would be no replacing it as any new metal armor had to come all the way from Spain.



How to Make 4 in 1 Chainmail

4-in-1 chainmail was the most prominently used pattern in European mail armor. The pattern gets its name because each ring has four others attached to it. These instructions will teach you how to make butted mail, meaning each ring is a wire circle with the ends pushed together. This is a common method used today in making mail jewelry. Any type of wire that maintains its shape can work when making this type of mail and the rings can be made into whatever size diameter is desired. We have used pipe cleaners since they are easy to cut and manipulate without specialized tools.

Materials

- Pipe cleaners
- A uniform cylinder (Marker, dowel, etc.)
- Scissors
- Pliers are optional, they may make it easier for you to close your rings but their use is at your discretion.
- String

Procedure

1. Take your wire and tightly wrap it around the cylinder to form a spring.



2. Remove the wound wire and cut straight down the spring to make individual rings. Use the end of the wire as a guide so that each ring is the same size.



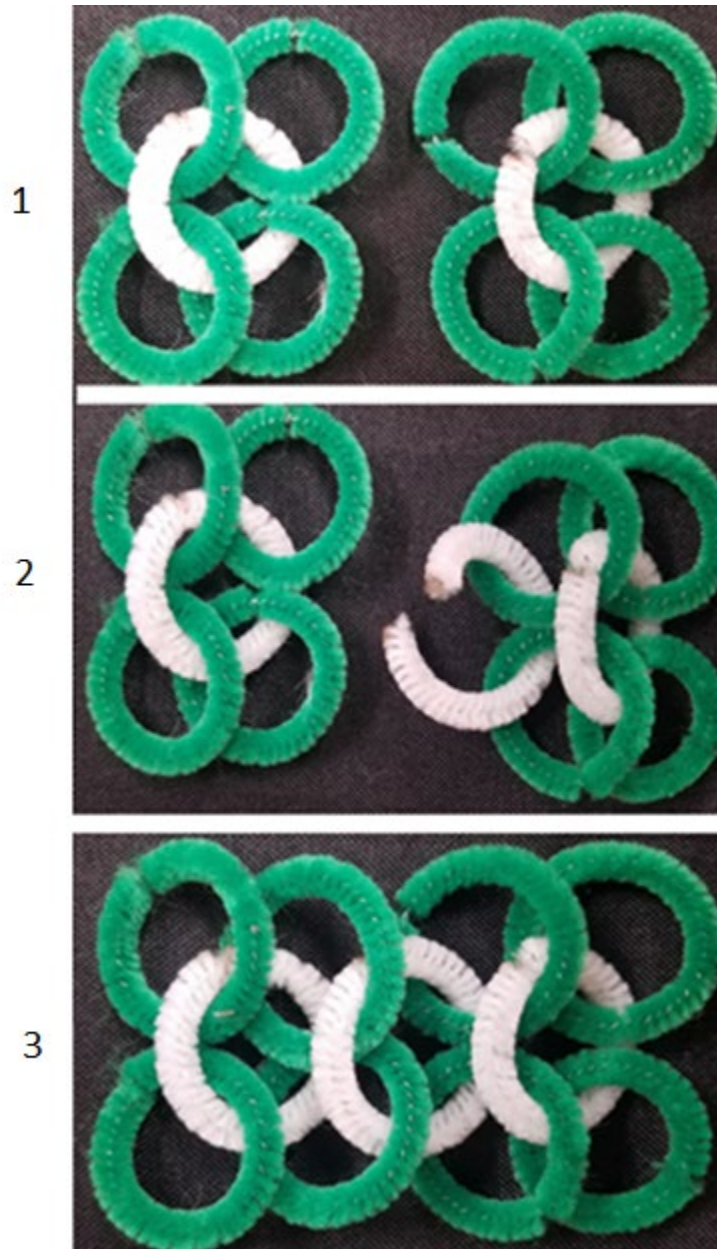
3. Make a pile of Closed Rings by bending the wire so the two ends meet. Set these aside, the remainder are your Open Rings. You will need around twice as many Closed Rings than Open Rings.



4. Take an Open Ring and slide four Closed Rings on it. Close the Open Ring. When laid out flat, it should look like a butterfly or a frog. Repeat this process multiple times until you have several 4-in-1's.

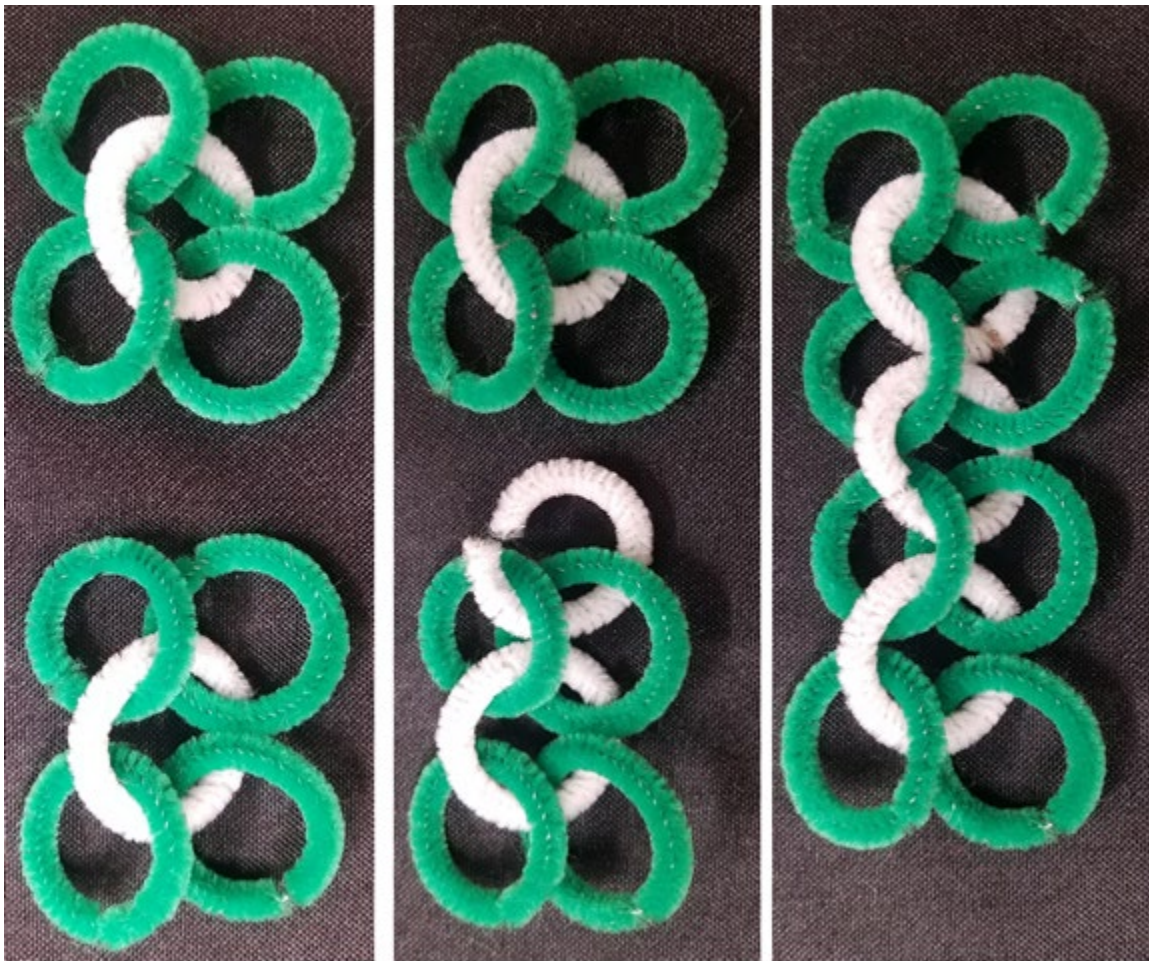


- To make the piece wider, lay out the 4-in-1's so that the center ring is angled upwards and to your left. You will be working with the Closed Rings in the middle. Hook an Open Ring through the two Closed Rings on the right, then place the adjacent two Closed Rings of the next 4-in-1 in the Open Ring and close that ring. You should now have a total of 8 closed rings, connected by 3 rings in the middle.



- Continue this pattern until you have your desired width, making more rings as needed. Skip this step if you want to make a bracelet.

7. To make the piece longer, place two pieces of mail next to each other with the center rings angled upwards and to your left. Take an Open Ring and slide it upwards through the Closed Rings in the middle. Repeat this process for the desired length.

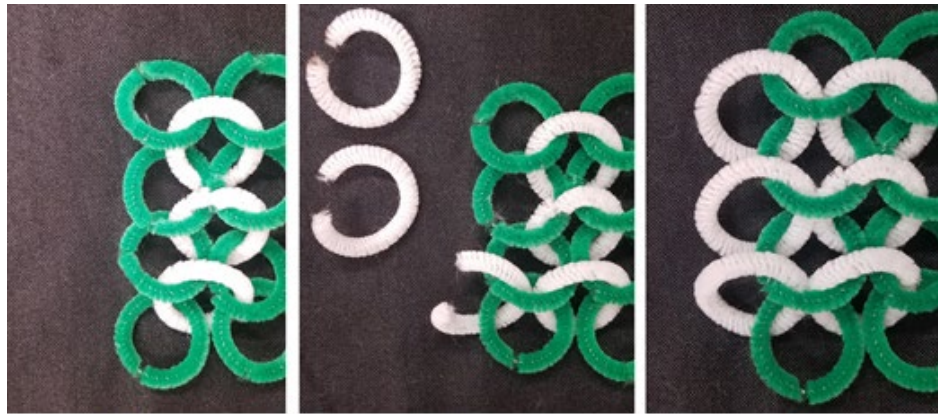


1

2

3

8. For a bracelet: When the section of mail is near the desired length place the chain down with the center connecting rings angled upwards and away from you. Add three open rings along the edge and close them, next only add two, and then the final ring. Repeat this process for the other end. This will make triangle ends on the bracelet. Take a long piece of string, thread it through the final ring and tie a knot, repeat this for the other side. These two pieces of string can be used to tie the bracelet closed with a basic knot or by using a sliding knot.



1

2

3



4

5



6

7