

So....You are making a zip-front garment and you need a 21" separating zipper, but zippers only come in 2" increments. Or, the local store has the color needed but only in a 26" length....What do you do? You *could* order a custom zipper from a zipper supplier – but you may not want to wait or spend the money for a custom solution - *especially, if you are using fabric from the ASG's free table!*

The solution? **Shorten it!**

## How to shorten a separating zipper

### About zippers...

The slider size and type are matched to the zipper teeth. The size and type of zipper *may* be stamped on the slider back, for example, 5C. The number is the size. The letter designates the teeth type. "C" stands for coil; "V" is for Vislon (molded plastic); metal teeth don't have a letter. (Note: Most, if not all, zippers in my stash were not labeled.)

The most common sizes are 3 mm, 5 mm, 7 mm, and 10 mm to match zipper-teeth widths. The number corresponds to the closed-teeth width in millimeters. A size 5 zipper, for example, has teeth that measure 5 mm wide when the zipper is zipped. If the size is not marked, and you *need* to know the size, use the chart at the right.

|                |
|----------------|
| 10 mm = 25/64" |
| 7 mm = 9/32"   |
| 5 mm = 13/64"  |
| 3 mm = 1/8"    |

Replacement parts (sliders, top stops and bottom stops) come in various sizes and colors to fit the corresponding zipper. The most common sizes are also 3 mm, 5 mm, 7 mm, and 10 mm to match zipper-teeth widths. The number corresponds to the closed-teeth width in millimeters. A top stop is normally "U" shaped and is clamped around the zipper tape.  A bottom stop is squared off & has prongs on the legs to penetrate the zipper tape. 

### Where can I get zipper top stops?

To shorten a separating zipper you will need two top stops, but *do not* need bottom stops.

- You may find the zipper stops you need in a zipper repair kit at local chain stores. However, if I only need two zipper stops, the kit can be pricey and leaves me with a bunch of extra parts I may never need or the kit may not include the needed color.
- You can also buy bulk lots of zipper tops and stops from specialty zipper suppliers or other online outlets (i.e., Wawak, Amazon, Etsy, etc.) in all one or  assorted colors. These normally are packaged by size, so make sure to order the correct size. A bulk order of 100 will likely give you a lifetime supply! Individual stops are also available and inexpensive, but unless ordering other items from the same supplier, the shipping cost will far exceed the cost of the stops.
- Since I never seem to plan far enough in advance to order zipper parts (*and I am cheap!*), I devised an alternative using an inexpensive, commonly available jewelry finding to hack the zipper stops. Look in the jewelry findings aisle for a package of cord end crimps (pictured.) These are normally used on leather or rubber cording to attach a clasp. My "hack" was a featured tip in [Threads Magazine #205](#). 

## Shortening the zipper

Both metal and plastic separating zippers can be easily shortened but **must** be shortened from the top. The same basic process applies to both, but the level of effort can vary.

1. **Prepare** - Mark the spot on both sides of the zipper tape where the zipper teeth will end. Make sure to remove enough teeth to accommodate the zipper top stop you plan on using – plan on about 2 teeth if using a commercial stop, 2-3 teeth if using my hack. Open the zipper at least 3-4" to give you room to work on each side of the zipper. Place a pin above the slider so you can't accidentally lose the slider (*ask me how I know...*)

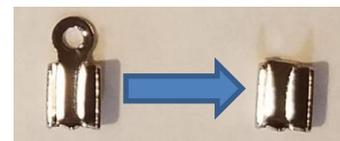
3. Remove teeth - Remove approximately 1" of zipper teeth above the marks. Removing the teeth will require some tools and elbow grease. Depending on the particular zipper, needle nose pliers and a small wire cutter, side cutter or end nipper (pictured) of some type will make the work easy, but each zipper is a little different...



- Metal teeth – Grasp a zipper tooth with the needle nose pliers, twist the tooth until it loosens and tug it away from the tape. Alternatively, if the teeth are stubborn, use the cutter or nipper to “piece” away at the zipper tooth taking off small chunks of metal until the tooth releases. *Note: Safety glasses are recommended when cutting metal, since the pieces may “fly” when cut.*
- Plastic molded teeth – Use a side cutter or even heavy duty scissors to cut off the protruding part of the zipper tooth. Work the remainder of the tooth out of the zipper tape using pliers. Alternatively, cut off one side of the zipper tooth as close as possible to the zipper tape and work the remaining side out with pliers. Pliers can also sometimes be used to crush remaining bits of the zipper to ease removal.
- Plastic coil zipper - Use small scissors to trim the coil close to and parallel to the zipper tape. Use the tip of the scissors, an awl or pliers to remove the loops from the zipper tape.

4. **Add a zipper stop** – If you are using a metal zipper, pry off the existing zipper stop from the top of the zipper and reuse it. Plastic stops are normally molded into the zipper tape and **cannot** be reused.

- Reused (from the same or a salvaged zipper) or commercially available zipper stops – Place the open end of the zipper stop close to the teeth and snugly against the zipper tape. Use pliers to crimp the stop firmly into place. Turn the zipper over and repeat to make sure it is securely crimped. A dot of fabric glue can be added under the stop before crimping for added security
- Jewelry part “hack” – The cord end will have a small loop on one end that must be removed. Use utility scissors, a metal cutter, or simply bend the loop back and forth till it breaks off. Place a dot of fabric



glue on the inside of the crimp. As with the commercially available zipper stops, place the open end of the cord end snugly over the zipper tape. Use pliers to crimp along the length of the cord end. Turn over and repeat the crimping.

5. **Cut** – trim off the excess zipper tape 1” above the stop.
6. **Color** - *Don't have the right color stop or don't like the color of the zipper stop?* Inexpensive nail polish now comes in a wide variety of colors. Grab a bottle and carefully paint a couple coats of nail polish on the stop. It will blend right into your garment or you can match the stop to the color of the zipper teeth.

## Additional Resources

Reader Tip: Fashion a Zipper Stop

<https://www.threadsmagazine.com/2019/08/20/reader-tip-fashion-a-zipper-stop?fbclid=IwAR2yspm5S1L4M6MAW -JCqTJaLQ4IaEMNIEqywQH20GQm-lxyPmxxWOXfiU>

Pulling Teeth: Tips to shorten zippers

<https://www.threadsmagazine.com/2010/12/30/pulling-teeth-tips-to-shorten-zippers>

Zipper Basics: Sliders and Stops

[https://www.threadsmagazine.com/2016/04/21/zipper-basics-sliders-and-stops?utm\\_campaign=meetedar&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=meetedar.com](https://www.threadsmagazine.com/2016/04/21/zipper-basics-sliders-and-stops?utm_campaign=meetedar&utm_medium=social&utm_source=meetedar.com)

How to shorten a metal zipper without wrecking your good sewing scissors

<https://annenamade.wordpress.com/2012/12/21/how-to-shorten-a-metal-zipper-without-wrecking-your-good-sewing-scissors/>