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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

Sewing Modern Fabrics

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Sewing **Modern** Fabric

by ELIZABETH K. EASTON, extension clothing specialist

Never before has such an array of exciting fabrics tempted the person who enjoys sewing, to get out her sewing machine and whip up something new and different. Old, familiar fibers and fabrics have been given new finishes and interesting textures. New fibers developed in laboratories all over the world, have found their way into entirely new fabrics.

Do you ever look at a piece of fabric and see a lovely suit or coat? or a beautiful dress? or a child's jumper? When shopping for fabrics do you want to touch and feel—to see what fabric will do and how it will behave?

Do you sense a personality in fabrics? One says, "Tailor me, I'm all business." Another is strictly the party-type. Fabrics can be bold, daring, subtle, casual. Some are for draping, others take to pleats. Some are sophisticated, others demure. Selecting the most appropriate fabric for a specific garment is a challenge—it's the key to the perfect costume.

Many of today's fabrics require new techniques in choice of pattern (design), cutting, adjustment of sewing machine, type of thread, size of needle, and method of pressing. In general, good habits and procedures for home sewing — cutting on grain, stay stitching, sewing and pressing alternately (and with grain), and finishing seams to reduce raveling — should be continued.

Consider the color, texture, and design of the fabric. Since texture and fiber content have the greatest bearing on sewing techniques, consider texture first.

Texture refers largely to the way fabrics react to touch, light, and handling. Wise choice of texture for the individual is influenced by the human figure, the occasion for which the garment will be worn, one's ability to sew, and the design of the garment. Closely woven cotton, linen, or woolen fabrics are the easiest to handle. The expert seamstress may wish to try suiting, coatings, stretch fabrics, fur-like textures, bonded fabrics, blends, or man-made fiber fabrics.

WHERE DO YOU BUY?

Buy your fabric from a store which stands behind its merchandise—the store that thinks of tomorrow's customers while ringing up the cash register today!

Information given on the end of the bolt generally is reliable. However, there are instances when fabric arrives at the retail level in a bundle and then is rolled onto a bolt or tube. In this case the information you find may or may not apply to the fabric at which you are looking. Always ask!

Examine fabric carefully for flaws in dyeing, weaving, color fastness, and straightness. Many easy-care fabrics insisted on today are achieved through a resin-treating process in which the fabric is subjected to high temperatures to seal the threads into a permanent position.

These finishes are wonderful, but there are disadvantages. If the fabric was not perfectly aligned in both directions, the finished product will be permanently off grain. So, beware when buying any fabric, but especially one which requires matching, such as a plaid, check, or stripe. Even though these are woven from previously dyed yarns, they may be skewed or bowed in the resin-treating process. If the warp and filling yarns are set at other than right angles there is no remedy. Only extreme care in laying the pattern can counteract this, and additional yardage will be required. Whenever possible, fabric should be torn from the bolt or cut on a line from which the thread was drawn. This will call immediate attention to off-grain fabric design.

SPECIAL FABRICS

BONDED FABRICS

This group includes all fibers and weaves generally bonded to an acetate or nylon tricot or to a woven cotton. The purpose of bonding is to give stability and body to loosely woven fabrics.

Look for evenly bonded lengthwise edges and straight-grain crosswise bonding of the face fabric.

Choose a garment design with simple lines and few seams. Use facings and interfacings of light weight fabric. Many times the face fabric separated from the backing will make a less bulky and more desirable facing. Grade encased seams, and finish other seams only if there is a tendency to roll or fray. Edge-stitch, zig-zag, or bind with tape if necessary. Bonded fabric does not eliminate the need for lining a jacket or coat.

Buttonholes may be bound or machine made, depending on the type of garment. If the outer fabric is

Texture	Fabrics
rough or coarse	hopsacking, tweed, burlap
smooth	chambray, broadcloth
nubby	boucle, tussah
bulky	heavy woolen, coatings, wide-wale corduroy
soft	flannel
clinging	jersey, knits
sheer	voile
transparent	organdy, chiffon
stiff	organza, taffeta
shiny	satin, brocade, lame, chintz, vinyl
pile or napped	velvet, corduroy, fur
dull	oxford cloth, felt, denim

bulky, remove the backing for the lips of the bound button hole.

A French hem is most suitable for bonded fabric. Pink the free edge, stitch close to the edge with the shortest length machine stitch, and hand-hem with a catch stitch below the hem edge between hem and garment.

CORDUROY, VELVET, VELVETEEN

Corduroy is a cotton fabric manufactured in several wale widths. Velvet and velveteen may be cotton or nylon, and much of today's velvet is washable.

The pile structure of corduroy and velvet demands special handling. Make sure the pile runs the same direction in all pieces of the garment. A garment composed of few pieces will simplify this.

A richer color effect will be obtained if the pile runs up. Avoid a design that calls for top stitching. Line or face with a smooth, finely woven fabric of matching color to avoid bulkiness.

Seams will require some type of finish. Do not pink! Do not turn and stitch the hem edge; instead, encase the edge with seam tape, or a piece of matching color bias fabric if the skirt has considerable flare.

Avoid buttonholes—use loops, snaps, or zippers sewed in by hand.

DIAGONAL WEAVES

These may be in any type of fabric. They call for a design with few seams. Finishing details will be determined by weight and closeness of weave.

FAKE FURS

Use the same techniques as those suitable for corduroy and velvet. Work pile out of seams with the point of a needle. Wherever suitable, face with a smooth fabric of appropriate character. Seams generally require no special finish. Slash darts and press flat. Buttonholes may be machine-made or bound, using wool or other smooth fabric for the lips.

FAKE LEATHER

Choose a design with straight lines and few seams and darts. Do not plan on buttonholes without making a trial sample first. Line and face with taffeta or polished cotton, and top or understitch to give a sharp edge. Use single or double top stitching to keep seam allowances flat. Slash darts and flatten.

JERSEY

Jersey is a single tubular knit. Before laying the pattern, open the tube by cutting along a rib. Straighten the ends of the fabric with a square.

Do not purchase printed jersey with a straight crosswise design unless the design runs at right angles to the lengthwise rib, not the fold.

Select a simple pattern with few seams. Avoid circular or bias-cut skirts. Jersey is adaptable to draping or design ease.

DOUBLE KNITS

A plain, double knit has nearly identical surfaces on both sides. This fabric comes off the machine in tubular form. The tube is pressed flat and often slit before selling. Double knit is especially suitable for tailored clothes. Avoid circular and bias cuts.

To reinforce shoulder seams or under side of kimono sleeves, pin pre-shrunk tape over the seamline before stitching and include it in the seam.

Grade encased seams in collars, facings, etc. In general other seams require no special finish. However, if there is a tendency to roll, catch-stitch seam edges to garment.

Buttonholes may be bound or machine-made. In either case, stabilize buttonhole area by pressing a small, oval-shaped piece of very light weight iron-on interfacing to the wrong side of the garment section.

To hem, stitch $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from cut edge and catch-stitch to garment, or, use a tailor's hem. Do not turn hem.

Line skirts with a good quality sheath lining or regular lining fabric.

LACE (NOT BONDED)

Laces generally are made of cotton or blends containing cotton. Choose simple, straight lines with few seams.

Most lace requires a backing; choose transparent, sheer, or opaque fabrics. Linings are usually opaque. Net, chiffon, or tulle are suitable transparent backings. Sheer backings include marquisette or organza. Opaques such as taffeta, peau de soie, or polished cotton also are suitable.

Avoid self-facings. Straight seams should be as fine and inconspicuous as possible, double stitched, and trimmed close to the stitching. Curved seams or edges of facings may be bound with net or other sheer fabric.

For straight hems use horsehair braid rather than turning up the lace.

Buttons and buttonholes are not appropriate for lace garments. Apply lightweight zipper as usual, but do last step by hand.

LEATHER AND SUEDE

Patience and care are required in handling any natural skin. Pin or needle marks are permanent, so make sure the pattern fits precisely before cutting from leather.

Select uniform skins for fronts and sleeves. Choose a design whose pieces will fit the irregular shape of skins. Simple designs are a must because collars, cuffs, encased edges, and complicated construction lines create problems.

Cut a single layer at a time. Place pattern on wrong side of leather and affix with tape. Mark with clay chalk or lead pencil.

Pre-shrink seam tape to reinforce seams. Trim seams to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch and round all corners.

Wherever possible, tape rather than press. Seam allowances and hems may be held in place by glueing. If pressing is required, use only a warm iron. Cover board with brown wrapping paper and press from wrong side.

Line leather and suede garments to minimize the need for dry cleaning.

PERMANENT OR DURABLE PRESS

These terms are used interchangeably. However, durable is a more realistic term. Today's piece goods stores or departments actually offer little of the durable press type fabric found in ready-to-wear; as yet no equipment is available for home use to post-cure or shape the garment after sewing. This does not eliminate the necessity for minor alterations. Few of us can wear a garment "as is," and children outgrow their clothes which necessitates lengthening.

When a hem is dropped it is almost impossible to remove the original crease without applying a special preparation (alter-ease) just new on the market. The new hemline usually can be pressed fairly well with a steam iron at the hottest setting, but the new lengthened pleat line leaves much to be desired. To overcome this edge stitch both outside and inside pleat lines. Apply this same technique to the bottom of slacks or skirts. Use a short stitch and well-matched thread. If shortening is required it is easier to take a skirt off at the top.

To reduce stitch-puckering which might appear after laundering, lengthen the stitch, and loosen the tension of both bobbin and needle thread.

When choosing a pattern for no-iron fabric, remember:

- Keep it simple with a minimum of seams.
- Top stitch or understitch for sharpness.
- Cut on bias where fabric design allows since straight seams pucker more than bias.
- Pre-shrink zipper, tape, lining, and interfacing by washing several times in warm water.
- Ease zipper into placket area.
- Use round-hole throat plate or put tape over the hole if only a zig-zag plate is available.
- Sew at moderate speed.
- Finish seams in accordance with their tendency to fray.

PLAIDS

There are two types of plaids: *balanced* and *unbalanced*. A balanced or even plaid repeats its pattern and spacing. An unbalanced plaid varies in pattern and spacing and requires special preparation in laying and cutting.

Plaids require extra yardage for matching:

- small scale— $\frac{1}{8}$ yard extra
- medium scale— $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ yard extra
- large scale—full yard extra

SEQUINED AND METALLIC FABRICS

These fabrics are for evening wear only and are most effective when made in simple styles with no buttonholes.

Cut heavily sequined fabric in single thickness. Use a backing of net on all metallic fabrics unless they are bonded. Do not face with self-fabric. Machine baste zipper in place; do the rest of the insertion by hand. Metallic fabrics require lining for comfort.

SHEER FABRICS

Sheers cover a wide range of fibers, weaves, and textures, most of which are easy to handle. Lay fabric over a sheet-covered cutting surface to prevent it from slipping off grain. Snip selvage at frequent intervals since it is more tightly woven than the body of the fabric. Mark with tailor's tacks. Most sheers require backing or an under-dress. Make French seams wherever possible. Avoid buttons and buttonholes. Insert zipper by hand. Use deep or rolled hems. Bind edges with double bias, rather than facing them.

STRETCH FABRICS

Since this fabric has a "give" it is possible that you need not allow the regular amount of ease. Spread fabric taut, then let it relax, before cutting. Avoid stretching the fabric as you cut.

Buttonholes are more satisfactory when placed opposite the direction of fabric stretch. Use an interfacing fabric at the buttonhole area for firmness.

Turn-stitch or overcast hems at raw edges and hand stitch. Be sure to hem with a stitch loose enough to allow the fabric to move. Avoid hem binding.

VINYL

Vinyl fabrics are available in a number of forms, but all require simple, straight lines. Raglan sleeves are preferred.

Welt seams or top-stitched seams on collar and facing edges are preferred.

Buttonholes may be bound or machine-made. If machine-made, always use a woven fabric as a stay between garment and facing.

Zippers, loops, or snaps may be used as closures.

Pin and needle holes are permanent, so pin within seam allowance and be sure the pattern fits before cutting.

Do not back-stitch darts; instead, stitch off the fabric and knot the two threads as one. Slash darts and finger-press edges open. Use fabric glue or rubber cement.

PURPOSE OF LINING

Linings are common in today's clothing and serve a variety of purposes. Understanding the reasons for using a lining will improve ones ability to select an appropriate lining for a particular fabric and use. Examples:

- to prevent wrinkling
- to prevent stretching
- to add body and weight to limp fabrics
- to give greater bodily comfort
- to enhance appearance of sheers
- to double as an interfacing as an aid in building a silhouette
- to add to the aesthetic appeal of the costume

Select a lining that will subordinate the garment fabric, feels pleasant to the touch, and will "keep pace" with the garment.

INTERFACING

An interfacing is an extra piece of fabric that lies between the facing and the outer section of the garment. It may be of the garment fabric, but generally it is not. Purposes of interfacing:

1. To keep the garment from stretching.
2. To add stiffness and body to limp fabrics or certain portions of the garment.
3. To act as a cushion for bulky seams.
4. To build an unusual silhouette.

Suitable fabrics: lawn, nylon net, muslin, hair canvas, non-wovens, "iron-ons." There are also a variety of special tradenames including *Under Current*, *Siri*, *Super Siri*, *Armo*, etc.

NEEDLE AND THREAD SIZE

Fabric	Needle Size	Thread
bonded	14	50 mercerized
corduroy and velvet	14	50 mercerized
fake fur	14	heavy duty or textured
fake leather	3-4	mercerized or silk
jersey	14	textured
double knit	11-14	textured
lace	9-11	70-100 mercerized
leather and suede	3-4	mercerized or silk
permanent press	12-14	mercerized, textured, or dual duty
sequinned or metallic	9-11	mercerized
sheers	9-11	mercerized or silk
stretch	14	textured
vinyl	14	50 mercerized

STITCH LENGTH

8 to 10 stitches/inch	10 to 12 stitches/inch	12 to 15 stitches/inch
fake furs	bonded fabrics	jersey
fake leathers	corduroy	knits
leather and suede	synthetics (nylon, acrylics, polyester)	sheers
permanent press	velvet and velveteen	stretch
sequinned and metallic	lace	
vinyl	wash-and-wear synthetics and cotton blends	

Use of a tradename does not imply endorsement of one product over another.