

Sewing Equipment: What do you need?

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Shears, gauges, hams, wheels—a variety of equipment is available for home sewing. What do you really need? Some pieces of equipment are basic for professional results; other pieces are convenient, save time, or simplify a process.

The beginner should start with the basics, marked with an asterisk (*) in the lists below, and add pieces when they are needed.

Before you purchase additional pieces of equipment, decide how much you will use them, whether another method or piece of equipment can be substituted, if you have storage space, and whether you can afford them.

Many more notions are available, but here are the more common sewing aids for you to consider.

FOR HAND SEWING

Needles come in a wide range of types and sizes. Select a needle appropriate for your fabric, thread, and type of stitch. Heavy fabrics require sturdy needles with large eyes to accommodate heavy thread. Fabrics of close, fine yarns require fine needles that do not leave holes or damage the fabric. The eye of the needle should be large enough for the thread, but not so large that the thread won't fill the needle hole in the fabric.

- * **Sharps**—average length, general purpose needles with round eyes.
- * **Crewel or embroidery**—average length with long slender eyes.
- Between**s—short needles with round eyes.
- Milliner's**—long needles with round eyes used for basting.
- Darners**—long needles with long eyes used for mending.
- Needlecraft**—specialized needles for arts and crafts such as tapestry (needlepoint), beading (sequin and bead work), and chenilles (heavy embroidery).
- Ball-point**—rounded point needle used for knit and woven textured filament yarn fabrics.
- Calyx-eyed**—eye open at the top for quick threading.

Beeswax is used to strengthen thread and prevent it from knotting. Cakes of beeswax come in a grooved, plastic holder. Replacement cakes are available.

FOR MEASURING

* *Tape measure* should be of fiberglass, plastic, or treated fabric with metal-tipped ends to maintain accuracy. Many tape measures are available in both inches and meters. The numbers should be on both sides. It is helpful if the numbers on one side begin at one end while the numbers on the other side begin at the other end.

* *Seam gauge* is a small measuring device with an adjustable indicator used for checking seam widths, hem widths, and small measuring tasks.

Hem gauge with straight and curved edges, speeds turning and pressing the hem line. The metal gauge has lines for various widths of hems.

Yardstick or meter stick is used for measuring and marking long, straight lines. The edge should be smooth and straight.

Skirt marker is used to locate and mark a hemline parallel to the floor.

Transparent plastic rulers, available in several sizes and styles, are used for precision measuring, marking, and pattern alteration.

Curved rulers are used for pattern alteration and as guides for the tracing wheel when marking.

Triangular rulers, L-squares, and T-squares are useful for checking straight yarn direction or grain and pattern layouts, and for finding true bias.

Needle threader has a flexible wire eye used to pull a thread through the needle's eye.

Thimbles protect the second finger as it pushes a needle through fabric. Thimbles are available in a range of sizes to give a snug fit. Both plastic and metal thimbles should be well indented to prevent the needle from slipping.

* *Pins* should be fine, sharp, and rustproof to prevent damage to fabrics. Pins are available in several lengths and thicknesses. Extra fine pins are used for delicate fabrics while long, thick pins are used for heavy materials. Pins come with three types of heads: the flat or standard head for general use, the glass or plastic colored ball which is easier to see and handle, and the "T" used for heavy pile and loose knit fabrics.

Dressmaker pins—medium diameter, general use.

Silk pins—slender with tapered point.

Ball point pins—rounded point for use on knit or woven textured filament yarn fabrics.

Pin cushions prevent pins from spilling and keep them convenient to your work.

* **Wrist pin cushions** are the most convenient way to keep pins handy.

Large round pin cushions hold an ample supply of pins. Some round pin cushions have an emery bag attached to use in sharpening and removing rust from pins and needles.

Pin dispenser with magnetized rim permits easy access to pins; will not hold nickel-plated brass pins.

FOR CUTTING

Shears are made with shaped handles for leverage when cutting and have longer, stronger blades than scissors. Both shears and scissors should be sharp and should open and close easily in your hand. There are special shears available for those who are left-handed. New types of scissors with one knife-edge blade or one serrated blade should be used for cutting man-made fibers such as polyester and nylon. Always close shears and scissors when not in use and be careful not to drop them which may cause nicks in the blades. Wipe blades frequently to remove lint and prevent rust.

* *Bent-handled shears* permit the pattern and fabric to lie flat on the table during cutting.

Electric shears are useful for persons with disabilities in their hands and arms. Electric shears are available in both plug-in and battery-operated models.

Pinking shears and *scalloping shears* may be used to finish seams of firmly woven, nonravelling fabrics and for decorative cutting. They are too inaccurate to be used for cutting out patterns and fabric.

Trimming scissors are used for light cutting, trimming, and handsewing. They have narrow, tapering blades with sharp points or one sharp and one rounded point.

Embroidery scissors are short, delicate scissors used for fine needlework.

Cutting wheel or *rotary cutter* is used to cut leather, vinyl, and bulky fabrics. It is designed with a replaceable disc blade and retractable blade protector. Be sure to use a protective cutting board or cardboard under the area being cut.

Thread clippers are used for ripping out seams or clipping threads while you are working. Hold clippers in the palm of the hand, fourth finger through the ring. The blade clips as you squeeze with your palm.

* *Seam ripper* is a pen-like device with a handle and curved blade with a sharp point. Cut every second or third stitch on a flat seam. A seam ripper is much safer for both user and fabric than a razor blade.

Cutting board of lightweight cardboard with one-inch markings is used for pinning, cutting, and pattern alteration.

FOR SPECIAL SEWING

Some pieces of equipment are very handy for specialized tasks. Consider how frequently you would use them before investing in these sewing aids.

Bodkin is a large, blunt needle with a long eye used for inserting elastic or cord through a casing.

Loop turner is a long, slender tool with a latch and hook at the end used to turn bias binding and insert cording.

Tweezers are used to get hold of tiny thread ends such as tailor's tacks and bastings.

Point turner is a specialized tong-like tool for turning corners right side out giving a neat, sharp point.

Eyelet punch and *no-sew snap pliers* may be separate items or may be interchangeable within one tool. The eyelet punch inserts metal reinforcements for belts. The no-sew snap pliers attaches the pronged rings to socket and ball fasteners.

FOR MARKING

* *Dressmaker carbon* is used to transfer markings from the pattern to the wrong side of the fabric. Select a color close to that of your fabric, yet one that will barely show. Test the carbon on a fabric scrap for visibility and removability. Carbon can be difficult to remove from some fabrics.

* *Tracing wheels* are used to transfer by pressure the dressmaker carbon to the fabric. There are three kinds of wheels: the needlepoint wheel for heavy fabrics and pattern-making; the sawtooth for medium weight fabrics; and the smooth for lightweight and delicate fabrics.

Cold water soluble markers are specialized marking pens with ink that can be removed with cold water. Hot water and some laundry products may set the mark or make a permanent stain.

Tailor's chalk may have a clay or wax base. Test on a sample of your fabric for removability and possible staining.

Marking pencils are similar to tailor's chalk but make thinner, more accurate lines.

Soap slivers, the remains of soap bars, can be used on many fabrics for marking lines.

FOR PRESSING

* *Iron with dry and steam combination* is needed for pressing a variety of fabrics. Follow the owner's manual for instructions on use and care—especially care.

* *Steamer* creates steam at a lower temperature setting than an iron for use on napped fabrics and delicate fabrics.

* *Ironing board* should have a smooth, wrinkle-free cover and padding to prevent shine at edges of seams.

* *Press cloth*, used when pressing at a dry or steam setting, protects fabrics and prevents a shine. Types of press cloths include cheesecloth, muslin, drill or heavy cotton, or smooth wool. The cheesecloth is used with lightweight fabrics; muslin with medium-weight fabrics; drill on heavy cotton with heavy fabrics; and wool with wool or textured fabrics. The cheesecloth or muslin may be dampened to provide moisture. Damp and dry press cloths may be used in various combinations.

Tailor's ham is a firm cushion used for pressing shaped or curved areas.

Seam roll is a narrow cylinder used for pressing seams. It prevents seam edges from shining through and forming ridges. A rolling pin works as a substitute.

Point presser is made of hardwood which may or may not be padded. It is used as a support when pressing collars, lapels, and narrow, awkward areas.

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