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Cooperative Extension South Dakota State University

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sewing corduroy and velveteen

Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Corduroy and velveteen belong to the family of pile fabrics. These fabrics are woven with an extra set of looped surface yarns which are cut to create a soft texture.

Fabrics with a fuzzy textured surface, as well as any fabric with a directional feeling, are referred to as "napped." A special knowledge of the characteristics of these fabrics is necessary in sewing or caring for them.

### Corduroy

As far back as the 18th century, servants wore imitation velvet made of cotton. It was durable and economical. Corduroy today is widely used and always in fashion.

Although it is usually made of cotton, this pile fabric may be blended with polyester or nylon for greater durability. Corduroy is available solid or printed and with patterned or novelty weaves. Quality varies with fabric construction and finishes added.

#### Types of Corduroy

- **Finewale**: up to 24 ribs per inch
- **Pinwale**: usually 16 ribs per inch
- **Midwale**: 12 to 14 ribs per inch
- **Widewale**: 3 to 10 ribs per inch
- **Ribless (no-wale or cordless)**: does not have ribs
- **Thick and thin**: alternately wide and narrow wales

### Velveteen

At one time velveteen was made of 100% cotton, but today it is often blended with synthetics. It differs from corduroy in that the pile on velveteen covers the surface and is thicker. It differs from velvet in that the pile in velvet is made with the warp threads while in velveteen it is made with the filling threads.

Most velveteen has either a plain or twill weave construction on the back. The twill weave will lock in the pile, giving it better drape, richer color, and more durability for apparel or home furnishings.

#### Pattern and fabric selection

Choose simple styles with as few seams as possible. A pattern with many pieces will give a patchy look. Also avoid curved seams as this fabric does not ease well. Suitable patterns will suggest corduroy or velveteen and will have a "with nap" layout which requires ¾ to ¼ yard more fabric.

Selecting the correct pattern size is particularly important to avoid fitting problems during the construction process since stitching lines will usually show when removed. Needed alterations should be made before cutting the pattern out.

#### Fabric preparation, layout and cutting

Preshrink all washable fabric and notions following directions on the care label. Some of these fabrics will shrink quite a bit depending on the fiber content.

To determine the nap or pile direction, brush your hand lightly over the pile. The surface will smooth in the direction of the pile. For a rich, deep color, lay the pattern with the nap going up the body. For a frosted effect, cut with the nap going down.

Follow the "with nap" layout diagram on the pattern guide instructions. If it is not given, be sure to use only a lengthwise fold (or single layer) and cut all pattern pieces in the same direction. If a crosswise fold is used, the nap direction is reversed on the under layer.

Lay fabric on a smooth surface with the pile folded in. Pin pattern on fabric using fine pins within the seam allowance. This will avoid marring the surface of the pile. Transfer pattern markings using thread tailor's tacks, chalk, or pins. A tracing wheel could mar the fabric.
Construction techniques

Stitching

Pressure and tension may need to be adjusted for sewing napped fabrics. Make test seams with two layers of fabric, pile to pile, making necessary adjustments. If fabric layers tend to shift or slip while stitching, decrease pressure on the presser foot. Basting seams first by hand often helps this problem. Or try an even feed or roller foot available on some sewing machine models. This attachment helps the top layer of the fabric feed through the machine at the same time as the bottom layer.

Use a longer than average stitch length—about 10 stitches per inch (2.5 cm). The heavier the fabric the longer the stitch needed. Choose a size 11 or 14 (70 or 80) “sharp” needle. Remove lint frequently which accumulates under the throat plate.

Stitch in the direction of the nap. It may work well to mark the direction on the back of each garment section with chalk.

Grade all enclosed seams to eliminate bulk.

Slash darts to within ½ inch of the point and press open.

Clip the corners of seam allowances diagonally where seams cross.

Seam finishes

Seams usually need to be finished on these fabrics since they are woven and the extra set of yarns will continue to shed. They may be finished by overcasting, zigzagging, or binding with cotton bias tape. If the fabric is closely woven, a pinking and stitched edge will be sufficient.

Hems

Raw edges of hems may be finished with seam binding, bound, overcast, or zigzagged. Hems should be done by hand using fine thread. Use an inside hemming stitch or a catch stitch, being careful not to pull the thread tight.

Fusible hems are not appropriate for most of these fabrics but can be used successfully on some.

Pressing

Most corduroys and velveteens require special pressing techniques. Always press on the wrong
side as you sew. Pile fabrics should be pressed with steam over a needleboard, a heavy turkish towel, or a large scrap of the fabric placed face-up on the ironing board.

To press a finished garment, hang it in a steam filled bathroom for 30 minutes and shake to remove wrinkles. The pile may be carefully brushed with a soft brush while damp. A commercial dry cleaner will usually do a nice job of steaming a finished garment to give it a professional look.

Closures

Machine buttonholes are appropriate for corduroy and velveteen. Bound buttonholes make attractive closures, especially on velveteen. Buttons may be covered or purchased for a decorative effect.

Be sure to use interfacing in the buttonhole, collar, and other detail areas. A non-fusible woven or nonwoven interfacing of the same care requirements is the best choice. Fusibles are usually not appropriate since so much pressing is involved with their application. Always make a test of the interfacing with the fabric if you wish to try a fusible.

Care

The pile may flatten during wear, and creasing may occur when sitting. You may freshen and lift the pile by holding it over a steam iron and brushing while it is still damp. Always let the garment dry completely before wearing it again.

Follow instructions on the care label for hand or machine washing. These fabrics also dryclean well and you may wish to care for them in that way, particularly if you have put time and effort into tailoring a garment.

Turn garments inside out so lint won’t collect on the pile if you decide to launder. A fabric softener will help maintain a fluffy pile. Remove garments from the dryer before they are completely dry. Shake to restore the pile and hang them on plastic hangers. Pile garments should not be folded for shelf storage, as this will result in hard to remove fold lines.

References:


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