1981

**Sewing Wools and Wool Blends**

Cooperative Extension South Dakota State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/extension_fact

**Recommended Citation**
https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/extension_fact/954

This Fact Sheet is brought to you for free and open access by the SDSU Extension at Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in SDSU Extension Fact Sheets by an authorized administrator of Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. For more information, please contact michael.biondo@sdstate.edu.
sewing wools and wool blends

Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
U.S. Department of Agriculture
sewing wools and wool blends

Wool may be one of the oldest fabrics known to man. And, after a slump in popularity, it is again being chosen for clothing for its durability and because of our increasing interest in renewable natural products.

Wool comes in a variety of textures and weight and has a number of natural advantages:
- insulating capacity that increases with fabric thickness,
- high degree of absorbency,
- resistance to wrinkling, pilling, and tearing,
- natural water repellence,
- flame resistance,
- easy shedding of dirt.

The wool fiber is popular to work with because it can be molded and shaped into garments that keep their shape. The chemical make-up of wool and its absorbency give it a special ability to take dyes. Wool fabrics are available in many beautiful colors.

Pattern and fabric selection

When buying wool or wool blend fabrics, be sure to check care information. Some of these fabrics are washable, but some must be dry cleaned.

Check information on the reverse side of the pattern envelope to choose a compatible fabric. Also determine whether or not the pattern is suitable for plaids or stripes. You may need to purchase extra fabric to allow for matching.

Most wool fabrics have a nap or surface texture. Some patterns are not suitable for napped fabrics.

Fabric preparation

One limitation of wool fabric is that it shrinks easily.

Preshrink your fabric if the label does not state that it has been preshrunk. Fabrics can be sent to the dry cleaners for shrinking or you can do it yourself following these steps:
- Find the straight grain and even ends.
- Thoroughly wet a sheet in warm water. Wring out excess and place on a flat surface over plastic or brown paper.
- Fold wool lengthwise, wrong sides out. Keeping grainline straight, lay the fabric on the wet sheet.

- Fold or roll the wool fabric in the sheet. Cover with plastic or paper and let it rest several hours.
- Unfold the fabric and allow it to dry, smoothing to remove wrinkles.
- Press lightly if necessary.

Shrink interfacing and seam tape also.

Layout, cutting, marking

Since it is often difficult to tell the right from the wrong side of wool fabric, it is a good idea to mark each piece after it has been cut out.

Lay the pattern on the fabric using the layout diagram on the pattern guidesheet. Follow the “with nap” layout or lay all pattern pieces in one direction whenever possible. Some wool fabrics do not have an obvious nap like that of corduroy or velvet, but you will still see color differences when the garment is completed.

Transfer pattern markings with tailor’s tacks, chalk, or pins. Tracing wheel and carbon will probably not show up on this fabric.

Construction techniques

Stitching

The weight of the fabric will determine the length of stitch and proper tension to use. Experiment with fabric scraps to see which works best.

The average stitch length for medium weight wool is from 10 to 12 stitches per inch. The heavier the fabric the longer the stitch that is used.
Choose a size 11 or 14 (70 or 80) machine needle with a sharp point for wovens and ballpoint for knits. Frequently remove the lint which accumulates under the throat plate.

Stay stitch the neck edge, shoulder, armhole, and other bias edges on the garment, using directional stitching. Stay stitching is done 1/8 inch from the seam line within the seam allowance.

Stay stitch the waistline and side seams of a skirt through the hip area.

Reinforce points and corners by using 20 stitches per inch along the seam line.

Grade all enclosed seams to eliminate bulk.

Clip the corners of seam allowances diagonally where seams cross.

**Seam finishes**

Seams usually need to be finished on woven wool fabrics since they tend to ravel.

Seams on wool are generally pressed open and may be finished by overcasting, zigzagging or binding. If the fabric is closely woven, a pinking and stitched seam finish may be sufficient and add the least amount of bulk.

**Hem finishes**

Edges of hems may be finished in any of a number of ways depending on the fabric.

Raw edges may be finished with seam tape, zig zagged or pinned and stitched. Hems should be done by hand because of the weight of most of these fabrics. Do not pull the stitches too tight. Fusible hems would not be appropriate for most woven wools but would work well on knits.
Seams, darts and hems that will be enclosed in linings need not be finished since the raw edges won’t receive any wear. If a fabric ravel an excessive amount, stitching the raw edge may be a wise precaution.

Pressing

Always use a press cloth on wool to protect it from scorching. Moisture supplied by a steam iron or damp press cloth will prevent the wool from drying out.

During construction, press the garment from the wrong side. To avoid the imprint from seams, darts, and other construction details on the right side of the garment, use brown paper strips between the detail and the garment when pressing.

Use a tailor’s ham and seam roll for shaping details. Press darts and shaped seams over a ham. If a ham is not available, you can use a tightly rolled terry cloth towel pinned securely to hold its shape.

Never press the wool until it is completely dry. Some moisture should be left in the fabric to retain its soft texture and finish.

Care

Wool responds well to professional cleaning, steam pressing, and shaping. It is rejuvenated by moisture.

Even though wool’s natural resiliency helps avoid wrinkling, it will hold creases and pleats when steam and pressure are applied. To take these creases out, just moisten with steam again and press.

Wool clothing can be altered easily, as steaming will erase the old stitch marks. Check to see that this is true for the particular fabric you are working with before taking the garment completely apart.

Wool has a natural resistance to stains and spots, but if difficult stains do occur, consult a stain removal chart before treating. Wool will dissolve in chlorine bleach so care must be taken never to use this product in laundering wool garments.

Wool is weaker when wet, so when laundering washable wool garments, including sweaters, be very careful not to stretch them.

Wool fabrics are attractive to moths and carpet beetles so should be stored with care. Many fabrics are now treated for permanent moth proofing and if not, they can be moth proofed by a professional cleaner.

Labeling

These two symbols will appear on labels sewn into ready made garments. Items carrying the pure wool mark are made of 100% wool fiber. The woolblend mark certifies that the fabric is at least 60% wool and meets Wool Bureau standards for performance and workmanship.

References:


Prepared by Linda Manikowske, Extension clothing and textiles specialist, SDSU.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the USDA. Hollis D. Hall, Director of Cooperative Extension Service, SDSU, Brookings. Educational programs and materials offered without regard to age, race, color, religion, sex, handicap or national origin. An Equal Opportunity Employer.

File: 13.6.3—5,000 printed at estimated 7 cents each—6-81mb—8164.