FABRIC GUIDE

The Thrifty Stitcher

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LEARN TO SEW WITH A PRO

CHOOSING FABRICS

This booklet is split into 4 main fabric categories, all based around the most widely used and popular fabrics, Cotton, Wool and Naturals, Stretch and Luxury fabrics. These have all been chosen because they make great clothes, are readily available and are a pleasure to sew and wear.

FABRIC TIPS

- Choosing fabrics can seem a daunting task when there are so many choices available. In each chapter you'll find a list of the most common types of fabric, and suggestions on how to use them in your dressmaking.

- When you start buying fabrics, it's a good idea to build up a swatch file. As you collect and buy fabrics, take a swatch or small sample and staple into a note-pad. Make a note of the type of fabric; what you used it for, and any laundry care advice that may have come with the fabric. You'll quickly find that you've built up a great file, and which you can refer back to every time you start a new project.

- The best tip for choosing fabric is to think about exactly what you plan to make, and then ask yourself if the fabric you've found is suitable? For example you may find an amazing rigid cotton drill in your favourite colour, and you really want to make a jumpsuit. Will that rigid fabric work in a garment that needs to fall in soft folds around the body? Probably not, so in this case you would pass on the drill and look for something with more 'drape'. The drape in this context, means that it falls well, and will hang nicely on the body.

Fabric falls into 3 main categories-

Woven fabrics-

These fabrics have long threads called the warp threads running along the length of the fabric, with another set of threads called the weft weaving horizontally across the width of the fabric. This is the most common way for fibres to be made into cloth.

Knit or stretch fabrics-

These fabrics have the thread looped around one another to create the cloth. It's this looping of the threads that gives the fabric it's stretch or flexibility. Stretch fabric ranges from simple cotton interlock, to complex technologically advanced Power Stretch sports fabric. Stretch fabrics can be made from many different fibres, and often have a blend of fibres to make the cloth suitable for different purposes. Stretch fabric can have little or lots of stretch, depending on how the threads are knitted.

Non-woven fabrics-

This type of fabric is less commonly used in dressmaking. The cloth is made by matting or pressing fibres together to make a cloth. A good example of a non-woven fabric is felt, which is made from wool fibres. Lots of interfacing used in dressmaking is non-woven, and it provides a stable structure to the inside of garments.

PREPARING YOUR FABRICS

It can't be stressed enough, that before cutting into any newly purchased delicious fabric, it should be pre-shrunk. Dressing is applied to fabric during the weaving process, and once this is lost, fabric can shrink by up to 10-20%.
Most fabric stores sell fabric with care labels attached. Make a note of the advice on the card before you leave the shop

Machine washable fabrics-
Put all fabrics of this type through a machine wash. Hang it to dry rather than using a dryer. Press carefully to re-set the grain before cutting.

Hand washable fabrics-
Wash by hand, and air dry. Press to re-set grain. If you want to avoid having to hand-wash this fabric once sewn up, then try doing a machine test. Cut a 10cm by 10 cm square, and look at the sheen of the cloth and how it drapes over your hand. Machine-wash and see how much it's shrunk, and if the quality of the cloth has been lost. If the cloth has suffered no ill effects, then you can use as machine washable.

Dry-clean only fabrics-
As a general rule, it's not necessary to get the cloth dry-cleaned before cutting. However for most dry-clean only fabrics it's essential to get some steam through the fabric to shrink the fibres.

Wool-
Hover an iron over the fabric, making sure to use lots of steam. Allow each section to cool down before moving it. Whilst warm, wool is extremely malleable so you can stretch it if you move it warm. Repeat this process on both sides of the fabric.

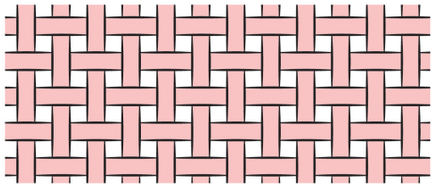
Brocades or fabrics with metallic threads-
ut off a small test piece before ironing the fabric. Use the test piece to make sure the iron temp doesn't scorch the iron. For the first test, don't use any steam. Metallic threads often shrink much more than the rest of the threads they're mixed with and steam can make this worse. Once you get the Iron temp right, and if the fabric hasn't significantly shrunk, try it with steam.

Silk-
Silk is such a magical fibre but it's also a delicate one. The beautiful lustre of silk can be destroyed by over-zealous ironing, which flattens the surface of the fabric. Do a small test and see how the silk responds to heat and steam. It's often a good idea to use a pressing cloth to protect the surface, and iron from the wrong side.

Lace or mesh fabrics-
These need to be treated very delicately. Because the fabric of lace is very open, it can be easily distorted, so it's best to treat a little like wool, and hover above the cloth with some light steam. Test on a small piece first to make sure the heat doesn't melt any of the lace.

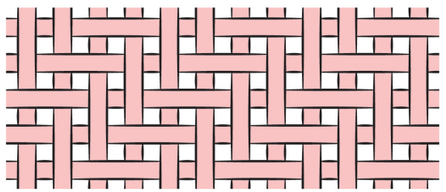
COTTONS

Cotton is a truly versatile fibre that can be used to make both woven fabrics and knitted fabrics and it's often blended with other fibres to create many wonderful fabrics. There are essentially three main types of weaving that we'll refer to in our fabric guide.



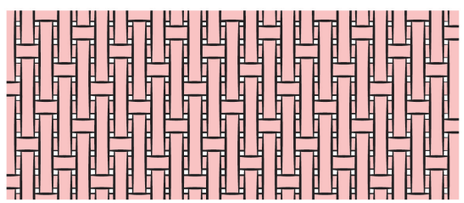
PLAIN WEAVE

This is the most readily available and popular type of woven fabric. The fabric is woven with long warp threads along the length of the cloth, and weft threads evenly interlaced across the width of the cloth. Plain-weave fabrics are usually easy to sew, gather and handle.



TWILL WEAVE

This type of weave creates the most durable cloths like gabardine, denim and chino. The weft threads don't weave in an even pattern horizontally across the warp threads. Instead, they create a series of over-and-under sequences, changing with each row and building a diagonal pattern. The diagonal pattern appears in the cloth like ridges, and is particularly noticeable in denim. It's possible to vary the over under sequence to create different patterns like a herringbone effect.



SATIN WEAVE

This is the least durable type of woven cloth, but it creates wonderful special-occasion fabrics. The weft threads are woven with long spaces or 'floats' across the warp threads. It's these floats that attract the light and create the satin quality of the fabric. Satin weaving enables elaborate patterns to be woven into the fabric. Damask and Jacquard weaving are both types of satin woven fabrics.

The choice of fabrics available can be overwhelming and bewildering! Here's a guide to some of the cotton fabrics that are commonly used for dressmaking, including what sort of garments

Batiste

This soft, opaque fabric comes in varying degrees of sheerness. It's a plain-woven fabric that is similar to lawn, although slightly heavier. It's a good choice for summer dressmaking and children's clothes.

Chambray

This is a fabulous cloth, woven with dyed warp threads and white filler or weft threads, which creates its distinctive sheen and iridescent effect. Often available in a denim colour, this lustrous cloth launders well and is really easy to sew with. Use a lightweight version for delicious shirts, dresses and children's clothes. The heavier-weight cloth makes excellent shorts or trousers; we've used it for our Men's Cargo Shorts (page XX).

Corduroy

Woven with a cut pile or nap, this fabric has long been a family favourite and is often used for children's clothes. The soft pile has distinctive stripes called 'wales' that run parallel with the selvedge. The wales come in a variety of widths, from fine needlecord to fat jumbo-cords. Choose a lighter-weight, narrow, ribbed cord for shirts or dresses, and use the thicker ribbed corduroy for dungarees, trousers and jackets. Corduroy is now available in so many cute children's prints, and makes really cosy durable clothes for children.

Denim

A universally popular fabric that is similar to drill. Denim's unique quality stems from indigo threads being used as the warp, with un-dyed threads used as the weft threads. Denim can also be produced in colours other than indigo. Denim was originally designed to make work-wear but is now available in many weights and is often blended with other fibres to make more technical cloth. It's a densely woven fabric, so use a denim needle if you're using heavier-weight denim. Lightweight denim makes fabulous shirts, dresses and children's clothes. The heavier weights are excellent for jeans, shorts, skirts and jackets.

Drill

Woven with a dense twill weave, this is a durable, hardwearing fabric. The fabric has a diagonal ribbed effect. Traditionally when used for army uniforms, it was known as khaki drill. Drill is a similar fabric to denim, and can be dyed in all colours. Drill makes great trousers, structured skirts and jackets. It's also useful for non-dressmaking projects such as bags and soft furnishings.

Dotted Swiss

Similar in appearance to eyelet fabric, dotted Swiss is crisp, sheer cotton that has textured dots woven into the fabric. Use this fabric to make summer blouses, tops, floaty dresses and nightwear.

Eyelet

This is a lacy fabric that's perfect for summer tops, dresses and blouses. The base fabric is usually a lightweight lawn, batiste or voile that has been embroidered with decorative holes or eyelets. It's often called broderie anglaise. We've used some for our Button-back Blouse (page XX). As the fabric is sheer with holes, you may need to consider underlining or lining any clothes made with this fabric.

Flannelette

This comes in many weights, and is can be made from fibres other than cotton. The fabric is a loose weave that has a nap on the right side. Cotton flannel is often called brushed cotton, due to the nap or texture of the fabric. Use it to make cosy nightwear and children's clothes.

Gingham

This delightful plain-woven fabric comes in a myriad of colours and checks. It's possible to find gingham with teeny checks and large, bold checks, and the cloth is available in lots of weights. The checked pattern is woven in rather than printed. Gingham is an excellent fabric for summer tops and blouses if a lighter weight is chosen. Heavier

WHAT EXACTLY IS COTTON?

- Cotton is the best fabric choice for anyone who is new to sewing, yet there are enough variations of cotton cloth to afford endless possibilities for even an experienced dressmaker. Cotton is the most used fibre for textile production, and is generally believed to be the most popular fabric in the world. There is evidence that humans have cultivated and used cotton crops for over 7000 years

- Aside from ease of sewing, cotton is really pleasurable to wear. It's a natural fibre, and allows the wearer's body to 'breathe'. Many begin sewing because it's getter harder and harder to find clothing on the high street that is actually made from natural fibres. The desire for fast fashion has prompted the creation of cheaper man-made fabrics, which are not always as nice to wear as they look!

- Cotton comes from a plant that yields balls or 'bolls' of fibrous lint. In its natural state it is off-white in colour and looks a little like candy floss. In order to become fabric, this crop needs to go through many processes. First it's turned into a yarn, which is then woven into a cloth. Cotton can be blended with many other fibres and that's one of the reasons it's so versatile. These days' cotton shirts can have built-in fibre technology that makes them non –iron. Cotton is often blended with other natural fibres like silk and linen, as well as with advanced new technological fibres that create specific properties in the cloth.

- The way the yarn is handled as it's woven is what dictates what type of cloth is produced. A twill weave for example skips warp threads as it's woven, making both a texture in the cloth and a really durable fabric. Denim is a great example of twill. Plain weaves create cloths like ginghams and broadcloths. There are many different ways to weave cotton yarn, all creating very different fabrics.

How the damp British weather helped to build our nation!

At one point Great Britain was the world's leading manufacturer of cotton, despite the fact that our climate was unsuitable for growing cotton. Much of the success of the British cotton industry can be attributed to the damp rolling hills of Lancashire. Raw cotton arrived onto our shores, and was taken to spinners in the north of England. In order to create cotton cloth, wool or linen was required for strength, and as Lancashire also produced wool, it was a perfect area for spinners to work. The damp weather proved an ideal asset to spinning cotton. The fibres were less prone to breakage when spun together in the humid hills of Lancashire, so it became a centre of cotton production.

In the 18th century spinning and weaving was mostly a cottage industry, with spinners and weavers working from their homes. With the industrial revolution came the invention of 2 spinning machines that revolutionised the manufacture of cotton, first the spinning jenny, and then the spinning mule. Cotton production moved away from homes and into large mills and factories. Cotton was now produced in quantities previously unachievable and Britain's cloth was exported all over the world.

Sadly the British cotton industry declined, as other crop growing countries such as the USA began to develop their own mills and factories. These days there are few working mills left in the UK and most of the cotton fabric we wear is produced in China or America

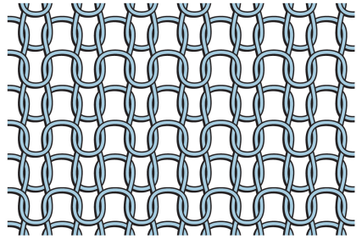
STRETCH FABRICS

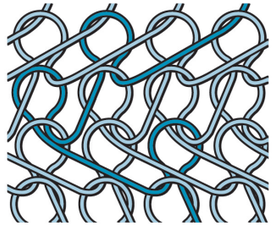
Knit fabric has revolutionised the fit of the modern wardrobe, because it moulds around the body much better than woven fabric. If you look in your wardrobe it's likely that you'll find several stretchy or knit garments, which are probably your most comfortable and favourite clothes.

Stretch fabrics come in all weights and qualities, from fine stretchy underwear to sweatshirts, fleece and even faux fur. They are defined by the way they're knitted rather than by the fibre content; it's possible to buy cotton, wool, silk and synthetic fibres in knits, and there are also blended knit fabrics. Just like woven fabrics, some are easier to sew than others. If you've never used stretch fabric before, try using a stable double knit like a Ponte Roma or cotton interlock fabric to get started.

We're focusing in this chapter on fabrics that have been knitted, rather than fabrics that have been woven with stretchy yarns. Knit fabrics are created by interlocking yarn around needles, creating looped stitches. It's the looping of the yarn that creates the elasticity or stretch in the fabric, rather than the yarn itself. While all knitted fabrics have some stretch, the amount of stretch and the direction in which it stretches varies considerably depending on the way it's knitted and the type of yarn used.

Knits are can either be hand knitted or machine knitted. It's machine knits that are used for dressmaking. It's believed that an early knitting machine was invented during the reign of Elizabeth I. The monarch, however, was concerned that it would destroy the livelihood of the home knitting industry and so the machine was never patented.





Knit fabric is created with two fundamental knitting systems.

WEFT KNIT

Weft knit is knitted with a single continuous yarn in horizontal rows, either by hand or by machine. This type of knitting produces fabric that has the greatest amount of stretch across the width of the cloth. If any stitches are caught or dropped, then the fabric will ladder vertically below the dropped stitched.

WARP KNIT

This is a much more complicated type of knitting only possible on a machine. Multiple needles form loops of yarn simultaneously along the length of the fabric. The loops interlock with one another in a zig-zag fashion. The interlocking process of warp knits creates ladder-free fabric with limited stretch.

GLOSSARY OF STRETCH FABRICS

Double knits
These are weft knits produced by two sets of needles and yarns working simultaneously. Double knit is a firm, stable, knitted fabric with little stretch. The fabric is characterised by vertical rows of ribs on either side of the fabric. It's available in all weights and qualities and can be produced in lots of fibres. Ponte Roma is a type of double knit that we've used for our Drapey Dress (page XX). Double knits are great for structured garments that don't require a lot of stretch; use them to make structured dresses, skirts tops, and trousers.

Fleece
Made from synthetic polyester fibres that have been shrunk and then felted, fleece is a dense fabric with a soft, fluffy pile. It's available in different weights and qualities and is fairly easy to sew. The Elephant Ballerina (page XX) has been made up in fleece, and it's the perfect fabric for children's wear and fancy dress. Use it to make sweatshirts and soft jackets.

Four-way stretch
These are fabrics that stretch across both the width and the length of the fabric. This type of stretch fabric has better recovery than other knit fabrics and is often used for sports clothes. Available in many weights and qualities, it is often produced from synthetic or man-made fibres. It is suitable for many projects, but make sure that the pattern specifically calls for a four-way stretch.

Interlock
This classic knit is often made from cotton and used to make T-shirts. Interlock is soft, drapes well and is characterised by fine lengthwise ribs on both sides of the fabric. It's knitted either as a flat fabric or as a tube.

Jersey
The word 'jersey' has become synonymous with all stretch fabrics, and is often mistakenly used to describe most knit fabrics. Named after the island of Jersey, where the fabric was first produced, it's a stable, drapey knit with limited stretch. Single-knit jersey has lengthwise fine ribs on one side with purl knit on the opposite side. Double-knit jersey has lengthwise ribs on both sides. Use it to make wrap dresses, tops, skirts and drapey trousers.

Rib knit
Knitted with alternate rows of knit and purl stitches, this fabric is characterised by prominent lengthwise ribs or 'wales'. These ribs allow a great deal of stretch across the width of the fabric, making it a great choice for making waistbands, cuffs and necklines.

Spandex and Lycra
Both spandex and Lycra are commonly used to describe fabrics, despite them being fibres rather than a fabric type. Spandex is actually elastane fibre, and Lycra is a trade name for a brand of spandex. The fabric commonly described as Lycra or spandex is actually a power knit. This type of knit has exceptional stretch properties due to the addition of the elastene and the four-way stretch. Common uses for this fabric are swimsuits, leotards, cycling clothes and sportswear.

Sweatshirt knit
This fabric has a plain or jersey knit on one side and a brushed, loopy, reverse side. It's the napped, brushed reverse side that makes this knit so distinctive and comfortable to wear. It is considered a stable knit with limited stretch. Use it to make sweatshirts, hooded tops

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH STRETCH FABRICS

1 With such an enormous range of weights and qualities, sew test seams each time you use a new type of stretch fabric. Keep a notebook with a sample of your fabrics and the settings you find work best. Narrow zigzag is often a great choice for seaming knits on a regular sewing machine.

2 Use a ballpoint needle or a stretch needle in your machine. These specialist needles have rounded points, so they will separate the fibres in your fabric rather than piercing them, which could create laddering.

3 Stretch fabric requires less ease than woven fabrics, so be sure to choose a pattern that's designed for knits, not woven fabrics. Sometimes it's possible to use a woven pattern, but you'll need to cut a smaller size and possibly adapt closures.

4 Always lay the pattern correctly across the direction of stretch. Most knits have more stretch across the width, which is best laid around the body.

5 Use a nap layout to avoid shading differences, as the surface of knits has a slight pile.

6 Stretch fabric can easily distort out of shape when made up, so you'll need to think about stabilizing shoulder seams and finished edges. Be sure to use a knit stabiliser that's a similar weight to your fabric.

7 It's worth decreasing the pressure on your sewing foot if your machine has that function. This can stop the fabric from stretching out as it's sewn and fluting.

8 If you are sewing with an overlocker, play around with the differential feed on your machine to avoid fluted or wavy seams. Also test that the needle tension is high enough that the threads don't show when the seam is stretched open.

9 Not all knitted fabrics will fray, so you often won't need to neaten your raw edges. Test the edge of a piece to see if your fabric frays.

10 If you are sewing really thick stretch fabrics, you might find it helps to use a walking foot on your sewing machine.

11 Try using a twin needle to hem knit fabrics. This needle creates two rows of parallel stitches on the right side, but a slight zigzag on the underside. The zigzag on the underside allows the fabric to stretch across the width of the body. Twin needles are sold with different widths between the needles and are available in all the same sizes and varieties as regular machine needles. You may have to loosen the bobbin tension to avoid 'tunnelling', where a ridge forms between the twin rows of stitching.

If you're sewing really fine knits, like a lingerie fabric, sew with some tissue paper between the fabric and the feed dogs. This can stop the fabric from getting sucked in, and you simply tear the tissue paper from the seam once it's stitched.

WOOL

& OTHER NATURAL FIBRES

WOOL

Wool is probably the most versatile fibre and it's as important in the 21st century as it was to our ancestors. Wool is available in many weights, textures and qualities, from floaty gossamer sheers to heavy blanket-weight plaids. As it's an excellent insulator, it will keep you warm in winter and cool in the summer. Wool is naturally water repellent and has some natural flame-resistant properties, making it a great choice for outerwear. Wool's natural elasticity and ability to recover when steamed mean that it moulds well.

Wool is defined as being fibre from the fleece of a sheep or the hair from an angora or Cashmere goat. Once the fleece is sheared from the animal, it's then processed to make yarn before being spun into cloth. There are two distinct types of wool yarns, producing two types of woollen fabric: **woollen yarn,** which is produced when the fleece has been carded and then drawn prior to spinning, and **worsted yarn**, which is carded, drawn, and then combed prior to spinning.

Both types of woollen yarns can be used to create either woven or knitted fabrics, and wool is often blended with man-made fibres to create more technical fabrics. Machine-washable wool suiting is a perfect example of a modern, blended wool fabric

Woollen spun fabric is soft feeling, with a coarse surface texture. Woollen yarn is used to make warmer, heavier fabrics like tweeds, flannels and coatings. Woollen fabrics are easier to sew with and less expensive than a worsted fabric. This type of wool is not ideal for elegant or fine tailoring, as it doesn't hold its shape as well as a worsted fabric.

LEATHER

Believed to be the oldest material used for clothes, leather is technically not a fabric. It is possible however to make almost any garment in leather that could be made in fabric. Leather is not a beginner's fabric, and is a challenge to sew for the first time. However, like most things in sewing, it's all about practise and the results are really worth the effort. You don't need a lot of special equipment to sew with leather; most domestic machines with a walking foot will sew garment-weight leather.

Leather is treated and preserved by a process known as tanning. Tanning is considered to be one of the oldest human activities, with records dating back to the Ancient Greeks and Egyptians. London was an enormous centre for the leather industry, in particular a district called Bermondsey. Towards the end of the 18th century, a third of all British leather came from the tanning pits in Bermondsey. The London leather exchange building still exists in that area, although it has long since ceased to trade in leather.

The smell we associate with leather comes from the tanning process rather than the leather itself. Suede is really just the underside of the leather, and it depends which side was treated. Sewing with suede is the same as sewing leather.

Leather comes from many different animals – most commonly cows, pigs and reptiles. Once a skin is tanned, it can be dyed and sometimes textures or treatments are applied to the skin. Patent leather is one such treatment.

It's really important when buying leather to remember that leather is sold by the hide or square metre, rather

SILK

Silk fabric has long been the preferred fabric choice of royalty and its price has at times exceeded that of gold. Silk has a lustrous shimmering quality that drapes like pooling liquid. The sheen on silk is due to the unique structure of silk fibres, which can reflect light. Silk is often reserved for special occasion wear or lingerie, and it feels like no other fabric next to the skin. Silk feels cool in summer and warm in winter.

It's debatable whether or not the legend of the silk worm dropping into the teacup of an empress is true or not. There is however documentation a Chinese empress in 2640 BC was cultivating silk worms and unwinding the silk filaments. The method for silk production was kept a closely guarded secret in China. The wearing of silk was a status symbol reserved initially for Royalty, and later for the noble classes. Legend says that the secret to silk production was eventually spread outside of china by 2 monks smuggling egg-worms hidden in their robes.

It's estimated that to make one kimono requires 2000 silk worms. Sadly the silk worm cannot be allowed to mature, as they will eat their way out of the cocoon, breaking the silk filaments. Once boiled, the filaments within the cocoons are carefully wound onto bobbins. It takes between 2- 20 strands of filament to create a single raw silk fibre, as the filaments are so fine. 2 or more raw silk fibres are then wound together before they can be woven. Whilst it seems to be a labour intensive process, the result is the truly the fabric of kings.

Worms that are not cultivated or farmed produce wild silk. These worms do reach maturity and eat their way out of the cocoons, resulting in much shorter silk filaments that lack the sheen and polish of the cultivated silkworm filament.

Silk is now woven and knitted into all types of cloth, so is no longer exclusively reserved for lingerie. Blended with wool, or cotton and other technical fibres, silk can be made into any kind of cloth from chiffon to tweed to charmeuse.

Silk is a little tricky to sew, but really worth the effort.

Tips for working with wool

- All wool fabric should be prepared well before cutting. It can shrink an enormous amount, so unless you buy pre-shrunk fabric (sometimes called needle ready), you should steam it well before cutting. Wool is very elastic when damp, so steam it in small sections and allow it to cool before moving the fabric to avoid stretching it.
- It's sometimes hard to work out which is the right side of your fabric. Usually the selvedge is smoother on the right side, and if it has text, you can read it on the right side only. Once you've established the right side, mark across the wrong side with crosses in tailor's chalk so that you don't get confused later.
- Always cut out with the nap layout, or make sure the pieces run in the same direction. The fibres are slightly scaly and can overlap in one direction, which could affect the colour of the finished garment.
- It is best to use a tailor's tack (see page XX) to transfer markings, as chalk or carbon paper can fall off the surface of the cloth.
- Use a seam roll when pressing seams in heavier wool fabric to avoid getting imprints on the right side.
- Always allow the area you've pressed to cool down before moving it off the ironing board; this allows the press to set.
- If pressing pleats or creases that you want to be razor sharp, use a wooden clapper to really set the press. It's a tailor's best friend!

Tips for working with leather

- Remember that you're working with an animal skin. Check over the skin for marks, tears or faded sections before cutting out.
- Leather doesn't have a true grain in the same way as a woven fabric, but the strength runs from the neck to the tail, so use this as your grainline guide.
- Cut sleeves and legs a little longer than usual, as the leather creeps up the arms and legs when worn.
- Lay out and cut your pattern pieces on a single layer only, and then mirror for the opposite side. When cutting out, it's best to weight down pattern pieces rather than pinning, and then to cut with a leather rotary cutter or a pair of very sharp shears.
- You may find it easier to use paper clips or mini bulldog clips to hold your seams together rather than pins.
- Try sewing with a walking foot, a roller foot or a Teflon foot. This will stop the leather from sticking to the foot as you sew, and will avoid stretching the top layer of the seam.
- Instead of pressing the seams open, which can damage the leather, use your thumb to open the seam, and then use a leather roller or a wallpaper roller to flatten the seam. Topstitched seams are a great way to hold the seams in place.
- Use a specialist leather needle, which has a triangular blade at the tip,

Tips for working with Silk

- If you've never sewn with silk before try using a silk blend, or a firmer weight silk. For your first project it's probably best not to start with a slippery silk or a floaty sheer chiffon!
- The lovely sheen on silk is similar to a nap, so cut out using the nap layout or ensuring the pieces all run in the same direction.
- If using a slippery silk like satin or a sheer, make sure to cut out in single layers only. It helps to weight the pattern pieces rather than pinning too.
- Avoid using wax or vanishing markers on silk when transferring pattern marks, as they can leave a residue that's impossible to get out.
- Be careful when pinning, as silk bruises and the pins can easily mark the fabric. It's a good idea to use bridal or lace pins, which are extra fine.
- Lots of silk fabric watermarks so test press before using your iron on the fabric to avoid spotting.
- If you're using a pattern you've never tried before, hand tack seams for fitting to avoid permanent holes from machine stitching
- Avoid the sewing machine needle sucking in the fabric at the start of seams by using a 'stitch starter'. Double fold a piece of thicker cloth, and start sewing onto that before continuing onto your seam.

GLOSSARY OF WOOLS AND NATRUAL FABRICS

WOOLS

Boucle
A loosely woven, textured woollen fabric that has distinctive loops and curls over the surface. The iconic Chanel cardigan jacket is often made from this cloth. Use for casual drapey jackets, dresses and skirts.

Boiled wool
Often confused with felt, this is knitted wool that has been shrunk and felted. It still retains a little of its stretch, and has a distinctive textured surface. Available in varying weights, it's good for unstructured jackets, coats, dresses or skirts.

Cashmere
This super-soft, luxurious cloth comes with a heavy price tag. The silky fibre is from the Kashmir goat and is usually blended with wool to make it affordable. It makes wonderful coats and jackets, but can be made into almost any garment depending on the weight.

Challis
This is fine. Soft. lightweight wool that is often used for paisley scarfs. It drapes beautifully and wears well. It comes in varying weights, including sheer. Use it to make winter blouses and dresses.

Crepe
This fabric has a slightly crinkled surface that's formed by twisted yarns with a crepe weave. Wool crepe has a wonderful drape. making it perfect for dresses and blouses. It's available in light to mid weights. Crepe is also available in many other fibres, so it's possible to buy crepe fabric as almost any type of cloth.

Flannel
A classic wool fabric used in suits and tailoring. It's usually a plain or twill weave cloth, with a soft, dull, surface texture. Flannel has a slight nap. Traditionally used for cricket whites, which were often called 'flannels', use the lighter weights for shirts and dressing gowns and medium weights for suits amd dresses

Gabardine
Considered a classic suiting fabric, gabardine is a twill weave with a distinctive ribbed pattern and a slight sheen. Use it for suits and dresses. This is a robust fabric that is also made from cotton and commonly used for macs.

Houndstooth
This woollen fabric is woven with two colours and has a distinctive broken checked pattern. It is often associated with Sherlock Holmes. The smaller check patterns are called 'dog tooth'. Houndstooth is available in many weights, and suitable for outerwear suits or dresses, depending on the weight.

Melton
This heavyweight twill weave is used for outerwear. The fabric appears felted on the surface due to its brushed texture. Often used for coats, there are specialist Melton fabrics that are extremely heavyweight.

Tweeds
Tweeds are textured woollen cloths that usually have slubs or surface irregularities. They are often woven with different qualities of yarn, including boucle yarn, which adds to the three-dimensional textured quality

Tartan
This is a blanket description for various checked and plaid twill woven fabrics. Tartans can be made in a variety of different fibres, but it's wool and wool blends that is most common. Tartans are often associated with specific Scottish clans,

LEATHER

Chamois
Usually associated with car cleaning cloths, this is the under layer of sheepskin. It's a really soft, flexible skin that has suede on either side. It's not suitable for outerwear that may get rained on, as it marks easily. Use it for shirts, tops and lightweight garments

Cow hide
Available in many weights, this is a large leather with a smooth-grained surface. As the hide is bigger, this is a great choice for larger garments such as coats, jackets and trousers

Deerskin
Smaller in size than cowhide usually measuring 0.6–1.3 square metres (7–14 square feet).

Embossed leather
This has had a heat treatment applied to the surface of the leather to alter its look – frequently replicate reptile skin, which is too small for most garments.

Lambskin
Soft and malleable, this lightweight leather is one of the easier leathers to sew. The average size is about 0.6 square metres (7 square feet).

Nappa leather
The most luxurious and often most expensive leather is soft and thin and comes from kid, lamb or sheepskin. Nappa leather is named after the region where it was first made (Napa, California), and the surface must be totally free of flaws. Generally available only as small pieces due to only the perfect sections being used, it is used to make all sorts of garments, in particular jackets and gloves.

Pigskin
Pigskin has a grainy surface texture and has distinctive marks across the surface left by the animal's hair follicles. One of the more popular leathers, due to being relatively inexpensive, it can be easily treated to look more expensive. The average skin size is 0.8–1.1 square metres (9–12 square feet).

Shearling
This is the skin of either a sheep or lamb that's been tanned with its fleece still attached.

SILK

Charmeuse
This gorgeous silk drapes beautifully and pools like liquid. Also known as silk satin, it has a lustrous glossy sheen on one side, with a matt look on the reverse. Available in varying weights and qualities, this fabric is delicate and snags easily when worn. Use it to make exceptional lingerie, blouses and special-occasion wear.

Crepe de Chine
A light- to medium-weight fabric woven with crepe yarns, which give the surface of the fabric a slightly crinkled texture, crepe de Chine has a beautiful hand and drapes wonderfully. The crepe surface means that it's a less glossy fabric than other silks. Use it to make blouses, scarves and eveningwear.

Dupion
Also known as Indian silk, dupion has a distinctive surface texture that has obvious slubs in the weave. Dupion is woven from silk that's come from double cocoons, where two silkworms spun close together. It's a crisp, medium-weight silk that's woven in a myriad of colours and is often shot with a second colour. Relatively inexpensive, it's popular for evening gowns and bridal wear.

Habotai
A Japanese silk that's soft, light and crisp, habotai is a plain weave and is considered the most practical of all silks. Used often as a lining, it's an excellent fabric for anyone new to sewing silk. Use it to make blouses and shirts or as a lining.

Noil
Often confused with raw silk, noil is a distinctive fabric woven from the short fibres left over after silk has been combed prior to spinning. Unlike most silks, there's

LUXURY FABRICS

In this chapter I've focussed on fabrics for special occasions, fabrics that aren't used and worn for general everyday wear, in particular Lace, Sheer fabrics and Satin and Taffeta.

What defines the fabrics in this section isn't their fibre content or whether they're knitted or woven, but how these fabrics. are used

Luxury fabrics come in all fibres, types and qualities, but what makes them special is how they drape, feel and look. These fabrics are not the first choice for anyone new to sewing, but with a little practise, they are really worth the effort.

Luxury fabrics include Lace, Sheer fabrics, Satin, Taffeta, Brocades, Jacquards and Velvet Devore. Most luxury fabrics are more expensive than everyday fabrics as they're created in more labour intensive ways.

Luxury fabrics are a treat: the process of sewing them is a joy in itself, and the wearing of luxury fabric is sheer bliss. The biggest advantage of sewing for your self, is being able to make clothes in fabrics that are normally associated with Couture, and which would be too expensive to buy if you were to buy as ready to wear.

LACE

Lace is a fabric with a transparent mesh or net background that has decorative motifs across the fabric. Lace was originally hand made using a series of intertwined threads and bobbins or by embroidering a fine cloth. Most modern lace is now made by machine.
Lace never seems to go out of fashion, whether its white for summer, or jewel colours for the festive party season.

Lace is a romantic, pretty fabric that makes it a popular choice for wedding gowns. It was used to great effect on the wedding gown of the Duchess of Cambridge in 2011, making lace-wedding dresses the style of choice for the next few years.

Lace was originally made by hand, and was extremely time consuming to produce, so the wearing of lace was a status symbol signifying how wealthy you were. During the 17th Century, lace had a boom period with portraits of the time showing that the fashion for deep lace collars, frills and cuffs and lace was no longer just for royalty but available to wealthy nobles and merchants too.

Lace is produced either as a fabric, or as narrow trim known as an insertion. Using a lace insertion is a cost effective way to add a touch of luxury to a garment. Whilst it's true that lace is delicate and needs careful handling when sewn, it's actually more forgiving than you might expect, and mistakes can often be disguised.

Lace was traditionally named after the regions that produced each type, and as many of these were French, lace has romantic names like Chantilly, Guipure and Alencon.

SHEERS

- The development of synthetic fibres means that less expensive, good quality man made sheer fabrics are now readily available. There's nothing like the feel of a gossamer light, chiffon blouse next to your skin, it's the perfect fabric to add everyday luxury into even a working wardrobe.

- Sheer fabric falls into 3 main groups, Crisp, Semi-Crisp and Soft sheers. All 3 groups have fabrics made up of many different fibres, weights and qualities. It's possible to have woven or knitted sheer fabric, and the amount of transparency also varies greatly.

- Sheer fabric is definitely not the best choice for your first ever sewing project. The sheerness of the fabric means seams and hems are all very visible, so you should really feel comfortable using machine before tackling these lovely fabrics.

- If you've never sewn with sheer fabric before try sewing a crisp or semi-crisp weight first. The hardest types of sheer to sew are the slippery, delightful soft fabrics like chiffon or georgette. Net fabrics like tulle also fall into the category of sheer, although they're more robust and easier to sew.

- For all sheer fabrics it's good to choose a simple pattern because all the seams are visible, it's a mistake to make something with lots of details and features. You'll need to consider the transparency of your fabric too, you may need to line, or add an additional layer beneath your sheer fabric to make it modest!

SATINS & TAFFETA

Both Satins and Taffeta have a lustrous sheen and body. This makes them excellent fabric choices for special occasion wear. Both these fabrics come in weights that fit the bill for all types of elegant evening wear or bridal wear.

Satin-
Recognised by a distinctive sheen over the surface of the fabric, satin is available in all fibres from cotton to silk and polyester. It's the weave of the fabric itself that gives the cloth it's shine, rather than the fibre content. Satin is made with a satin weave, this creates long floats or spaces where the weft thread skips over several warp threads. These floats allow the yarn to catch the light, but they also make the fabric less robust than other weaves. Satin comes in all weights, from a slinky Charmeuse, to heavy double-faced satins and Duchesse satin. Satin seams can creep when sewn, so choose a design without lots of seams. Satin fabric needs to be treated with care to get a good sewing result.

Taffeta-
A distinctive superfine crisp fabric with an almost paper like quality that makes a familiar rustling sound when worn. Taffeta has been used for luxury gowns for centuries, and is as popular today as it's ever been. Taffeta is available in many weights, prints and is often iridescent or shot with 2 colours. Originally made from silk, it's more readily available now in polyester, acetate or nylon. Taffeta is also available in a lining weight.

Tips for working with Lace

- Buy an extra 75 cms to allow for matching up the large patterned lace.
- Lace often has a one-way design, so you'll need to cut out on a single layer.
- Consider where to place the motifs in the lace pattern on your garment. Ensure to centre motifs with the middle of garment pieces for example. You'll also need to consider matching up the lace pattern horizontally.
- Make sure to do a test press on a scrap of lace to work out the temperature. Start with a synthetic setting, as often lace fabric is blended with synthetic fibres. Use a press cloth to avoid melting!
- Tailors tacks are the best way to transfer pattern markings: chalk and carbon just don't stay on
- **Always** do a test seam. Seams and seam finishes are visible on lace, so see what works best for your fabric. Narrow seams are a good all round seam for most lace seams.
- Reduce the pressure on your sewing foot if your machine has that function. You may find a roller foot is helpful, or try wrapping the points on your regular foot so they don't catch the lace.
- One of the best ways to hem lace is to use the scalloped edge. If this isn't possible, cut and then applique on a length of scalloped edge.

Tips for working with Sheers

- If your fabric is really slippery try weighting the pattern in place and using a rotary cutter and mat to cut out. Only use really sharp or serrated scissors
- Don't transfer pattern markings with carbon paper- the marks can permanently mark your fabric
- Use fine dressmaking pins, and make sure to change your machine needle to a fresh fine one.
- Always do a test seam and a test press. Start with a low temperature, and avoid prolonged exposure to the iron to avoid scorching
- Start sewing seams with a folded stitch starter to avoid the fabric getting sucked into the feed-dog
- On some crisp sheer fabric like organza, the feed dog may bruise the fabric, in that case use tissue paper on the underside to protect your fabric. It can be torn away once the seam is stitched.
- On soft sheer fabric like chiffon, always do the narrowest hem finishes you can. Deep hems will look lumpy.
- Avoid using interfacing where possible. If it's necessary try using a flesh colour organza, as that will appear less visible than conventional interfacings. Never use iron on interfacing!
- Allow 48 hours for garments to hang before hemming. These fabrics love to droop.

Tips for working with Satin and Taffeta

- Store satin fabric rolled to avoid bruising the surface.
- Before starting work on light colour satin fabric, make sure to wash your hands to remove any oil residue. It's a good idea to make sure your sewing space is clean too. If your table has a rough surface, cover with an oilcloth tablecloth before cutting.
- Use the nap layout when cutting satin fabric, to avoid differences in shading
- Avoid using a tracing wheel when transferring pattern marks as they can mark these fabrics
- Use new fine pins when sewing, as these fabrics mark easily.
- Hand tack seams before fitting as machine needles damage the fabric.
- Always do some test seams to work out the best settings, and start with a new fine sewing machine needle.
- Try to avoid getting water spots on the fabrics when pressing as they can leave permanent marks on the fabric.
- Use a pressing cloth, and hover with the iron to avoid permanently marking the fabric
- Avoid pressing over seams with a zigzag or over-locked edges as they can mark the outside of the fabric. Try using a seam roll
- If you find your seams are puckering and creeping try using a walking foot or a roller foot

GLOSSARY OF LUXURY FABRICS

LACE

Alencon lace-
Is a French needlepoint lace with a delicate classical floral pattern on a net background. The lace motifs are often outlined with cord, making then suitable for Applique. This type of lace often has beaded scalloped edges. Sometime called the Queen of Laces

Chantilly Lace-
A pretty very fine French lace, characterised by the fringed quality of the scalloped edges. Original Chantilly lace was made from silk and was a bobbin lace, resulting in narrow fabric. The lace pattern is romantically floral, usually with delicate scrolls and branches. This lace is very fine and needs to be cut and sewn with care

Cluny Lace-
This coarse lace is made from cotton yarns, and is a distinctive looking lace. Available as a narrow trim or as a wider fabric, it's often used for curtains and home furnishings.

Guipure lace- Sometimes known as Venetian lace is sturdy lace that doesn't feature a net background. The design is embroidered with cotton fibres onto a dissolvable background.

Metallic lace-
This can be made as any type of Lace that has utilised metallic threads in the pattern of the lace.

Stretch lace-

A modern lace that includes the addition of Elastic fibres to allow the lace to stretch. Often used for lingerie it can also be used to make skirts, tops and dresses

SHEERS

Chiffon-
Available in many fibres, silk is the most luxurious of the chiffons. A plain weave fabric that comes in different weights. It's a beautiful elegant fabric, that's soft and slippery and is one of the most tricky fabrics to sew. Use to make blouses, full skirts and lingerie.

Crepe chiffon-
Similar to chiffon, this is a sheer crepe fabric that has all the properties of crepe but in a sheer. The surface of the fabric has a textured look typical of a crepe. Considered harder to sew than chiffon, it's used for special occasion wear.

Gazar-
A really lovely heavy weight organza that has a unique linen look. Gazar is one of the least transparent sheers, and appears almost opaque. Use to make dramatic special occasion dress coats, or full-skirted dresses.

Georgette-
A lovely fabric with a looser weave than chiffon, it can look a lot like chiffon. Woven with some crepe yarns, giving it a rougher texture than chiffon. Usually made from polyester blends or silk, sews up easier than chiffon. Perfect for slips, blouses and lingerie.

Mousseline-

Also known as silk muslin, this is a crisp sheer fabric that's more densely woven than chiffon and not as soft. Use to make eveningwear.

Net-

Made from many fibres, but usually man made. Net comes in wide range of weights and varying sizes of mesh. Usually used as a supporting fabric rather than a fashion fabric. Use to make petticoats, tutus, frills and as a trimming

Organza-

Made from silk, polyester or rayon this is a crisp plain-woven fabric with more body than chiffon. Organza often has a sheen, and is perfect for making sheer over-layers and eveningwear.

Tulle-

Finer than net, this is a soft mesh fabric. Available in many fibres including silk. Tulle is the traditional choice for tutus, and is often used in bridal wear.

Voile-

Available in many fibres including cotton, silk, polyester and rayon. Voile is semi crisp sheer fabric woven with twisted yarns. It's available in various weights and is used for children's clothes, lingerie, blouse and some home furnishings.

SATIN & TAFFETA

Crepe backed satin-

This divine fabric is reversible. It's available in various weights and has a shiny satin side, with a matt crepe side on the reverse. Often used to

create stunning gowns utilising both sides of the fabric.

Double-sided satin-
Another reversible satin, this has satin on both sides, and is usually a heavier weight fabric. Often used for evening jackets and coats.

Duchesse satin-
An elegant and very lustrous fabric, which is heavier than a charmeuse and is the fabric of choice for many brides and Couture gown designers. Duchesse satin has a high thread count, enabling it to hold the shape of a gown whilst also draping beautifully. Use it for really special eveningwear or bridal clothes.

Satin brocade-
Has been woven on a jacquard loom, to create a floral design on the satin side. Traditionally used for Chinese Chong Sam dresses, this is a distinctive fabric. It often has metallic threads woven into the design of the fabric. Use to make structured dresses, jackets and coats.

Faille Taffeta-
This is often referred to simply as Faille. It has a more distinctive ribbing than other taffeta. Excellent fabric for a full circle skirt, or shirtdresses.

Moiré Taffeta-
Has very distinctive water marked pattern that looks like the rippling surface of water. Available in various weights, it's often used for the lapels of tuxedos, and to make coats and jackets.

Shot Taffeta-
Woven with 2 or more coloured yarns, this taffeta has an iridescent quality. The colours shimmer as the fabric moves, making it a great choice for large full-skirted gowns or costumes.

Tissue or Paper Taffeta-
Fine thin lightweight variations of taffeta. Tissue taffeta is a slightly softer version, and is almost sheer. Use to make blouses or skirts and dresses.