



By Linda Lee

Fabric Guide

Fabric Reference Books

Fabric Sewing Guide by Claire Shaeffer

More Fabric Savvy by Sandra Betzina

Knits

Fabric constructed by interlocking a series of loops of one or more yarns by a machine that has alternate units of short and long needles.

Common types used in making garments:

Jersey – a single knit with lengthwise ribs on right side and horizontal rows on the reverse. Jersey will curl at the edges.

Interlock – have lengthwise ribs on both sides. Compared to jerseys, they are heavier, thicker, and easier to sew. The edges curl less than jersey.

Double knit – stable knits with lengthwise ribs on both sides, which look the same. They have good body and shape retention.

Spandex - a generic name for the man-made fibers composed largely of segmented polyurethane. Lycra is a common trade name of Spandex.

Needles and Thread:

60/8 to 80/12mm universal, ballpoint or stretch needles depending on the fabric weight,
twin needles for hems
Polyester thread

Care:

Fabric: All knits except wool can be laundered in cold to warm water. Allow for shrinkage. Wool jersey can be washed if felting is desired.

Garment: Once the fabric is pre-washed, generally the garment can be laundered.

Linen

One of the oldest textile fibers known. Linen is made from the stem of the flax plant. Produced mainly in Russia, Belgium, Italy, Ireland, France, and Egypt, it has natural luster, high moisture absorbency, and no static electricity. It wrinkles easily.

Common types used in garments:

Handkerchief linen - a sheer, lightweight fabric frequently used for blouses, skirts and lingerie, but not pants.

Dress weight and suitings - heavier than handkerchief linen. There are a variety of weights suitable for jackets, pants, skirts, suits and coats.

Needles and Thread:

Handkerchief linen

60 wt. 100% cotton thread
65/9mm, 70/10mm universal needle

Heavier weights

50wt. 100% cotton thread
80/12mm universal needle

Care:

Fabric: Prewash in warm water using regular detergent. Dry on wash-and-wear setting. When laundered, it loses some of its crispness.

Garment: Wash to enhance wrinkles and soften. Dry clean to retain some finishes and crispness and retail overall new look of the garment.

Polyester

Polyester is a manufactured fiber. Common trade names are Dacron, Kodel, Fortrel and Vycron. It is crease-resistant, quick drying, high strength and requires minimum care. For the very reason that it does not wrinkle much, it is also difficult to press and get a good professional result for the home sewer. It is best blended with natural and other man-made fibers to get better results.

Needles and Threads:

60/8 to 80/12mm universal needles depending on the fabric weight
Polyester thread

Care:

Fabric: Most polyester fabrics launder well with very little, if any, shrinkage. Test a sample first.

Garment: Determine whether the garment can be laundered by the style and details.

Rayon

Rayon is a generic term for man-made fibers composed of regenerated cellulose derived from trees, cotton and woody plants. It is characterized by high absorbency, bright or dull luster, pleasant feel, the ability to be dyed in brilliant colors and superior strength.

Viscose – a term describing one of the methods of producing rayon – a centrifugal pot spinning method invented in England in 1892. Most rayons are made by the viscose process. They are called “rayon” in the United States and “viscose” in Europe.

Cupra or cuprammonium – a second method of producing rayon invented in Germany involving using copper ammonia to dissolve the cellulose. Compared to viscose rayon, the filaments are finer and stronger. Bemberg lining is made by the cuprammonium process.

Common types used in making garments:

Rayon crepe - the same as wool crepe except with rayon fibers.

Rayon challis - a soft, supple, lightweight, plain weave fabric, commonly printed in floral motifs.

Needles and Thread:

70/10mm to 80/12mm universal needle depending on the weight

50 wt. 100% cotton thread

Care:

Wash a sample before making a decision on care.

Fabric: Pre-wash in cold to warm water using mild detergent. Dry on wash-and-wear setting.

Garment: Wash or dry clean depending on the details of the garment.

Rayon can fade with frequent washings, so it is important to decide the value of the garment and possibly dry clean to retain the color and shape of the garment.

Silk

A continuous protein filament produced by the larvae of a host, commonly the caterpillar, when constructing their cocoon. The cocoon is softened and loosened in warm water and reeled off. Silk is noted for its resiliency, aesthetics, elasticity and strength.

Common types used for making garments are:

Lightweight silks

Charmeuse - a lightweight soft silk that drapes well and is identified by having a semi-lustrous satin face and a dull back.

Chiffon - a very lightweight, sheer, soft silk made in a plain weave.

China silk, also referred to as Habutai - a plain weave, lustrous lightweight fabric produced in China and Japan. The threads are irregular and very soft. Used for blouses, lingerie, and linings.

Crepe de Chine - a fine, lightweight, plain weave fabric woven with a silk warp and a crepe twist silk filling.

Douppioni - a cross-rib silk woven with an uneven, irregular slubbed yard.

Georgette - a sheer, lightweight silk fabric with a fine crepe surface.

Mid-to heavyweight silks

Matelassé - woven on a jacquard loom with two extra sets of crepe yarns. When the fabric is finished, the underlayer of crepe yarns is shrunk to create a quilted or padded effect.

Satin-back crepe - a reversible satin weave silk with a smooth and lustrous surface on one side and a dull and crepe surface on the other side.

Silk noil - silk waste produced in the manufacture of spun silk, blended with other fibers and used to make a nubby, dull-finished cloth.

Tussah, also know as raw silk - a cross-rib fabric made with irregular filaments from uncultivated silkworms or synthetic look-alikes in the filling.

Needles and Thread:

Lightweight silks:

60 wt. 100% cotton thread or 100% silk thread

65/9mm, 70/10mm universal needle

Mid-to heavyweight silks:

50 wt. 100% cotton thread or 100% silk thread

70/10mm, 80/10mm universal needle

Care:

Wash a sample before making a decision on care.

Fabric: Pre-wash in cold to warm water using mild detergent. Dry on wash-and-wear setting.

Garment: Wash or dry clean depending on the details of the garment.

Wool

Wool is the fiber from the fleece of the sheep or lamb, or hair of the Angora or Cashmere goat (and many include the specialty fibers from the hair of the camel, Alpaca and Vicuna).

Common types of wool used to make garments:

Wool crepe – a textured effect achieved by the alternating right-and left-hand twist yarns.

Gabardine – a tightly-woven warp-faced fabric made with 45° angle twill. Wears well, doesn't wrinkle. Very difficult to sew and press.

Worsted wool - woven from yard that has been spun from combed wool (the finest grade). Typical types are gabardines and tropical worsted.

Merino wool - a very valuable wool produced by merino sheep. Also called Botany wool.

Lamb's wool - a wool sheared from sheep up to 7 months old.

Needles and Thread:

70/10 to 90/14mm universal needles depending on fabric weight

100% cotton thread

Care:

Fabric: Some worsted tropical-weight wools can be immersed in cool water by folding the fabric flat and laying it in a shallow tub and letting it hang over a hanger to dry. Other wools are purposely washed to soften and shrink them and change the character. But for the most part, wool fabric and garments are dry-clean only.

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