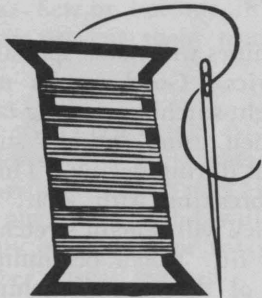


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SWEATER KNIT LOOKS ALL SEWN UP

Margret Ann Vanderpoorten*

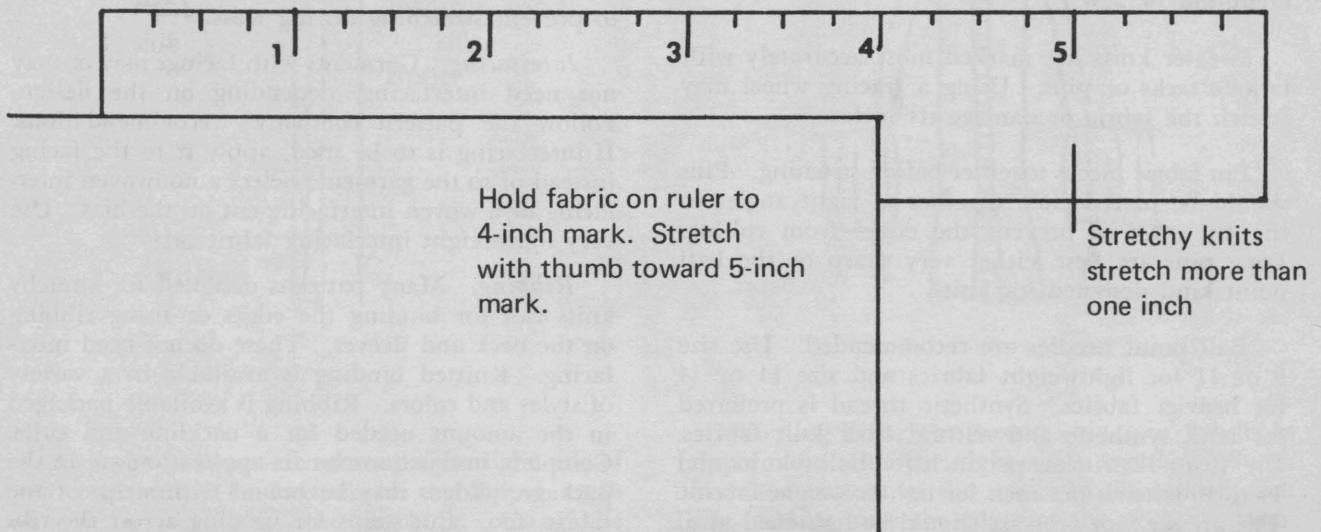
Selection of Fabric and Pattern

Sweater knits come in many weights, fibers and designs, and with varying amounts of stretchability. The selection of a compatible fabric and pattern combination is therefore very important. Check the crosswise stretchability of the knit being considered by using a stretch gauge or ruler. Many patterns designed for stretchable knits have a stretch gauge printed on the envelope. To determine amount of stretchability with a ruler, hold one edge of a 4-inch swatch on the ruler and stretch fabric gently with thumb. Stretchy knits will stretch more than one inch without curling on the edge, while stable knits stretch less than one inch before the edges begin to curl. If a pattern calls for a moderate stretch knit, be sure to follow pattern instructions for determining stretchability.

Fabrics such as stretch terry cloth and stretch velour often have the same characteristics as stretchy sweater knits and should be handled in the same way.

If a sweater knit is stable, it may be treated in the same manner as double knit fabric. Stretchy knits call for patterns labeled "sweater knits only" or "stretchy knits only." Patterns designed for stretchy knits frequently omit darts and provide much less ease than regular patterns. If you need more or less ease than is allowed, make adjustments in the pattern rather than buying a larger or smaller size.

Designs intended for sweater knits often use zippers instead of buttons and elastic casing instead of fitted waistbands. Skirts may be gently flared but are seldom gored or circular.



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Preparation of Fabric

Washable sweater knits vary in the amount of shrinkage they will have. Unless the label or hangtag lists the percentage of shrinkage to expect, there is no way of knowing except by laundering the fabric. Some novelty knits may shrink as much as 8 percent, which is about 3 inches per yard. Fabric that cannot be laundered should be shrunk by a dry cleaner before using. Exceptions are mohair, which should never be steamed, and ribbing sold for neck edges and cuffs. Ribbing will shrink when laundered or dry cleaned but will expand as needed to go over the head or arms. All notions such as seam tape, zippers and trims should be shrunk before use by soaking them in hot water and ironing them dry.

If the fabric selected is tubular, cut it open along a rib. Often the creases and the ribs in the fabric are not parallel. When this is the case, be sure to use the ribs to determine the straight grain. After cutting the tube open, press out the remaining crease. If it will not disappear, lay pattern pieces so that creased area is not used.

Lay out the pattern using directions for fabrics with nap to keep color and pattern the same throughout the garment. Keep the fabric on a flat surface while pinning and cutting. Always avoid stretching the fabric or allowing the fabric to fall over the edge of the cutting surface. Use very sharp shears or those designed for knits. Unlike hand-knitted fabrics, sweater knits sold by the yard will not ravel out when cut.

Preparing to Sew

Sweater knits are marked most accurately with tailor's tacks or pins. Using a tracing wheel may stretch the fabric or damage its surface.

Pin fabric pieces together before stitching. Pins should be placed close together at right angles to the cut edge to prevent the edges from rolling. Long pins are best, either very sharp or the ball point kind designed for knits.

Ball point needles are recommended. Use size 9 or 11 for lightweight fabrics and size 11 or 14 for heavier fabrics. Synthetic thread is preferred for both synthetic and natural fiber knit fabrics. Use 10 to 12 stitches per inch for bulky knits and 14 to 16 stitches per inch for lighter weight fabrics. The presser foot pressure should be lightened until the upper layer of fabric does not stretch as it goes under the foot. There are several special presser

feet available for use with knits to assist in getting an even flow of both layers of fabric through the machine.

Suggestions for Sewing

Seams. Some machines will make special seams just for stretchy fabrics. Good results may be obtained using straight-stitching or zig-zag machines, however. When using straight stitching, keep seams slightly taut during sewing. This helps prevent seams from breaking with wear. Never stretch the seams or they will remain stretched and the garment will not fit. When beginning each seam, hold the ends of the threads behind and slightly to one side of the presser foot to prevent the fabric from following the needle down through the throat plate. Be sure to use the straight stitch throat plate and presser foot if using a straight stitch for seams, as they provide more control over the fabric.

Zig-zag or overcast the edges of plain seams if the knit frays or rolls. Sweater seams were designed for these fabrics and are simple to make. They are the best choice of seams for casual garments and children's wear. Make a sweater seam by stitching on the seam line, and again $\frac{1}{8}$ inch from the seam line in the seam allowance. Trim the seam to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch and zig-zag or overcast the edge loosely.

Seams that may need to be stabilized are necklines, shoulder seams, pants or skirt waistlines and pants crotch seams. As a general guide, stabilize all facings or waistbands. If the garment must pull over the head or if it has elastic casings, these seams should not be stabilized. If necessary, sew pre-shrunk seam tape or narrow twill tape in the seam to prevent stretching during wear.

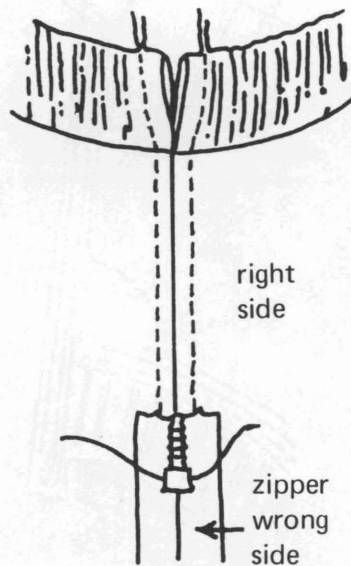
Interfacing. Garments with facings may or may not need interfacing, depending on the design. Follow the pattern company's recommendations. If interfacing is to be used, apply it to the facing instead of to the garment. Select a nonwoven interfacing or a woven interfacing cut on the bias. Use very lightweight interfacing fabric.

Ribbing. Many patterns designed for stretchy knits call for binding the edges or using ribbing on the neck and sleeves. These do not need interfacing. Knitted binding is available in a variety of styles and colors. Ribbing is available packaged in the amount needed for a neckline and cuffs. Complete instructions for its application are in the package. Edges may be bound with strips of the fabric, too. Cut strips for binding across the ribs instead of on the bias, as knits are stretchiest in the crosswise direction.

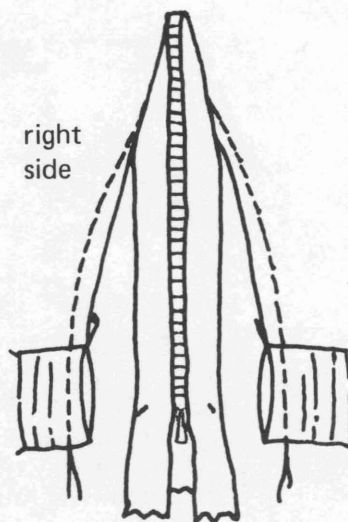
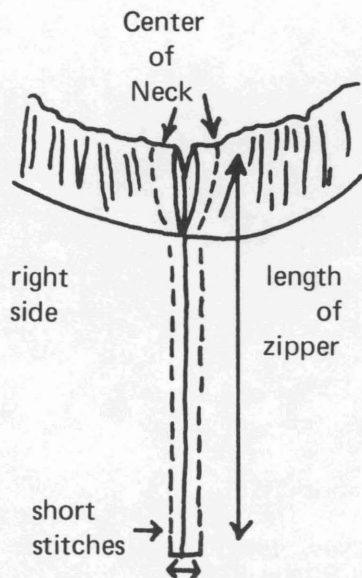
Buttonholes. Avoid making buttonholes, if possible, as they tend to stretch out of shape. If a garment must have buttonholes, make them by machine rather than making bound buttonholes. Place a square of interfacing under each buttonhole between the garment and facing to reinforce the area. Sew on buttons through squares of interfacing to prevent them from tearing out of the fabric.

Zippers. Lightweight synthetic zippers are preferred for sweater knits where an opening is necessary. Invisible zippers may also be used. A regular zipper put in by hand will be almost invisible, especially in a loopy or fuzzy knit. In sportswear and other casual garments, an exposed zipper is simple to do and fashionable.

An exposed zipper should be applied before the garment is constructed. Draw a line the length of the zipper down the center back of the garment, starting at the neck seamline. Stay-stitch exactly $\frac{1}{8}$ inch on each side of this line and across the bottom. Use 20 to 22 stitches per inch across the bottom and for about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch on each side, to reinforce corners.

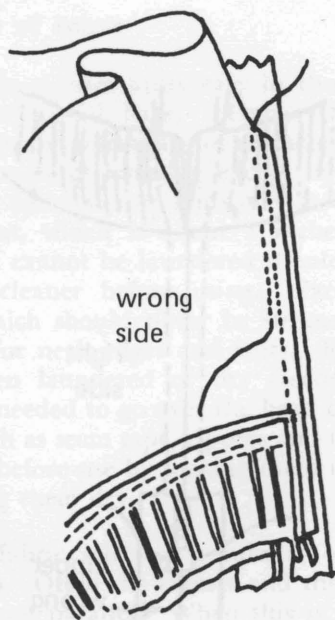


Cut along the line on the center back from the neck to the bottom of the stitching. Turn the zipper to the wrong side.



Center the zipper face down on the right side of the garment. The bottom of the zipper teeth should be just below the stitching. Using the zipper foot, stitch back and forth across the tapes the width of the zipper teeth ($\frac{1}{4}$ inch) several times.

Working from the wrong side, pin fabric to zipper tape with the right sides together. Stitch from the bottom of the zipper to the top on each side, making sure the edges of the neck are even. Turn the ends of the zipper tapes down and finish by hand.



Sleeves. Insert sleeves before sewing side seams. After sewing shoulder seam lay the garment out flat. Pin the sleeve to the garment, matching dots and notches. No ease stitching is necessary. Stitch the sleeve and garment together, easing in sleeve as necessary. Do not stretch the garment. Trim

the seam or make a sweater seam. Matching the sleeve seams, stitch the side seam and underarm seam at the same time.

Finishing Touches

Before hemming a garment, let it hang for 24 hours. Measure and mark the desired hem length and trim the edge evenly. Hems should be fairly narrow to prevent bulkiness and droopy lines. Stitch around the hem $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the edge. Turn up hem the desired amount and make a tailor's hem using very loose stitches. Press the lower edge of the garment lightly from the wrong side.

Steam the finished garment lightly from the wrong side (except mohair). Follow care instructions received with the fabric. Some sweater knits need to be dried flat instead of in a dryer.

Lightweight or very stretchy knits should be stored flat. Never hang a sweater knit by the shoulders. Sweater knits that may be hung should be stored on "knitwear hangers." These hangers have a padded horizontal bar over which the garment is folded to distribute the weight evenly.

References

- Coats and Clark Inc., "Sewing Today's Fabrics With Today's Threads."
- "Sewing Knits," *Vogue Patterns*, Oct./Nov., 1973.
- American Thread, "Uncommon Ideas With Thread: The Sewing Chart."

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