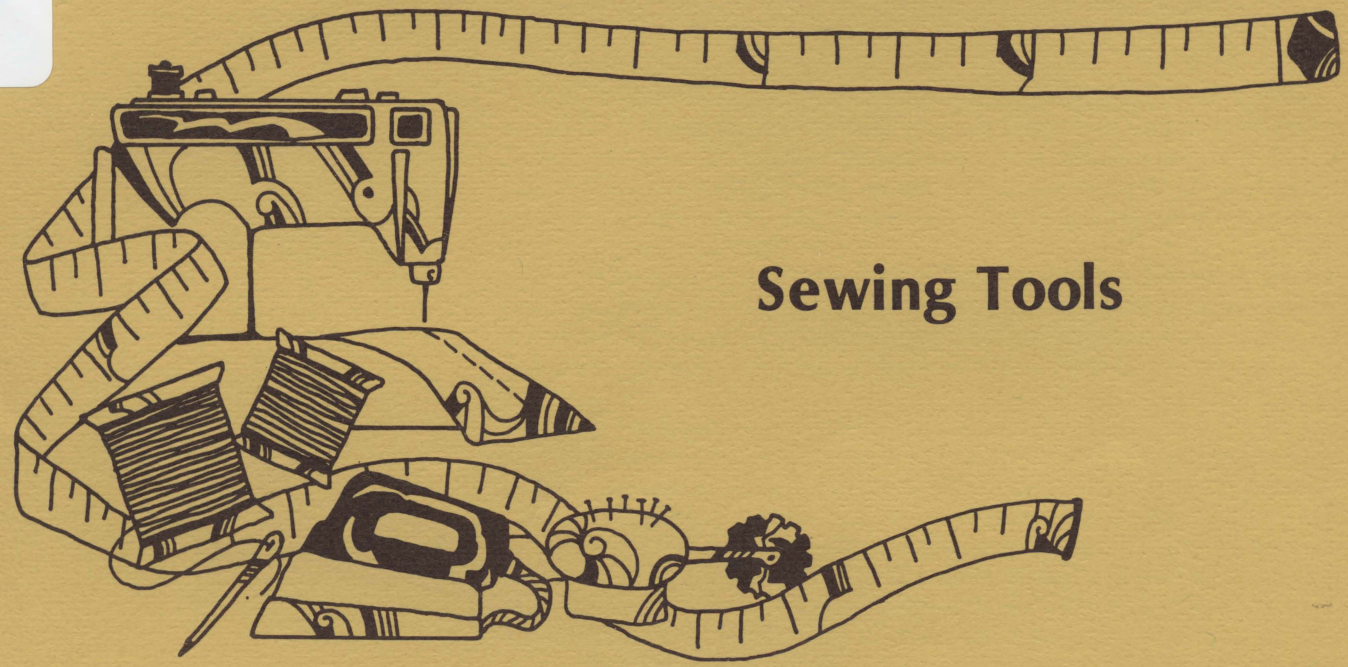


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Measure Your Sew-How

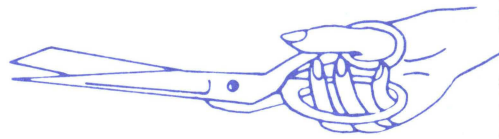


Sewing Tools

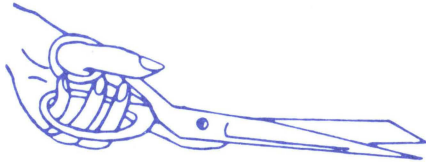
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SEWING TOOLS

Becky Saunders*



Right-handed shears



Left-handed shears

Figure 1

A vast assortment of sewing tools and gadgets are readily available to save time and make sewing more enjoyable. With so many items available, it is often difficult to know which ones can best meet your needs. When beginning to sew, certain sewing tools are essential such as needles, pins and scissors. As sewing interest increases, other items will become desirable.

Because many tools are essential to sewing success, choose good quality ones at first. Keep items in good working order by repairing or replacing them as soon as they become worn. Store tools to prolong their life and keep them convenient to save time when sewing.

If possible, try out tools such as scissors before buying to see how they perform. Examine other items for the correct size, type and quality materials needed for the job(s) intended.

Since most people are right-handed, tools are usually designed to be used by the right-hand, but these are difficult and awkward for the left-handed person to use. Scissors, shears, reeled tape measures and rulers are among the left-handed tools available (see Figure 1).

Sewing tools can be dangerous. Keep small and sharp objects away from infants and small children. Try to locate pins or needles when dropped and always return them to a cushion or container.

Sewing machines, pressing equipment and thread are discussed in detail in other publications in this series.

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Measuring

Measuring tools are important in fitting to obtain a symmetrical appearance. Most measuring tools available today are marked in inches and yards as well as centimeters and meters. Select tools with numbers clearly printed in the units needed. Measure often and accurately for sewing success.

Essentials

Ruler. A 12- to 18-inch (30-46 cm) ruler in plastic or other transparent material is ideal for measuring most straight, flat areas. Wood may warp or chip; if used, however, it should have a metal edge for accuracy.

Sewing Gauge. Sewing gauges are usually metal or plastic in 6-inch (15 cm) lengths and have a moveable slide for marking certain lengths. A self-locking slide is convenient. Notches and commonly used lengths such as $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch (1.5 cm) are helpful.

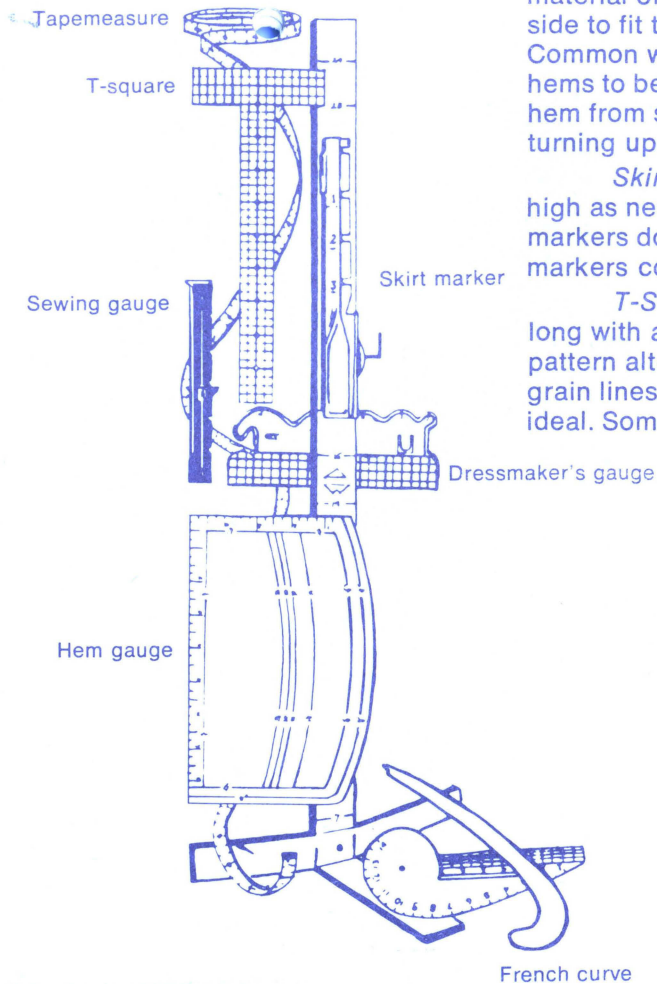
Tapemeasure. Choose materials such as fiberglass for accurate body, pattern and other curved or straight measurements. Plastics may stretch or cloth may shrink when wet. Look for numbers clearly printed on both sides and metal or reinforced end tips.

Yard or Meter Stick. Metal is the sturdiest material, but shellacked wood is serviceable for measuring long and straight areas.

Optional—Nice to Have

Dressmaker's Gauge. Gauges aid in marking set widths such as tucks and pleats and may have shaped edges such as scallops. They are available in metal or plastic or other transparent materials.

French Curve. A French curve is ideal for drawing edges of seam and cutting lines that become distorted from pattern alteration or designing. They are available in metal or plastic or other transparent materials and come in a number of different sizes and shapes.



Hem Gauge. Usually of plastic or some other transparent material or lightweight metal, the hem gauge is slightly curved on one side to fit the shape of most curved hems and straight on the other. Common widths are marked and often slotted. Hem gauges allow hems to be turned up easily and quickly and prevent the edge of the hem from showing on the wrong side when pressed. It is useful in turning up other edges such as pockets, appliques and casings.

Skirt Marker. Choose a sturdy base and length that extends as high as needed. Pin versions require someone to help while chalk markers do not, but pin versions are more accurate. Some skirt markers combine both.

T-Square. A moderate size T-square which is 9 inches (22.5 cm) long with a 4-inch (10 cm) T-bar is most convenient for marking pattern alterations, finding right angles or straightening or locating grain lines. Lightweight metal, plastic or transparent materials are ideal. Some have an adjustable T-bar.

Figure 2

Cutting

Accurate cutting maintains accurate marking. Cutting slightly out of line can change a garment's fit and professional appearance while carelessness may permanently ruin a garment.

Essentials

Scissors and Shears. Shears are usually 6 inches (16 cm) or longer, have a small bent ring handle for the thumb, larger ring handle for two or three fingers and basically are used for heavier cutting. Bent handle shears allow fabric to lie flat when cutting. Scissors are usually 3 to 6 inches (7.5-16 cm) long, have ring handles of equal size and are used for lighter, intricate cutting. A 7- to 8-inch (17.5 to 20 cm) dressmaker shear and a pair of scissors are ideal.

Look for blades of high quality steel or Molybdenum that are nickel-plated for protection and chrome-plated to prevent rust. Before buying, test for working smoothness. Shears should cut fabric the entire length of the blade. Handles of shears should feel comfortable and balanced in the hand. Keep blades closed and free of lint and dust. About once a year place one drop of sewing machine oil on the screw or pivot joint. Never cut over pins or paper which will damage the blades. Blades may be commercially or home sharpened. Cutting synthetic fabrics dulls cutting edges more rapidly. Repeated cutting of heavier fabrics may make cutting delicate fabrics more difficult as blades may be slightly sprung. Adjustments may be needed.

Optional—Nice to Have

Buttonhole Scissors. An adjustable screw makes it possible to set the blades to cut only a certain length.

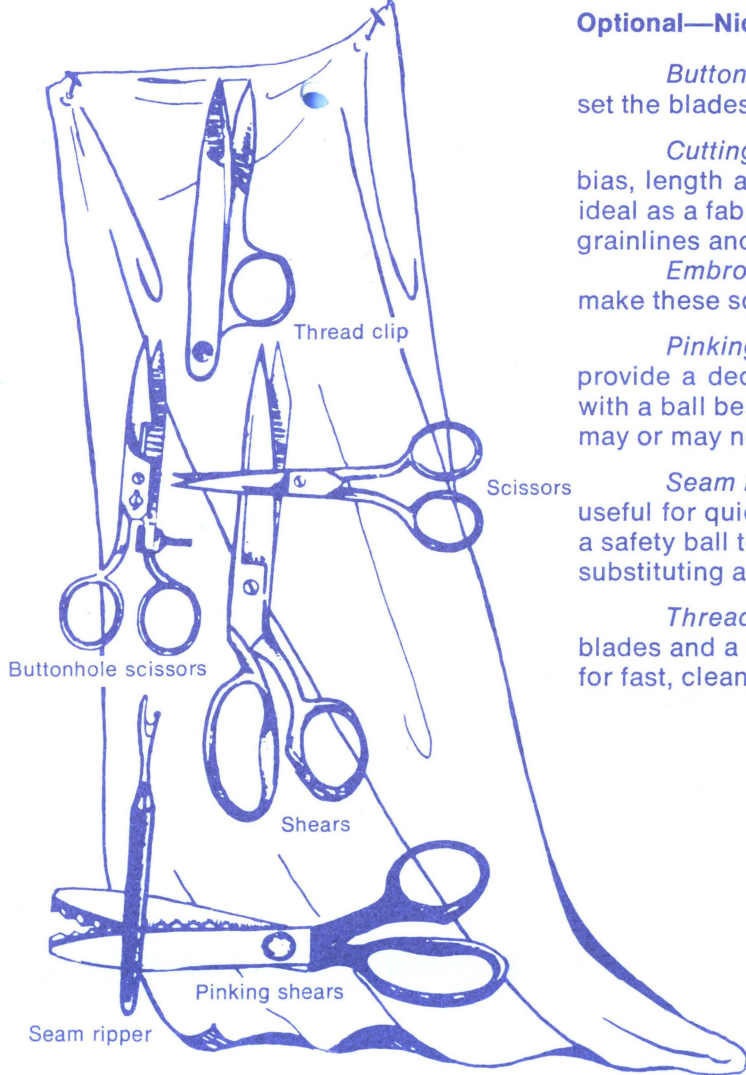
Cutting Board. Foldable, corrugated cardboard materials with bias, length and width markings in square inches and centimeters are ideal as a fabric cutting surface, for checking or straightening grainlines and marking or designing.

Embroidery Scissors. Slender blades and needlesharp points make these scissors ideal for intricate work.

Pinking or Scalloping Shears. These shears retard raveling or provide a decorative finish. Select 7½- to 9-inch (8.7-22.5 cm) blades with a ball bearing pivot. Blades are not easily sharpened at home and may or may not be successfully sharpened commercially.

Seam Ripper. A pin-like device with sharp steel blade that is useful for quick ripping, rippers are available in various sizes. Look for a safety ball to protect fabric and cap covering for the blade. Avoid substituting a razor blade which is dangerous and less accurate.

Thread Clips. Thread clips are a scissor variation with short blades and a spring mechanism to keep blades apart. They are ideal for fast, clean notching, ripping, short cuts and clipping threads.



Marking

Transferring pattern markings accurately is essential to sewing success. Fabric type determines the marking tools needed.

Essentials

Thread basting or tacking, clipped seam allowances and straight pins can be used to mark most areas on any fabric and especially delicate or special fabrics that cannot be marked by any other method.

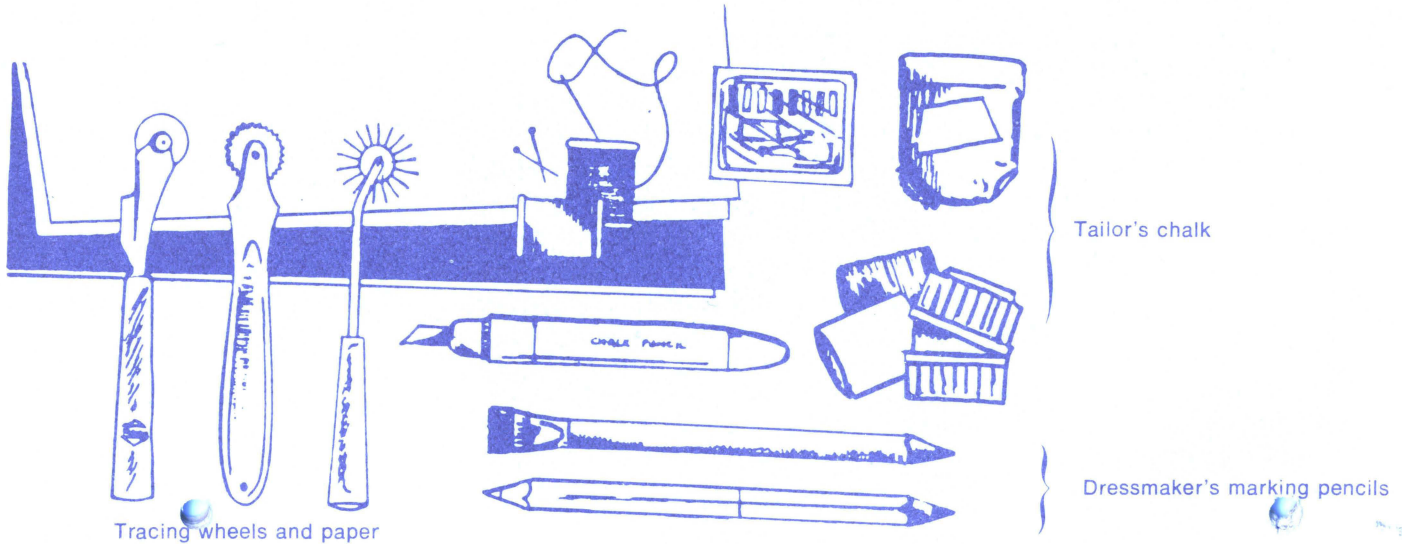


Figure 4

Optional—Nice to Have

Dressmaker's Marking Pencil. Choose one with a brush for ease in removing chalk markings or one easily removed by plain water. Marking pencils are most suitable for hard-surfaced fabrics and are available in a variety of colors.

Tailor's Chalk. Refillable holder types with built-in sharpeners are most convenient. For easy removal and to avoid permanent damage, *always test color and chalk on a fabric scrap before using.*

Tracing Wheel and Dressmaker's Tracing Paper. Wheels with dull, serrated edges are best for most fabrics. Delicate fabrics need an unserrated wheel, while heavy fabrics need a needlepoint wheel. Some wheels have a bent shank that serves as a finger rest. Double faced paper is more convenient and saves time. *Always test paper color and wheel marks on fabric before using* to prevent permanent damage such as snagging. Buy paper that allows washing or drycleaning to remove colored tracings from the fabric.

Miscellaneous Tools

Essentials

Needles, Hand and Machine. Sharps are a commonly used medium length, all purpose hand sewing needle. Sizes range from #1 for coarse work to #10 for fine sewing. Sewing machine needle sizes commonly range from 9 or 70 (metric size) for delicate fabrics to 18 or 110 (metric size) for heavier fabrics. Both hand and machine needles are available in sharp points for sewing wovens and ball points for sewing knits. Throw away bent, burred or damaged needles to prevent snagging or damaging fabric. Change sewing machine needles frequently or after approximately 8 hours of sewing time.



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Pin Cushion. Select a cushion with an attached emery bag for cleaning needles and pins, minor sharpening and removing rust. Wrist pin cushions are convenient while sewing or fitting. Magnetized caddies keep pins easily available.

Pins. Choose fine rustproof dressmaker's brass or stainless steel silk pins with sharp or ball points. Brightly colored glass headed pins are convenient, easy to use and a safety feature that prevents pins being lost in carpet or furniture. Extra long pin lengths are convenient for heavy fabrics or fitting. Do not use commercial pins from packaged garments such as men's shirts because they are coarse, may rust or damage the fabric.

Thimbles. Thimbles are usually selected to fit the middle finger and are available in rustproof metal, plastic, leather and other materials. Sizes range from 6 to 11.

Optional—Nice to Have

Beeswax. Beeswax is most handy in a holder which keeps wax dust and lint free. Beeswax helps keep thread from knotting, tangling and breaking and aids in threading needles.

Bodkin. Bodkins are clasp devices useful in threading elastic and cording through casings.

Double Stick Tape. This product is useful for matching patterned fabrics, holding zippers or appliques in place, fitting or designing.

Loop Turner. Loop turners are a latch-hook device used in turning cording.

Needles, Hand and Machine. Embroidery or crewel hand sewing needles are easy to thread because they have larger eyes.

Self-threading needles are available for both hand or machine sewing in which thread slips through a small opening at the top or on the side of the needle's eyes. Double or triple machine sewing needles (joined to one shaft) are ideal for parallel rows of plain or decorative topstitching. Machine needles are also available with wedge points for sewing leather and all purpose points for most fabrics.

Figure 5

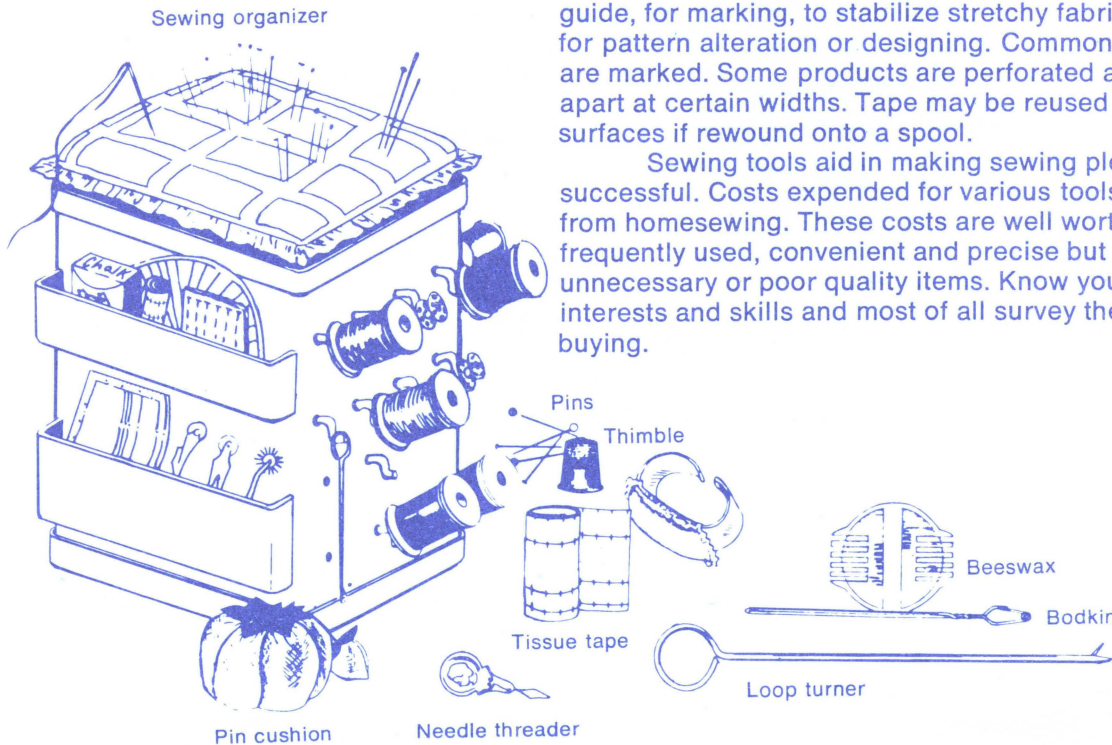
Needle Threader. This product is a wire device that aids in threading machine or hand sewing needles. Threaders can be purchased with a magnifying glass for added ease in threading.

Sewing Equipment Organizers. Chests, baskets, cases, caddies, files or wall organizers save time and are convenient.

Tissue Tape. Common measurements and widths are marked on this non-adhesive tissue product. It is designed to prevent snagging and jamming of sheer fabrics, allows even feeding of vinyls and leathers and simplifies sewing of delicate and pile fabrics. It can also aid in gathering and pleating.

Topstitching Tape. This product is useful as a topstitching guide, for marking, to stabilize stretchy fabrics, tape basting hems or for pattern alteration or designing. Common measurements and widths are marked. Some products are perforated and designed to be torn apart at certain widths. Tape may be reused when applied to smooth surfaces if rewound onto a spool.

Sewing tools aid in making sewing pleasant, enjoyable and successful. Costs expended for various tools reduce savings resulting from homesewing. These costs are well worth it for tools that are frequently used, convenient and precise but unjustifiable for faddish, unnecessary or poor quality items. Know yourself, your needs, interests and skills and most of all survey the market carefully before buying.



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