



University of Idaho
College of Agriculture

Current Information Series No. 740

Cooperative Extension Service
Agricultural Experiment Station

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SEP 20 1984

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All About Silk Silk Fabrics

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The quality of silk and its price are generally related closely. The better the quality, the higher the price.

What is quality silk? Silk is judged for quality in the same way as diamonds are. Representatives of the International Silk Association in silk-producing countries grade silk for evenness of filament size, neatness of fibers and cleanliness. Once graded, the silk is purchased by companies around the world and woven into fabric or dyed.

Learning how to judge quality silk takes time, practice and patience. Take a shortcut by buying top brand names known for their quality. Harikoshi silks from Japan, Wellman silks from China and European prints offered by S. Rimmon, Inc. are a few notable companies that supply some of the top designers with their superb silks.

Pattern Selection

Once you've decided that silk is appropriate for the type of garment you want to make, pick a pattern appropriate for silk. Consider the weight of the fabric in relation to the pattern. Heavy silks are appropriate for tailored dresses, suits and coats. Soft silks are best for dresses and blouses. Sheer silks require

patterns with few seams and no darts; full skirts and softly draped styles are most appropriate.

Interfacing

Interfacing supports, shapes and stabilizes sections of the garment such as collars, cuffs and flaps. It also prevents stretching in areas such as the armhole, the hem, the lapel or the front. Woven or nonwoven interfacings are available in both sew-in and fusible types and in a variety of weights; self fabric can also be used as interfacing.

A controversy has developed among home sewers, fabric store personnel and sewing experts about interfacings for silk — to fuse or not to fuse. Some feel it is blasphemy to use fusibles on luxurious silk or even silk-like fabrics. Others disagree and use fusibles with excellent, professional looking results. Fusibles are frequently and successfully used in \$100 ready-to-wear silk shirts.

Still, fusibles aren't for every fabric or garment. To decide which type of interfacing — fusible or sew-in — to use with your fabric, always test it first.

To test a fusible type, cut a 2-inch square of the interfacing, and fuse it to a scrap of fabric following the manu-

facturers' instructions. Wash and press the sample as you would if it were a finished garment.

To test sew-in interfacing, place it between two layers of the fabric to simulate the garment construction. Remember that sew-in interfacing softens with wear and laundering.

• How do the fabrics feel together? Are they compatible (i.e. the same weight)? The interfacing should give support and body without changing the fabric's characteristics. The front band of a silky shirt needs an interfacing that gives it just enough strength and stability for the buttonholes without stiffness or rigidity that would be incompatible with the shirt.

• Does the color change on the right side of the fabric? Do you see lumps, bubbles or spots? These could indicate you are using the wrong interfacing or haven't followed fusing instructions properly.

• Will the directional stretch or give of the interfacing be compatible with the fabric and the garment? Wovens are usually cut on the straight grain, give stability, and prevent stretching in buttonholes, waistbands, plackets and pockets. If a degree of give is needed in



a woven interfacing, as in shaping collars or cuffs, cut it on the bias. Nonwoven interfacing either stretches equally in all directions or stretches only in the crosswise direction.

- Does the interfacing show through the fabric? Use beige interfacing to blend with the skin tone.

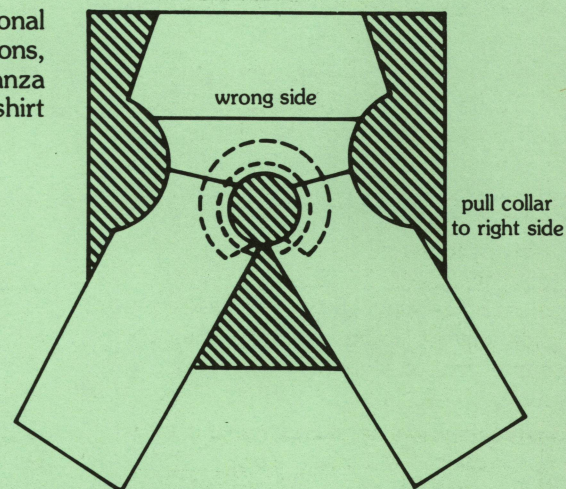
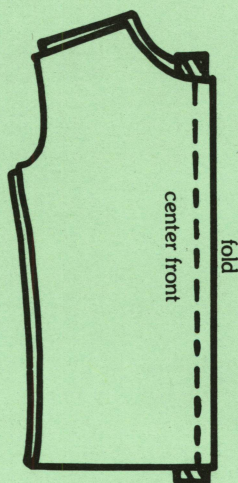
Whatever interfacing you choose, the care requirement should be the same as for the fabric. A never fail policy is to apply fusible interfacings only to the facings, under collar and under cuffs. In these places, any possible texture change will not affect the outside of the garment.

More than one interfacing may be necessary in some garments. For example, Stacy's Easy-Knit® can be used on the upper collar and upper cuffs of lightweight silks to prevent the ridge of the seam allowance from showing through. (Always test first.) But because Easy-Knit is stretchy, a more stable, woven sew-in interfacing or self fabric is best for use in the front of a buttoned blouse. On V-necks, more stable, nonwoven interfacings can prevent stretching along the diagonal edges.

When underlining is required, use china silk or silk broadcloth for suits. Some designers make all silk shirt fronts double. This gives extra body, and enables you to hide all seams. It also gives necessary body for some collar applications.

For this procedure, buy an additional one half yard of fabric. Place both shirt front pattern pieces on the fold of the fabric, placing the front finished edge on

the fold line, and cut out. For additional support under buttonholes and buttons, slip a 2-inch wide strip of silk organza between the two layers of each shirt front. Hand-baste into place.



Continue shirt construction attaching back and fronts to back yoke. This also has two layers. Do not sew underarm or sleeve seams yet. Complete collar and neckband construction. Hand-baste raw edges of neckband together.

Reaching through the armhole, turn the shirt so that right sides are together. Slip collar and neckband between neckline layers. Pin into place. Sew neckline seam in one continuous line. In this operation, you are attaching the collar and neckband to the shirt.

This technique eliminates any hand or machine stitching around the neck. It also avoids bulk at the front where the neckband joins the shirt.

The first time you try this technique, machine baste the neckline seam and turn the right side out before trimming. This way you can check to be sure you have pinned the collar in correctly.

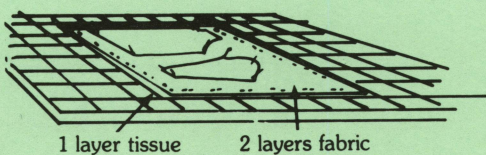
Trim the neckline seam. Continue shirt construction by inserting sleeves and sewing the underarm seam.

Layout and Cutting

Preshrinking is recommended to prevent additional fabric shrinkage in the garment. Check the manufacturer's recommendations for fabric care. Some silk fabrics may be hand washed even though the manufacturer recommends dry cleaning only. Be sure, however, to first test wash a 4 by 4 inch sample of the fabric to check for color fastness, shrinkage, hang and sheen. Washing silk not only saves the cost of dry cleaning, but also silk that has been washed will not water spot.



To hand wash silk fabric, use plenty of lukewarm water and a mild detergent that is suitable for delicate fabrics. Place the fabric in the water, and gently agitate, if desired, but do not rub spots. Rinse thoroughly two or three times in cool water. Roll in a towel to remove excess water. Iron dry on the wrong side using a warm, dry iron. Follow this same procedure with the finished garment.



Stabilize a very slippery silk by pinning it to tissue paper. Pin through all layers. You can also prevent the top and bottom layers from slipping by using a vinyl tablecloth (or the flannel side of a vinyl tablecloth) or an old sheet under the silk. The silk tends to stick to this surface and is stabilized. Use lots of pins, and cut slowly using sharp, long blade shears.

Marking and Pressing

The method of marking depends on the type of silk fabric you have selected. Appropriate marking methods include

tailor's tacks, dressmaker's pencil, clipping, tracing wheel and carbon paper and a marking pen with water soluble ink. If the fabric is light in color, chalk or carbon paper is not recommended. If the fabric is not washable, the marking pen is not recommended. Stay away from any type of wax markings. A tracing wheel can be used on most fine silks. Test on a fabric scrap, however, before selecting this method for marking the garment.

Pattern dots and notches can be marked by snipping $\frac{1}{8}$ inch into the tissue and fabric edge for accurate matching of fabric pieces later. If both sides of the fabric are similar in appearance, you should mark the wrong side with chalk.

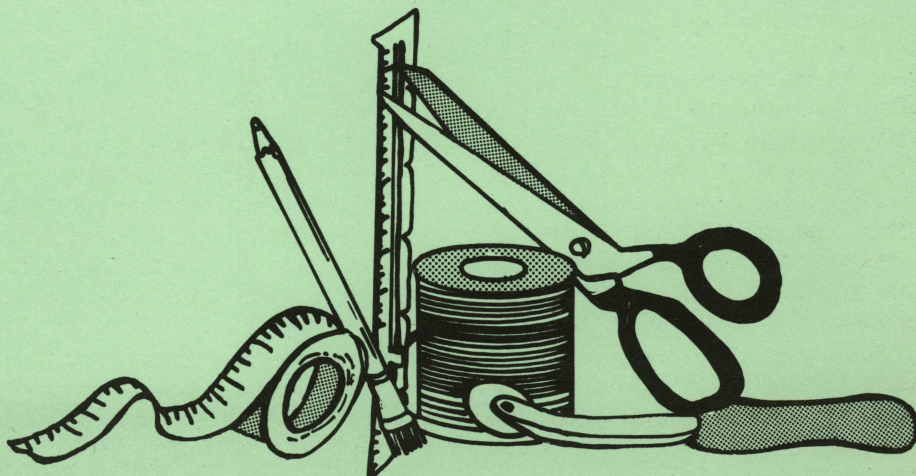
When pressing lightweight silks, use a cool iron setting. First test on a scrap



folded fabric Lukewarm water and mild detergent

To preshrink a dry cleanable garment, thoroughly steam the fabric on the wrong side using a press cloth. This will protect the fabric finish and avoid water spotting.

If the fabric has a sheen, use a "with nap" layout. The fabric may reflect light differently and appear to be different colors when held in opposite directions.



because sometimes steam cannot be used as it water spots some silks and puckers others. Wool padding on the pressing surface will make the job easier. Always press along the seamline before pressing the seam open. This "sets" the stitching and allows the garment to hang better when worn. Use the point of the iron to press seams open. A long envelop or heavy paper under the seam allowances will prevent them from making an impression on the right side. For final pressing on the right side, protect the fabric with a dry press cloth.

Medium to heavyweight silks are easier to press. First test your iron setting on a fabric scrap. This is important because steam may or may not be acceptable. Use the point of the iron along the line of stitching to press seams open. Treat these fabrics like wool, never completely drying out the fabric with the iron, or it may become harsh or a bit stiff. Use a swatch of the fashion fabric as a press cloth when final pressing on the right side. Put the right side of the press cloth next to the right side of the garment.

Stitching

Pins — Avoid pin marks by using no. 17 silk pins. Only pin in the seam allowances and dart area to prevent pin marks from damaging your fabric. Or, use pleating pins. Because they are slim

and sharp, they do not leave pinholes. Avoid using ball point pins (for knits) as they poke holes in your fabric. Never sew over pins.

Thread — Silk thread, size A, is good for basting. It is too strong, however, for permanent stitching. Ideally, thread should be slightly weaker than the fabric being stitched, so that in cases of stress, the thread will break and not rip the fabric. Regardless of this rule, a fine silk, cotton or long staple polyester thread works well. Poly covered cotton thread is too thick for fine silk.

Zipper — Lightweight, nylon coil zippers are best. Avoid invisible zippers; they are too rigid.

Hand Needles — The size of your needle will vary depending on the weight of your fabric. Lightweight - no. 11 sharp; medium and heavyweight - no. 6 sharp.

Machine Needles — Lightweight - very fine no. 9; medium - heavyweight - medium no. 14. Do not select ball point needles for use with woven fabrics.

Tension — Avoid puckering with a loose and well-balanced tension, no. 2 or no. 3. Some machines adjust tension automatically. As you sew, hold the fabric taut both in front of and behind the needle, but don't pull the material through the machine.

Pressure — Use light pressure with an even feed. Experiment on a scrap to find the correct amount of pressure.

Stitching — For very fine silks, such as chiffon or georgette, stitch 16 to 20 stitches per inch; for mediumweight silks, such as shantung, broadcloth, crepe de chine or faille, stitch 12 stitches per inch.

If fabric puckers along the stitching line, try one or more of the following suggestions:

- If stitching with a straight stitch, use the straight stitch presser foot and throat plate. Or, move the needle from the center position to the right or left position, maintaining the correct seam allowance when stitching the seam.
- Be sure you are holding the fabric taut in front of and behind the presser foot.
- Shorten the stitch length.
- Sew at a steady, even pace.
- Be sure you are using a quality thread that is compatible in size with your needle.
- Place tissue paper or Stitch-n-Tear® by Pellon® under the fabric. Remove Stitch-n-Tear® by pulling apart from the sides to prevent distorting the stitches.

Reference to trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended nor endorsement implied.