



UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO
College of Agriculture

Pressing Equipment

to make your pressing easy

By Esther Nystrom

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To Make Your Pressing Easy

By Esther Nystrom
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Careful pressing is a basic commandment of all good sewing methods. Regardless of the time, planning, and work put into a garment, if it is not pressed well, not shaped by pressing as it is made, it can become mediocre or poor, develop into much less than its original possibilities. Curves and contours of the body must be followed as the garment proceeds in construction, and this can only be done through press-shaping while the material is new and before it has taken a permanent set.

For this important phase of sewing and garment-construction work, good pressing equipment is a "must." Shaping is impossible without equipment for shaping, and the woman who sews without such equipment works at a decided disadvantage when her work is compared with that of the woman who has such tools at hand and ready to use.

Fortunately for us who like to sew, pressing equipment is neither complicated nor expensive. Most of it can be made at home by either a man or woman familiar with and handy with a few simple tools. The equipment list includes a skirt board and a sleeve board, one egg-shaped and one long pressing ham. A pounding block, and a point presser or seam-pressing board are effective in giving a professional appearance to woolen garments.

To most women who sew, the skirt-pressing board is probably the most useful equipment in garment construction. Set on a table, the skirt-pressing board is at a convenient working height, and the table supports the garment's weight and prevents stretching the unfinished parts. It is better than a regular ironing board because it makes pressing small areas and construction details much easier. Simple in construction the board is durable enough to meet the strain of the pounding block, its one special requirement.

Most of us who sew find pressing hams the only answer to the necessary molding and shaping of a garment during its construction; the egg-shaped pressing ham is for pressing or blocking shoulder seams, sleeve caps, bustlines, and hiplines. Only by using the pressing ham can we have the desired built-in fullness that gives a garment its professional appearance.

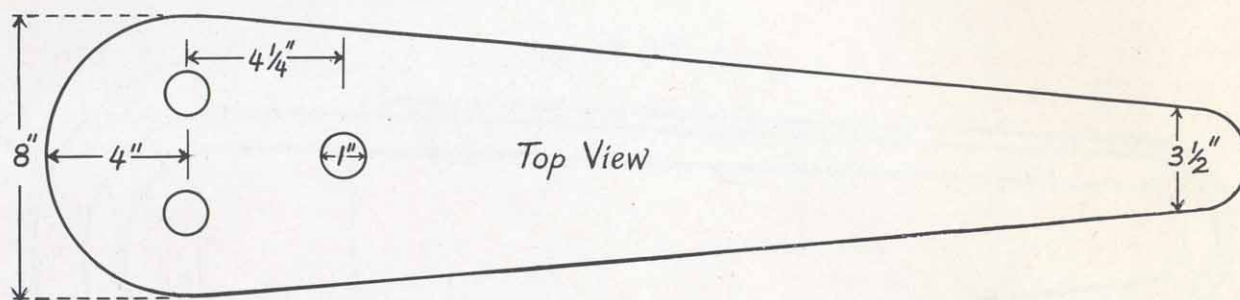
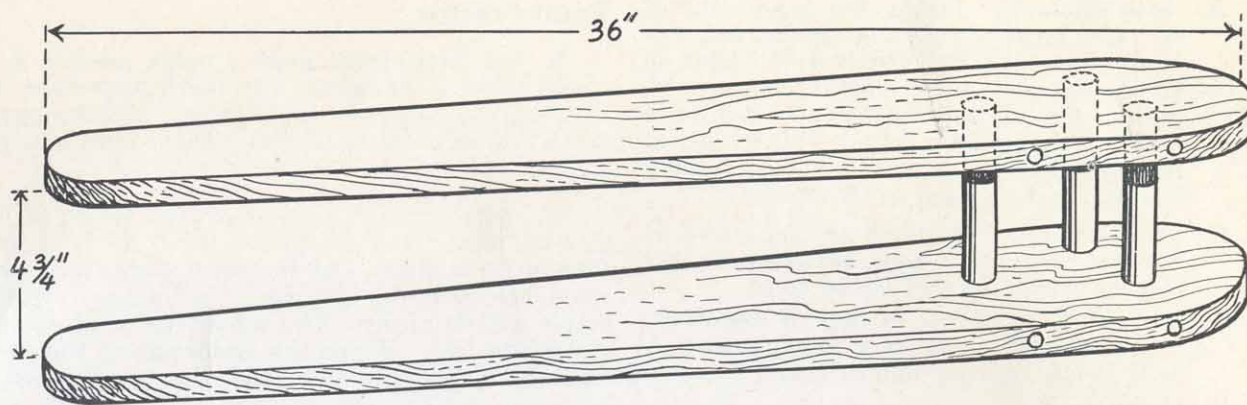
We use the point presser to press open the seams of stitched points—collars, revers, cuffs, pockets, and seams that are difficult to reach. Sometimes we call the point presser a seam board.

The long or roll ham is convenient for pressing open the seams of garments, especially convenient for pressing open the seams of sleeves. Through its use we avoid seam imprints on the right side of the finished garment.

The pounding block is one of our most effective pressing aids for woolens and worsteds. We use it especially for tailoring dresses, suits, and coats. The block is especially useful in forcing steam through the fabric and flattening seams and edges.

Suggested Materials for a Skirt Board:

Stair-step stock is very good for constructing the skirt board. It is a full 1 inch thick and that is about what is needed. Three-fourths inch material is too thin for the job. In the construction you see in the illustration you can use 1-inch galvanized pipe for the supports. Bolts go through both sides of the material to hold the pipe in place and both pipe and bolts are counter-sunk. Hardwood, 1-inch dowels will serve as well as the pipe if they are put in properly. Holes for the dowels should be 1/32 inch smaller than the dowels themselves and a good grade of glue must be used to hold the dowels once they are in place.



Skirt-and-Sleeve-Board Padding

After the skirt board and its companion, the sleeve board, are constructed well, the next step is padding them so that they do the best possible job. Without this, they are almost useless.

Clean, discarded woolen blankets or remnants from woolen mills make good padding for the boards. A square yard of such wool cloth is enough if you reverse the patterns as you cut. Shrink the cloth thoroughly before you use it. If the finished pad shrinks by heat and steam during use, the boards lose their shape and must be re-padded if they are to be used further. To shrink the cloth, agitate it in hot water and dry it over heat.

Now you are ready to cut the five layers of padding. Cut the first one an inch larger than the board all the way around. Cut each layer one-half inch smaller than the one before until you have five.

Now before padding the board do steps 1 and 2 under SKIRT-BOARD COVER.

Place the smallest layer on the board first and continue placing layers until the largest is in place on top.

Place a rectangular piece of muslin over the padding and board. Stretch a wick-twill tape around the edge of the board over the muslin. Tack tape at both ends of the board to hold it securely. When you have the muslin cover pulled tight under the tape, tack it at each side to hold it firmly.

Trim off muslin around edge of tape.

Skirt-Board Cover

Every pressing board needs a cover, and your skirt board is no exception. The cover gives you the smooth surface essential to good pressing; at the same time it protects the padding beneath. The cover gives your board the finished look it must have and makes it ready for use at any time.

You Will Need:

1 1/4 yards of heavy 36" muslin sheeting or drill. Pre-shrink this. The extra allows for shrinkage. Buy a half yard of half-inch elastic.

Do It This Way:

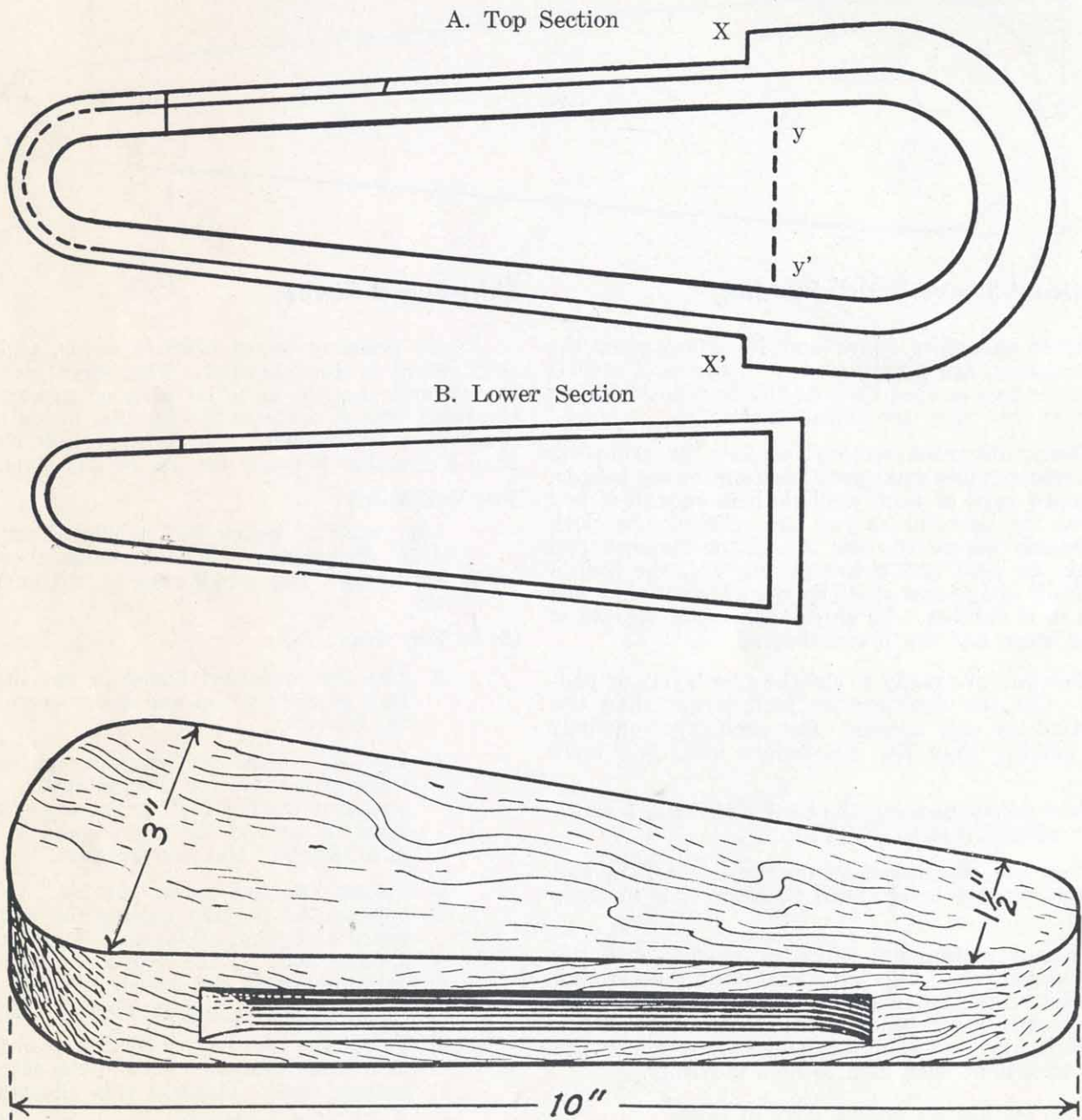
1. Use the unpadded board to get the pattern shape for top and lower sections of the cover.
2. Lay the board on wrapping paper and trace an outline for the top cover. Make a second tracing for the lower section by marking around the narrow end to within 2 inches of the first support.
3. To cut the top cover, cut 1 1/2" to 1 5/8" beyond the pattern outline for depth of board and seam allowance all around the narrow part of the board. Around the large curve of the board, allow an extra 1 1/2" for casing, making about 3" extra.
4. To cut the lower cover section, plan for 5/8 inch seam allowance around the sides and narrow ends. Increase this allowance to 1" for hem at straight end of the board.

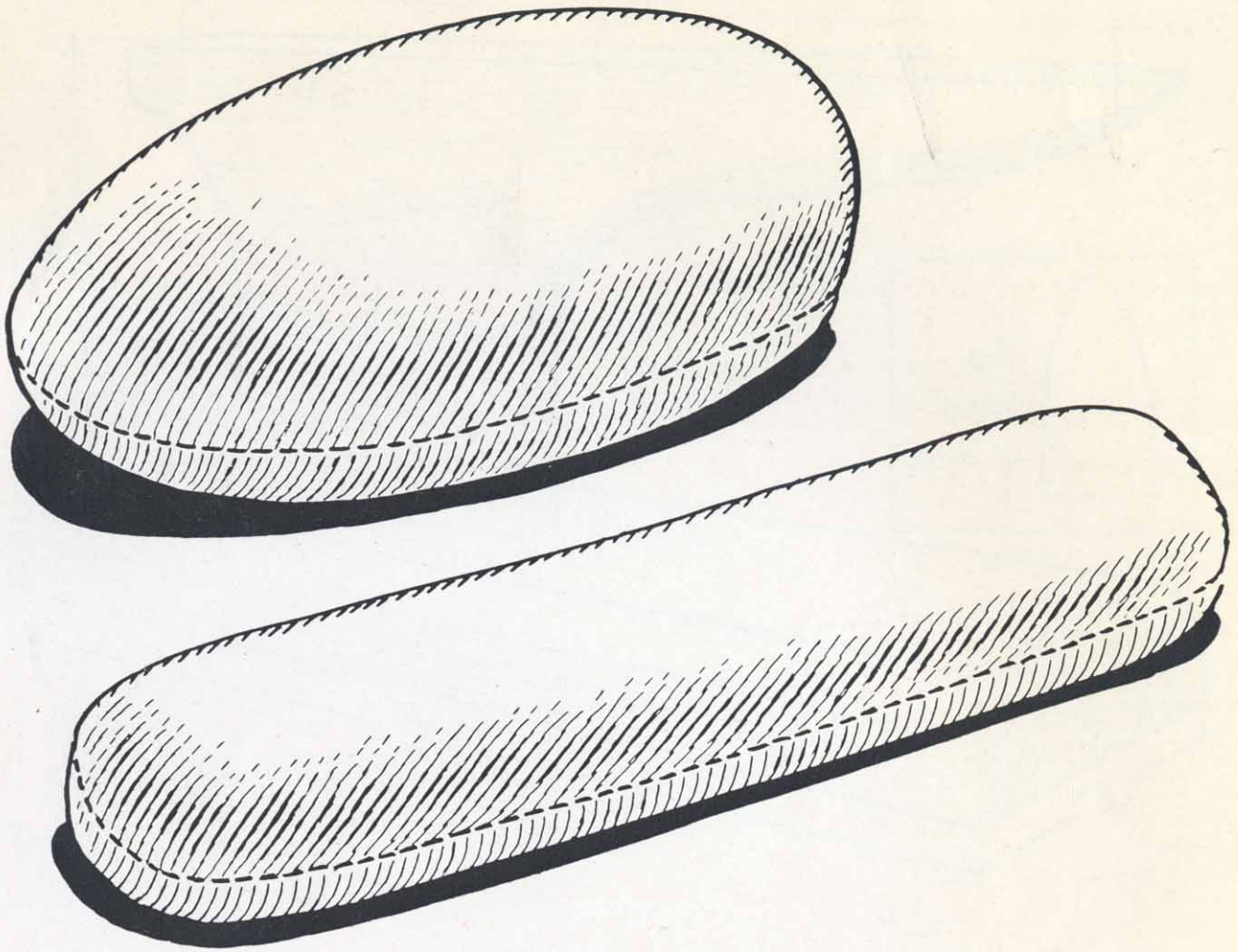
5. Staystitch $\frac{1}{4}$ " inside the large end of A. Use large stitches in the curved section. Now turn and stitch a $\frac{3}{4}$ " hem on the casing section for elastic from x to x', pulling up the large stitches to facilitate making the casing hem. This point, x, is approximately 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches from y where finished edge of B starts.
6. Stitch in $\frac{5}{8}$ " from edge around curve at narrow end, using large stitches so this can be drawn up and fitted to B.
7. Lay right sides of A and B together. Match and stitch from y to y', easing A to B around narrow end of cover.
8. Insert elastic in casing section. Fasten. Make extra unbleached muslin covers with elastic inserted in a hem at the edge. These are easily removed for laundering.

Point Presser

If you have never used a point presser as you constructed a garment, try using one next time. You will be surprised and pleased at how much it helps the appearance of the dress or suit, how much easier it makes the task.

Make your point presser of two pieces of wood. Cut the base from a board $\frac{3}{4}$ by 5 by $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Pine or fir will do. Cut the point piece from a hardwood board $\frac{3}{4}$ by $4\frac{1}{2}$ by $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Birch or maple will do nicely. The top of the point section is a straight line. Shape the underside as the pattern indicates. Smooth and sand the wood when you have the desired shape. For a last polish, rub it hard with a smoothly sanded piece of hardwood about the size of a pencil or larger. Attach the point section to the base with screws and glue.





Pounding Block

Your pounding block must weigh about 2 pounds. It, too, is of hardwood—finished size $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches thick, 3 inches wide, 10 inches long. Look at your pattern and see where the gripping grooves are shaped into the sides. The block is easier to use if these grooves are large enough to fit the fingertips and deep enough to allow a good grip. Now smooth and sand the entire block. Rub with a smooth hardwood piece for extra burnishing. Do not varnish.

Pressing Ham Patterns

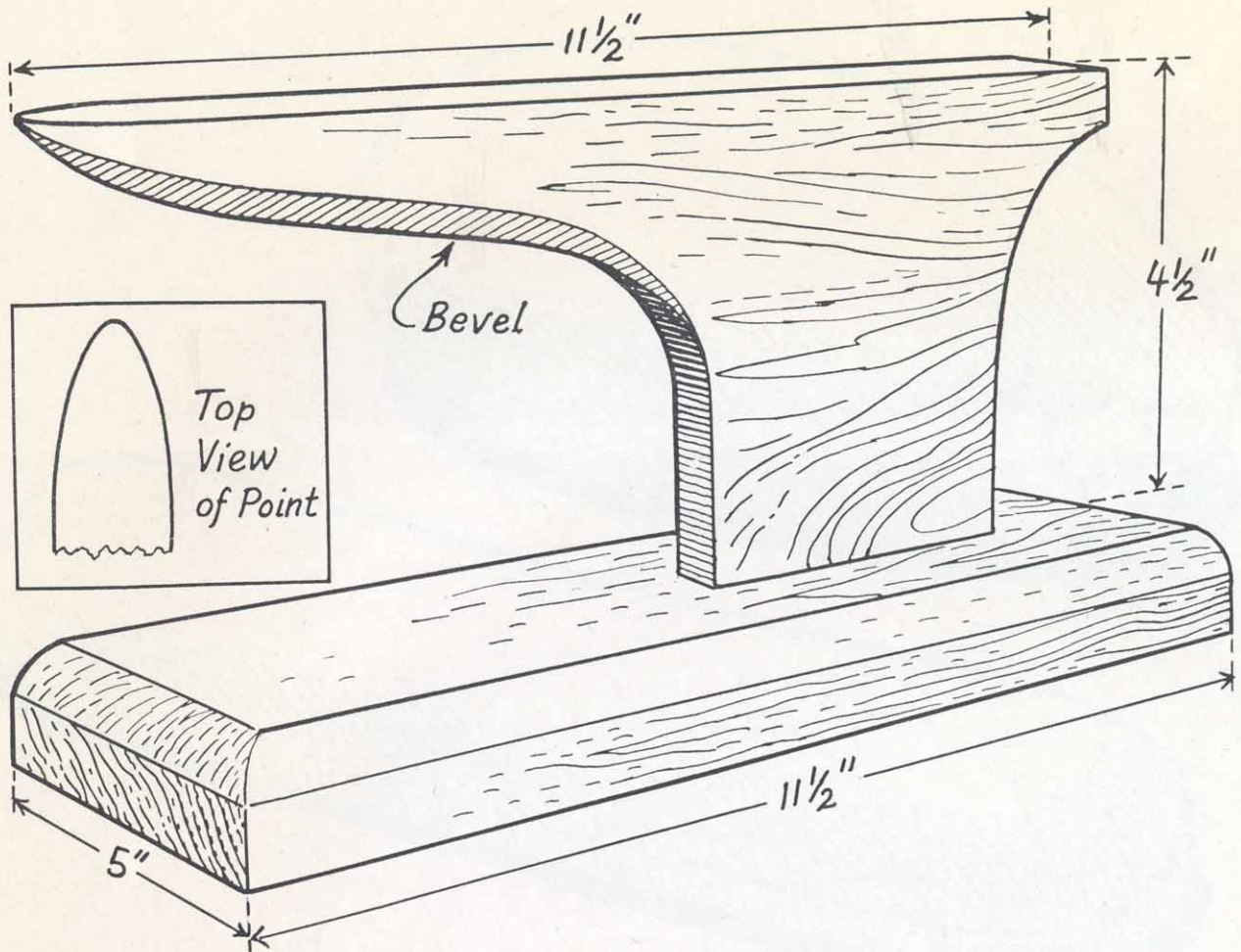
Patterns and measurements for making the two pressing hams are given on extra pages. Persons handy with simple shop tools will find no difficulty in making the skirt board, point presser, or pounding block. The two hams are for the seamstress to make and will usually take little time for the making.

Sleeve Board

The sleeve board is used for ironing as well as for pressing jobs. Its uses are many. You will find it most useful in ironing blouses and children's clothes that cannot be pressed flat on an ironing board. You can purchase a sleeve board for 2 or 3 dollars including patterns and covers. At this price it is impractical for the average homemaker to try to make this piece of equipment.

Press Cloth

The press cloth is essential! You can buy a good chemically treated lintless cloth or you can use cheesecloth. Place the press cloth between the iron and the fabric. This protects the fabric from direct contact with the iron. Apply moisture by dampening the press cloth with a sponge or by using a steam iron. The final pressing is on the right side. A press cloth is necessary on almost all fabric to prevent the shine that comes when the iron contacts cloth.



Press Mitt

A cloth press mitt is inexpensive to buy and very useful to get into small areas and places difficult to press, such as tops of sleeves and children's clothing.

If you are pressing wool, dacron polyester, orlon acrylic, and wool mixtures, you will find a wool press cloth satisfactory. It is described in the University of Idaho Extension Service Mimeo, "Care of Woolen Clothing."

Pressing Principles

Proper pressing techniques as well as good pressing equipment produce a truly professional garment at the same time they save you time and energy.

Every professional tailor knows the techniques of good pressing, keeps them in mind, uses them constantly. He knows that silk, rayon, nylon, wool, and other fibers take a technique of their own, that using the wrong method will not give the desired effect and, in some instances, may ruin the newly made garment. For you or me to press blindly, to apply heat and moisture without knowing what the process will do to the fabric of a carefully construct-

ed garment would be as foolish for us as for the tailor. Knowing how to press each suit or dress that we make gives that final touch of satisfaction for which we work; failure to know so often leads to disappointment that lasts as long as we wear the garment.

Too little pressing, inaccurate pressing, too much pressing can destroy the results of careful cutting, stitching, and fitting. A good combination dry-and-steam iron will be your first and best helper. See PNW No. 35 "Steam Irons."

1. Base your pressing techniques on the type fiber in your fabric. Some "man-made" fibers require a lower temperature than that needed to produce steam in your steam iron. Test a fabric sample first to determine how much heat and steam it can take. Protect delicate fabrics with cheesecloth or muslin.
2. Press construction details with the fabric grain in the direction stitched.
3. Press each construction detail on the wrong side BEFORE stitching over a seam or dart with another seam.
4. During construction, press seams open on wrong side of fabric with point of iron only. Press exactly on line of stitching. This avoids seam imprint on right side.
5. Leave some moisture in wool when you press it. If no steam appears after you lift the cloth, you are overpressing—too long and too hard. Don't press wool until it is entirely dry. Don't set the iron directly on wool. Use a good pressing cloth and always use steam.
6. Learn to steam and finger-press nap fabrics to prevent shine. Do not use a pounding board on pile fabrics! A cloth press mitt may be used for flattening seams in nap fabric.
7. To raise nap on some fabrics, use a piece of self fabric. Place right side of self fabric to right side of garment. Apply steam from the wrong side of garment but use no pressure of the iron. Let fabric or garment dry before disturbing it.

8. Curves should be pressed over curves.
9. If in doubt, press all fabrics on wrong side.

Many cottons today are given a resin finish to make them crease resistant. This process has made the fabric difficult to press or remove construction wrinkles. Creases which form on the fold in a bolt of fabric are difficult to remove. Heat, pressure, and moisture alone will not remove the creases.

To Remove Wrinkles: (1) make a 10 percent solution of formic acid or white vinegar solution, (2) iron the wrinkled area with steam iron to heat the surface cloth, (3) with the medicine dropper apply vinegar solution to the wrinkled area, (4) let stand a couple of minutes so the solution will be absorbed, (5) run iron over the area until it is dry, (6) repeat process if wrinkle doesn't come out.

To press correctly you must know the difference between ironing and pressing.

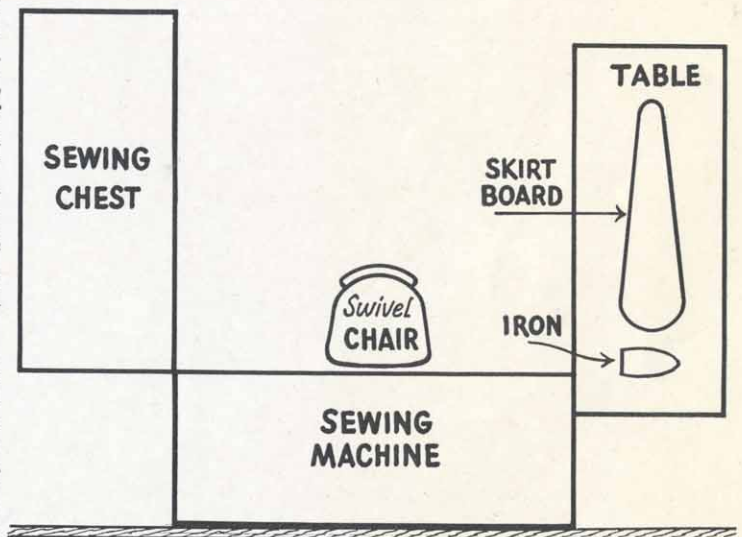
Ironing is used on garments or clothing articles that have been washed, dried, and dampened. You smooth and dry the garments with a sliding motion of the iron. However, many of today's easy-care fabrics can be quickly ironed with the steam iron without previous dampening.

Pressing is used during construction or on day-to-day touch-ups for clothing articles. You smooth and shape the articles with a series of lifting motions, usually with a steam iron. You do not press the article dry. With a lifting and lowering motion of the steam iron you can remove wrinkles, form crease lines, flatten edges, or shape garments during construction.

Set Up A Sewing Center

A U-shaped sewing center is best for most of us. The sewing machine makes the bottom or cross bar of the U. A surface for laying out and cutting fabric is on your right, a surface for pressing on your left. Your dining table and your sewing cabinet may furnish these surfaces. Underneath them, keep your sewing supplies in convenient drawers or other containers. With such a center you sit in the middle. Everything you need is within easy reach. A convenient chair is a swivel office chair—armless and on easy-rolling casters. In such a chair you turn from one part of your sewing job to the next without getting up or walking around. If you can press without rising from your chair, you will be encouraged to press each detail as you sew.

For the cutting center on the right, housewives have reported using a flat-top desk or even an old refinished washstand. Both offer a flat surface and space underneath to keep supplies within easy reach. For the pressing needed in many sewing jobs, a skirt board is placed on a cabinet or table. It saves space, too. The iron and electric sewing machine may be plugged into a double wall outlet behind the machine.



You may want to read:

If It's a Pile Fabric—Extension Bulletin No. 364.

Steam Irons—PNW Bulletin 35.

Fabrics—Buying, Sewing, Laundering—PNW Bulletin 20.

Care of Woolen Clothing—Extension Mimeo.

Cover, Pad and Fireproof Your Ironing Board—Extension Mimeo.

Available at your County Extension Office