



ONE THREAD DOESN'T FIT ALL

Thread is an integral part of all our sewing projects. Because it is no longer just hidden behind the seams, thread now takes on a more important role than in the past. As we witness technological advances in equipment and fabrics, we also see an emergence of special threads.

Contemporary sewing encompasses a broad spectrum. The popularity of sergers, for instance, has opened up a new area of creativity. Reflecting a growing emphasis of decorative work on conventional machines, many varieties of shiny, glittery, and textured threads are now available to home sewers. Although they certainly enhance the artistry that anyone can accomplish, these threads are particularly suited to the newer, top-of-the-line computerized machines. Some machines have a wide range of preprogrammed embroidery capabilities and the newest models have software for creating personalized designs as well.

There are three main categories of threads: 1) general sewing threads, 2) specialty threads, and 3) decorative threads. There are many different types of threads that fit into each of these categories.

GENERAL SEWING THREADS:

- Cotton-wrapped polyester:** An all-purpose thread that sews nearly all kinds of fabric except for very lightweight fabrics, leathers, and suedes. It is manufactured with a core of polyester filaments wrapped in cotton. The polyester lends strength and durability, while the softer cotton lets stitches sink into fabric more easily.
- Long-staple polyester:** Made with extra-long fibers, it boasts smoothness, sheen, elasticity, durability, and uniformity. It's good on most fabrics, especially those with stretch.
- Mercerized cotton:** This is not so easy to find now except in grandma's sewing basket. Cotton is non-shrinking, colorfast, and forms soft stitches. It's best used on natural fibers but is not suited for synthetics or stretch fabrics. Linting and knotting may be a problem since it is made from short fibers. It is a good bobbin mate for upper decorative threads.
- Silk:** This is the only natural thread that's a continuous filament. It is lustrous and fine, strong and colorfast, and may be used to sew pure silk and similar couture quality natural fabrics. Because of the cost, it is more often used for handwork, basting, and finishing details. Silk never leaves an imprint when pressed.

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- Topstitching and buttonhole twist:** Slightly heavier than all-purpose thread, this thread is used for prominent top-stitching, sewing on buttons, shoulder pads, etc.
- Quilting thread:** A strong cotton thread with a waxy coating to prevent tangling when hand-quilting. It is not appropriate for use in sewing machines.
- Button and carpet thread:** A heavy-duty cotton-wrapped polyester for hand work on tough carpet fabrics such as upholstery. Its glazed finish prevents abrasion when pulled through thicker fabrics.
- Elastic thread:** Used for stretch shirring, it is usually wound by hand onto the bobbin. The bobbin tension must be adjusted when using this type of thread.
- Fusible thread:** This has a special coating that melts when pressed with a hot iron. It should only be used on the bobbin. It is helpful for positioning trims, zippers, matching plaids, etc.
- Transparent thread:** This is a nylon monofilament thread for invisible stitching. Look for a fine gauge and avoid the wiry coarse type. It can also be used in sergers, but one should avoid continuous use because it has a wearing effect on the loopers. It is mainly used in crafts, machine quilting, appliqué, and ornamental effects.
- Serger thread:** This thread is spirally wound on cones and tubes for high speed feeding. It is made of two-ply polyester and designed to be less bulky in looped stitches. The cones have high yardage.

THREAD TIPS:

- There are many weights, fibers, brands, and prices of threads on the market. It pays to make careful choices. It is important that the fiber content of the thread and the fabric be compatible.
- As a general rule, purchase the best quality you can afford. Buy thread produced by reputable manufacturers. Don't be tempted by bargain-priced spools where the thread is often made with short, linty fibers. Also, it may not be colorfast.
- Avoid old cotton thread on wooden spools which has probably deteriorated over the years and no longer has adequate strength.
- For construction, choose thread that is close in color or one shade darker than fabric because it will sew up a bit lighter. On a serger, you can blend several colors to achieve a close match.

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- Rayon:** Offered in a wide array of vibrant colors, this is silky, lustrous, and versatile. Because it is weaker than regular sewing thread, it should not be used for construction but rather for top thread adornment. It is especially effective with programmed decorative stitches, monogramming, and software embroidery discs.
- Cotton** This is a thin two-ply, lustrous thread designed for decorative stitching. The heavier 30 weight should be used for close satin stitching, and the finer 60 weight used for embroidery and French "hand sewing."
- Polyester:** "Super Sheen," a fine gauge polyester distributed by Pfaff dealers, is ideal for machine embroidery but can also be used for construction.
- Acrylic:** A recent addition to the market, this is a 50-weight, high-gloss thread designed and distributed by New Home dealers for machine embroidery. It is static-free and easy to use.
- Metallic:** Under normal sewing conditions, the newer metallics of good quality don't break or shred, as long as the needle eye is large enough. These add a beautiful touch of glitter, and they are durable. Some are thin, and some are textured. They are available in gold, silver, variegated, and other colors. All-purpose thread should be used on the bobbin; use metallic in the upper looper only on the serger.
- Ribbon:** This is a soft, supple rayon or silk woven ribbon, 1/16 inch or 1/8 inch wide, that can be used on conventional sewing machines. A braiding foot helps direct the ribbon under the needle as it passes through. It can also be couched down by zigzagging with clear thread.
- Texturized (wooly) nylon:** This is also good for use on sergers. Its fluffiness helps give good coverage, and it is especially nice for stretchy seams.
- Crochet cotton, pearl cotton, fine two-ply yarn:** These can be used for decorative effects on the regular sewing machines, as well as the serger, when threaded in the upper looper.

DECORATIVE THREAD TIPS:

- When using decorative threads, fill several bobbins before you start, so a large project won't have to be interrupted.
- Take advantage of the wonderful variety of thread products, and let them inspire your sewing.