



SEW-lutions Guidelines

Your Guide
to
Successful
Sewing

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Part of being well dressed is being well pressed, and generating steam is essential for professional-looking projects you sew. Look to the right iron to get the job done.



Photo courtesy of Rowenta

Iron-y

For laundry and sewing uses, look for household and professional models of a traditional iron; for the more serious sewer, check out a steam generator with the iron unit separate from the water tank.

It's About Sole

Soleplate materials vary among irons, from non-stick Teflon to stainless steel and aluminum. No matter which materials you select, be sure it's a surface that's easy to clean.

Check the shape of the iron soleplate, as some offer narrower tips, making it easy to access for concentrated pressing tasks like childrenswear, collars or other tailoring details.

Talking Terms

Do you know the difference between pressing and ironing?

Pressing is something sewers do to flatten seams and add shape to their in-progress creations. It is done with an up-and-down motion of the iron, usually with steam.

Ironing is the process of removing wrinkles. Dreaded by most household members, ironing involves sliding the iron across the surface, pushing and stretching out folds and creases left from the laundry process.

Weighty Matters

The weight of an iron is important to sewers, particularly for tailoring uses. Household irons range in weight from 1 1/2 lbs. to around 4 lbs. The heavier the iron, the more weight that's applied to flatten seams, set sewn details and fuse inner components.

Auto Shut-off

A controversial feature among sewers, many irons feature an auto-shut-off mechanism if the iron is left in a vertical position for a certain amount of time. This is designed for safety, but to sewers who are constantly running between the sewing machine and the iron, it can be an annoyance to have to wait for the iron to reheat.

Taking Temperatures

All irons have variable temperature settings, some are noted on the dial only by dots, others by fabric names such as cotton, linen or synthetics. The owner's manual should detail the actual degree of heat for each setting.

Steamy Situations

Steam is important for sewers during the construction process. Some sewing tasks require only heat, not steam, so look for both capabilities in a sewing iron.

Soleplates on irons vary greatly from those having no steam vents (dry irons only) to those

with hundreds of holes allowing for the even distribution of steam. Specialty irons may have a greater concentration of steam

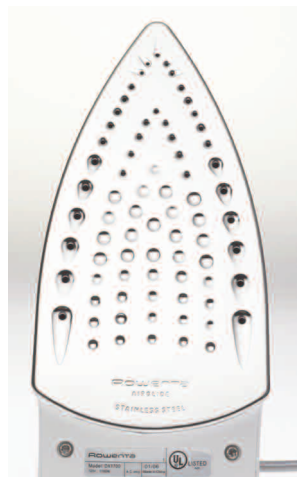


Photo courtesy of Rowenta

holes on the tip for detail work. Steam vents can leave imprints on some fabrics like velvets and other napped surfaces, so a press cloth may be necessary to avoid the patterning.

Some irons offer a burst-of-steam feature allowing for concentrated steaming. Irons can steam only when horizontal, or they may also steam in a vertical position for use on hanging things, like garments or home décor projects.

The amount and speed of steam production is directly related to the water chamber volume. Look for an iron with an easy-to-fill tank. Some are removable for added convenience and capacities vary greatly. Look for one with a visible water reservoir so you can keep tabs when it's time to refill.

Irons can use tap water or they can require distilled water, depending on their internal mechanism. Those that use tap water should have some kind of self-cleaning feature to eliminate mineral deposits in the water system.

To avoid spitting, allow the water in the iron to heat thoroughly. Check the owner's manual for the recommended time.

Cord Cues

If several family members will be using the iron, check that the cord pivots to accommodate both left- and right-hand users. Depending on your set-up area, an extra-long cord can be helpful.

A few iron brands offer a retractable cord for quick and easy storage.

Some cordless irons are available if portability is an issue, but most sewers prefer the connected variety for consistent temperature and steam settings.



Photo courtesy of Rowenta

Standing Up

Tired of having to set the iron back up on its heel when you're not using it. Oliso has created an iron with an Auto-Lift System, so that the iron actually raises itself up off the pressing surface with built-in legs when the handle is released. No fear of scorching and no need to set it upright.



Photo courtesy of Oliso

Steam Generators

For the serious sewer, a steam generator ironing system may be helpful. This type of iron has the actual ironing head separate from the water tank unit, with a hose and cord connection. Because this type of system generates steam under pressure, it produces much greater amounts than a household iron and has the ability for continuous steaming.



Photo courtesy of Rowenta

Steam generator systems require a longer initial heating time than a household iron because of the much larger water capacity, but maintain the steam without frequent refilling or reheating.

Caution should be taken with steam generators, as some require the system to be totally cool before refilling to avoid injury due to the pressurization of the steam chamber.

For more information on ironing boards, see Guideline 2.116. ■