

Sewing With Handwovens

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Page 1



SEW-lutions Guidelines

Your Guide
to
Successful
Sewing

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Cut and sew handwoven fabric with confidence when you plan ahead to prevent cut edges from fraying and acquaint yourself with the best machine settings for the hand-loomed cloth.

Looking Good

Expect handwovens to be narrower than commercially woven fabrics. They may be woven of natural and/or synthetic fibers and may feature novelty yarns such as chenilles and bouclés. Depending on fiber type, it's common for a weaver to wash yardage after removing it from the loom to "full" or shrink out any slack in the weave. Whenever possible, ask for laundering instructions when purchasing handwoven fabric. Otherwise, assume dry cleaning is required.

Pattern Pointers

Let this special fabric be the focal point of your garment. Look for a pattern with as few seams as possible and choose one calling for a familiar commercial fabric having similar weight and drape as the handwoven. Avoid complicated details or closely-fitted garment styles, as handwovens are typically more fragile than commercially-made fabrics. Very soft or loosely woven fabrics may sag and stretch with wear, so they're best suited to tops or unconstructed jackets rather than skirts or pants.

Test-sew or tissue-fit the pattern and make any adjustments necessary. Trace duplicate pattern pieces (including grainline and match points) as needed for the right and left sides of the body. For pinning and cutting accuracy, trim each pattern piece along its cutting line.

Cutting Cues

After choosing a stabilization method from the options given below, plan to cut the fabric as a single layer. The thicker the fibers, the more care is needed when cutting because the loss of a single strand may erode the dimensions of a pattern piece, especially a small one. Before

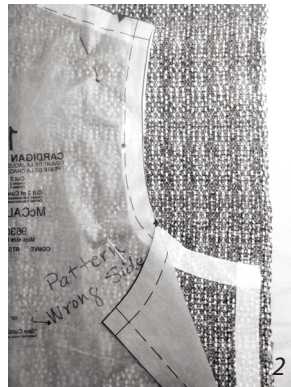
pinning, always make sure the selvages and weave are square throughout, patting the cloth to shape as needed and checking against a clear ruler or T-square. After pinning, double-check that all pattern pieces are accounted for and facing in the correct directions. When cutting, ignore notches and other match points; they'll be marked later.

Do a trial layout of the pattern pieces and then cut into an expendable area to determine how fragile the weave is. Option 1 is suitable for all fabrics and essential for very loose weaves. Options 2 and 3 are suitable for fabrics that can withstand a bit of handling after cutting.

Keeping It Altogether

Option 1: Before cutting, stabilize the outline of each main garment section. It's the best defense against raveling while retaining the original character of the cloth. Arrange the fabric and pattern pieces wrong side up. Pin generously and roll up the cloth. Place a pressing pad on a work surface and unroll the fabric over it. Repositioning pins as needed, slip stay tape beneath the pattern edges, even with the cutting lines all around each pattern piece. Purchased 1/4"- to 3/8"-wide fusible stay tape works well when the goal is merely to prevent fraying. Should stabilization of the stitching line be needed as well to support stretchy or fragile fibers, custom cut stay tape wide enough to treat the entire seam allowance plus 1/8". For example, for a 5/8" seam allowance, prepare 3/4"-wide stay tape to catch in the stitching line. Purchase soft, knit-type fusible interfacing and strip-cut on the lengthwise grain using a rotary cutter, mat and ruler. Handle the strips gently; they'll lose width if stretched. Fuse the strips to heat- and pressure-tolerant fabric with a regular dry iron, using an up-

and-down motion (not sliding). To fuse only the cutting lines without affecting the rest of the fabric, use a "mini" iron (1). Abut strips by overlapping the ends 1/8"; trim them flush at corners. To accommodate convex or concave curves, arrange the tape along the greater circumference. Clip and lap the excess along the shorter circumference. (Don't clip and spread; it creates gaps.) (2)



Pattern pieces requiring interfacing (facings, collars, cuffs, etc.) during the construction process needn't be outlined. Instead, cut out the interfacings and, checking the shape against the pattern piece, fuse in place on the wrong side of the fabric. Cut out the pattern pieces.

Option 2: Pin and cut as usual, then stabilize the cut edges of the main garment sections. Place each cut garment section wrong side up over a pressing pad. Check against the shape of the pattern piece, and then fuse stay tape along the cut edges following the pressing tips given above.

Option 3: Before or after cutting, completely underline all garment sections with fusible interfacing. It's important to note that fusing changes the weight and drape of the fabric; and that some fiber types may be damaged by the heat and pressure needed to achieve a successful bond. Choose soft, lightweight knit-type fusible interfacing and test on a small section of fabric to make sure you like the result. Cut duplicate main garment sections from interfacing, piecing lengths as needed to accommodate the width of the pattern pieces. Working over a pressing pad, either fuse the interfacing shapes to the wrong side of the intact fabric; or cut out each pattern piece and then fuse the interfacing to the wrong side. Always check against the pattern piece, patting the cut-out interfacing and/or fabric to shape as needed. Fuse the interfacing, following the manufacturer's instructions. Be patient; it

takes time to fuse an entire garment. To balance garment sections requiring interfacing (facings, collars, cuffs, etc.) during the construction process, use a heavier weight interfacing or two layers of lightweight.

Seams Right

After cutting/fusing, return the pattern pieces to each garment section. Chalk-mark notches and other match points on the fusible product and then prepare to edgestitch each garment section all around. Regardless of machine type, set it for a slightly longer (3-4mm) stitch length to avoid over-needling the fabric; and plan to sew with the fusible face up. A serger set for a wide 3-thread overcast stitch provides the best coverage and the cleanest edge. Many late-model sewing machines have an "overcast" stitch setting and/or presser foot to prevent tunneling. If your machine lacks overcasting features, use a 3-step zigzag.

By now your garment sections should be no more intimidating than if cut from commercial cloth. Unless already stabilized, stitching lines in high-stress areas (such as necklines, armholes, and skirt vents) should be treated with narrow fusible stay tape after re-shaping as needed to match the pattern. Also fuse or hand-baste a strip of interfacing behind the buttonhole area on a jacket if not already stabilized.

Sew What?

Use a size 80/12 to 90/14 universal needle and a good quality cotton or polyester thread. If possible, set up the machine for even-feed sewing or install a walking foot. Set the machine for a 2.5-3mm stitch length. Stitching can be difficult to remove from handwoven fabric without damage, so hand-baste seams likely to require fine-tuning.

To improve the inside appearance of an unlined garment, wrap the seam and hem allowances with a Hong Kong finish or purchased bias binding. While it's tempting to cut garment pieces on the crosswise grain with the selvage as a finished hem to save fabric, it's not the best approach. Damage may occur if the selvage is overstretched during wear. If there isn't enough fabric to turn a hem, finish the edge with a facing instead. 🍷