

Identifying Plaids

4.315

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SEW-lutions Guidelines

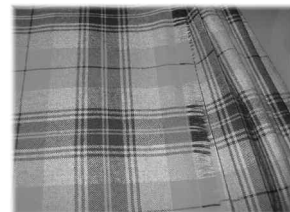
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Plaids are formed by vertical and horizontal color patterning in fabrics from traditional wools to elegant synthetics. Identifying their unique characteristics will aid the cutting and sewing process for a perfect match.



1.

Defining Moments

What is the difference between a tartan and a plaid, and a balanced even plaid versus an uneven plaid?

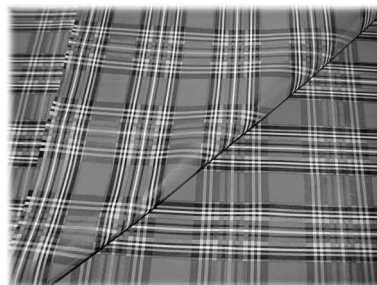
A tartan is a specific woven pattern that often signifies a particular Scottish clan in the modern era. The pattern is made with colored yarns forming alternating stripes, resulting in blocks of colors that repeat vertically and horizontally in a pattern of squares and lines (1). At one point wearing tartan was banned in 1745 because it was the dress of Highlanders who supported the Stuart Prince Charles against King George 11. Today wearing tartans is considered a classic fall look.

In American English, plaid is a fabric made with alternating stripes and bands of color woven into or dyed onto the fabric. This makes blocks of colors that repeat vertically and horizontally in a pattern or squares and lines. Plaid is also a Scottish word meaning blanket or long shawl, usually referring to a patterned woolen cloth. Through the Middle Ages and until the 18th century the people of North Britain belted their plaids about them; the lower part forming the kilt, the upper part the cloak.

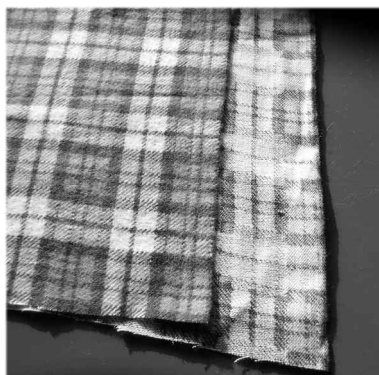
Today the words plaid and

tartan are used interchangeably.

Plaids can be printed or woven. A woven plaid fabric (2) is created when different color yarns are intertwined lengthwise and crosswise, making both sides of the fabric identical. With a printed plaid (3), the design may be off grain resulting in sewing and cutting challenges.



2. Woven plaid



3. Printed plaid



4. Even plaid

Balancing Act

Plaids are also characterized as even (or balanced) or an uneven (or unbalanced). An easy way to identify the plaid type is to fold the plaid lengthwise with right sides together. Turn back one corner to form a right angle. Do the lines, spaces and colors match in both the lengthwise and crosswise directions? If so, this is an even plaid. An even plaid will have the same lines, spaces, colors on the left and right side and the same pattern above and below a center or dominate line. Even plaids will match in both the lengthwise and crosswise directions resulting in a perfect square (4). Very few plaids are even.

An uneven plaid is a rectangular repeat which is not a perfect square. It can be balanced crosswise, lengthwise, both or neither. An uneven plaid with a balanced crosswise has a symmetrical arrangement of

vertical bars. When folded vertically through the center of the repeat, the two halves are identical. This type of plaid will require a with-nap layout when cutting out pattern pieces. When the uneven plaid is balanced lengthwise, the repeats do not have a center from which the design can be balanced in both directions, which means the design will go around the body in one direction only. This type of plaid has a symmetrical arrangement of crosswise bars and when folded horizontally the two halves are identical. When the uneven plaid is balanced in both directions there will be a symmetrical arrangement of both vertical and horizontal bars. Fold this plaid into quarters and all four quarters will match, but they will not make a perfect square. Uneven balanced plaids frequently look like even plaids, but they are rectangles, not perfect squares. An uneven plaid will typically require more fabric and more skill, and again all the pattern pieces should lay out for a with nap layout. See views 5 and 6.

Sometimes it is difficult to decide if the plaid is balanced or not. One way to determine on large or multicolored plaids is to number each bar and space, allowing you to read the pattern without getting confused. So if the pattern reads 543212345 the plaid is balanced, while if another plaid reads 1234512345 the plaid is unbalanced. See views 7 and 8.

Careful Consideration

Plaids require additional yardage to allow for matching. Some plaids have a nap or a one-way pattern, resulting in additional yardage beyond what's required for matching.

Look carefully before buying a printed plaid—if it's off-grain more than 1/4", it will become difficult (if not impossible) to match the plaids or the seams will end up twisted.



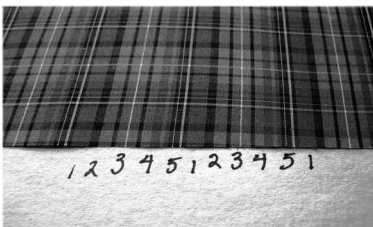
5. Uneven balanced plaid



6. Uneven crosswise plaid



7. Balanced plaid



8. Unbalanced plaid

Pattern Picks

The most attractive plaid garments are simple, uncomplicated designs that showcase the fabric. Avoid patterns with slanted darts, circular yokes and curved seams.

Keep the plaid scale in mind--small plaids work best with blouses, while the larger plaids work better with coats, jackets or skirts.

For best results, look at fabric suggestions on the pattern envelope to see if plaids are listed as a suitable fabric for the project; if not, don't use plaid fabric.

Cutting design details like piping, binding and/or pockets on the bias is an especially effective use of plaid fabric.

For more information on plaids and how to match them, see Guideline 11.390. 📖