

Slick Tricks: Laminated Fabrics and Vinyls

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Whether you're making a raincoat, place mats, a child's apron, or styling a rainy-day tote or lunch bag, sewing with vinyl coated fabrics is great fun. Many fabrics come pre-laminated, or you can add a slick coating to your own fabric.

Some fabric companies make coordinates, where the same fabric may be available in both a vinyl-coated version and a non-coated style.

Laminate Your Own

Look for an iron-on vinyl, available in glossy or matte finish. Pre-wash the base fabric without any fabric softener or dryer sheets, to ensure that all finishes are removed and the vinyl will adhere securely. Press out any fabric wrinkles.

Press-on vinyl comes with a protective sheet, which doubles a pressing cloth for the application process. NEVER touch the iron directly on the vinyl, as it will melt. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for fusing the coating to the fabric.

Both sides of a fabric can be encased in vinyl if you prefer, offering double the protection.

Ready-made Laminates

There are several types of slick coated fabrics available—oilcloth and laminated or coated cottons are the most commonly used for fashion and accessories, though the principles of sewing these slippery fabrics are all the same.

Pattern Choices

Since most vinyls and laminates may not be very flexible, it's best to select a pattern without a lot of fitting—darts and gathers should be avoided, as should set-in sleeves. Look for raglan or cut-on sleeves for easier sewing.

Check to be sure your fabric is on-grain as with a vinyl coating, there's no way to straighten the patterning if it's obviously askew. If it is askew, follow the design patterning instead of the fabric grainline.

Cutting & Marking

Begin with your laminates and vinyls at room temperature. Medium- to heavy-weight versions can be quite stiff if they're the least bit chilly. Remember, pressing isn't an option so lay the fabric flat for a day or two before using.

Cut most vinyl items as a single layer. If a piece needs to be cut on the fold, double the fabric wrong sides together to avoid sticking, or place a sheet of tissue between the layers.

Keep any pins within the seam allowances only, as pin holes are permanent.

It's best to mark with chalk, as tools like a tracing wheel will damage the fabric surface. Water-soluble markers may not work with the vinyl coating, and thread marks will leave permanent holes. Test on a scrap before deciding which method is best.

Stitch 'em Up

There are no do-overs with coated fabric sewing, so it needs to be correct the first time you stitch. Needle holes are permanent. If you're making a garment, it's best to test the pattern for fit in another fabric first.

Choose a small size needle—a 70/10 for lightweights, and only slightly larger for medium-weight vinyls. Use a needle with a sharp point.

Since laminates tend to be sticky, use a Teflon coated presser foot or a roller foot for even feeding.

Try to avoid pinning seams, but if you must, do so only within the seam allowance. Paper clips are a good alternative to pins, as is painter's tape.

Use a medium- to long stitch length. If your stitches are too small, they can perforate the vinyl coating.

As you sew seams, hold the fabric taut, in front and in back of the presser foot. Don't pull on it, just hold it tautly to help prevent puckering.

If your project requires interfacing, use sew-in only. Vinyls can't take the iron heat for fusibles.

Finishing

Once you've sewn the seam in a coated fabric, it may be difficult to get it to stay open since you can only use finger-pressing. Understitch and/or topstitch seams to hold them flat, folding them open or to one side.

Trim out the excess fabric in anything with a facing and use edgestitching to hold the folded edges flat.

Another finish for vinyl and laminates is binding the raw edge to encase it, or depending on the item, use decorative scissors to finish the edge. For example, scalloped or pinking shears create an easy finish for table toppers and place mats.

Any buttonholes should be made as slits, or bound buttonholes. Unless your machine has a widely spaced buttonhole setting or you can manually adjust the density, avoid machine buttonholes as the thick stitching may damage the vinyl.

Zippers make a perfect garment closure—just tape them in place for sewing.

Care

Most vinyl fabrics cannot be machine washed or dried. Check the bolt information, but it's best to simply wipe them off with a damp cloth or sponge for cleaning. 🍷



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