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NF91-37 Thread Facts

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NebFact



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Thread Facts

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There are many types of threads available on the market today. They vary in fiber content, fiber length, thread size, and intended use. A good quality thread will be easier to work with in a sewing machine, serger or by hand. The results of the project will also be improved if a quality thread is used instead of a "bargain" thread. A good quality thread is strong, smooth (not fuzzy), consistent in thickness and resists tangles.

Fiber Content

The thread's fiber content are of two basic types, natural and synthetic. Natural fiber threads come from a source in nature and include: cotton, linen, and silk. Synthetic fibers are made by a chemical manufacturing process. Synthetic fibers include: polyester, nylon, rayon and acrylic. Polyester is the most common of these. In most cases, a synthetic fiber has greater strength than a natural fiber.

Fiber Length

The fibers of thread can be staple length fibers or filament fibers. A filament fiber is a continuous fiber and can be very long. Silk is one continuous filament fiber. Synthetic fibers are produced as continuous filaments then cut into desired staple lengths.

Staple fibers are fairly short, usually up to two inches in length. Cotton is an example of a staple fiber. Synthetic filament fibers are cut into staple fibers of desired length, sometimes up to five inches.

Fiber Twist

Thread is made by aligning and then twisting fibers together. Thread made from longer fibers, staple or filament, tend to have greater strength than short staple fibers. Short staple fibers are often used in inexpensive threads, causing them to be fuzzier and weaker than when longer staple length fibers are used. These shorter fibers often loose lint in the sewing process and may cause machine problems.

Types of Thread

No one thread can be used successfully on every fabric. It is important to understand that the best thread depends on the project in which it will be used.

Cotton — Thread of 100 percent cotton is less used today than in previous times due to greater durability and versatility offered by other threads. Cotton thread forms soft stitches and comes in several weights, useful for sewing fabrics of different weights. They have little stretch and are best used on natural fiber woven fabrics.

Cotton covered polyester core — The most commonly used all purpose thread. The polyester core provides strength and stretch while the cotton outer layer gives easier sewability.

Polyester — Thread that is 100 percent polyester has good strength, and has the ability to stretch and recover. It is recommended for knits, though it also sews well on wovens. Short-staple polyester has been cut into 1 1/2" staple lengths. It appears fuzzy and tends to produce lint.

Long-staple polyester filaments are 4" to 5" in length. This makes the thread finer, smoother and more even. Quality long staple polyester makes a good substitute for silk thread.

Silk — Quality silk thread is made from long continuous filament fibers resulting in strong and lustrous thread. Though a bit expensive, it is good for tailoring because it can stretch.

Rayon — This thread is lustrous like silk, but is less durable. Use it as a substitute for silk in decorative work.

Nylon — Monofilament nylon thread is strong and semi-transparent. It is designed for sewing nylon tricot and other lingerie fabrics. Avoid using a very hot iron on nylon thread. Use it in conventional or serger machines.

Specialty Threads — Metallic threads are for decorative use. They should be used with a larger sized needle, an all purpose thread in the bobbin, and sew slowly. Fiber content may be 60 percent polyester and 40 percent metallic.

Basting thread is a soft, weak light weight thread made especially for easy removal.

Buttonhole twist and topstitching threads are intended for the uses their names suggest. They are available in silk or polyester. Use a large needle with a large eye to keep thread from shredding.

Button and carpet threads are very strong and have a glazed finish to ease the piercing of heavy weight fabrics.

Machine Embroidery thread is designed to fill in smoothly and evenly without building up or breaking. It may be cotton, rayon, long staple polyester or core-spun polyester.

Thread Fuse™ is a polyester thread coated with a heat activated fusible fiber. It bonds with the touch of a steam iron. Use it in the bobbin of a conventional machine or the lower looper of a serger. Try it for hems, positioning zippers, pockets, facings appliques, and matching plaids. Stitch'n Fuse is a similar thread made of 100 percent nylon.

Serger thread is specially made for high speed sewing. It is slightly finer in size, and has a special finish for higher speed sewing. It is available on cones, king or compact tubes.

There are a variety of threads you can use for serging. Any of the following may be tried on a serger: Pearl cotton, a mercerized 100 percent cotton; Decor 6, a 100 percent viscose rayon filament thread; rayon ribbon floss, a 1/16" braided mini ribbon; and wooly nylon, a texturized nylon thread.

Thread Choice

Your fabric will influence the type of thread you select as well as its fiber content. Fiber content of your thread need not be the same as your fabric. Heavyweight fabric requires a heavyweight thread and lightweight fabric requires a finer thread. Very light weight or sheer fabrics are best sewn with a very fine needle and an extra fine thread. Using the correct thread size may reduce puckering, a problem frequently encountered when sewing light weight fabrics.

Thread Care

Consider the care requirement of your thread choice. While most threads are easy care (machine wash and dry) there are some exceptions. Some rayon threads require cold water temperatures, while metallic and nylon threads may be heat sensitive; silk is harmed by chlorine bleach. The thread care requirements should be compatible with the fabric care requirements.

Thread Tips

1. Select a thread color to match your fabric or one shade darker.
2. For plaids and multicolored background select thread to match main color.
3. Buy your fabric and thread at the same time.
4. Purchase enough thread to complete the project.
5. For ease in threading a needle, cut thread on a slant with sharp scissors.
6. It is best to work with thread no longer than 18" when hand sewing.

SELECTION GUIDE

THREAD	USE
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GENERAL

Cotton/Polyester

Extra fine	Sheer and very lightweight fabrics; sewing by hand, conventional machine sewing
All-purpose	Light to heavyweight fabrics; sewing by hand, conventional machine sewing
Topstitching, Heavy Duty	Decorative hand or conventional machine sewing; use all-purpose thread in bobbin

Serger	Sized between extra fine and all purpose weights for serger machine
<i>Polyester</i>	
All-purpose	Light to heavyweight fabrics
Twist, Heavy-duty	Decorative hand or conventional machine sewing; use all-purpose thread in bobbin
Spun	All-purpose weight for serger machines
Spun, Jeans	Heavier serger thread for heavyweight fabrics, decorative effects
<i>Cotton</i>	Use #50 size for delicate silks and light to medium weight woven fabrics or in bobbin for decorative effects; use #40 size for medium to heavyweight woven fabrics
<i>Silk</i>	
Machine Twist, #50	All-purpose weight for machine sewing
Silk Stitch	Heavier thread for machine topstitching, buttonholes, decorative effects
Line Stitch, #30	
<i>Texturized Nylon</i>	Soft, wooly texture; makes strong, stretchy seams and rolled edges; primarily for serger machines.

DECORATIVE STITCHING

<i>Acrylic</i>	Machine embroidery
<i>Rayon</i>	Shiny texture; 40wt. and 30wt. for machine embroidery, other decorative effects; use heavier 30wt. in needle and finer thread in bobbin; stitch slowly; sewing by hand, conventional machine or serger; may require special care
<i>Metallic</i>	Glittering texture; use size 14 or 16 needle and all-purpose thread in bobbin; stitch slowly; sewing by hand, conventional machine or serger; may require special care.
<i>Silk, Buttonhole</i>	Heavyweight for hand sewing

SPECIAL

<i>Button and Carpet</i>	Heavy, glazed thread for hand sewing
<i>Elastic Thread</i>	Wind on bobbin for stretchy shirring
<i>Monofilament Nylon</i>	Transparent for invisible stitches; use in bobbin for decorative effects and machine quilting; serger sewing; strong and wiry
<i>Silk, Fine</i>	Lightest weight for hand sewing; use for basting — will not leave an imprint, even if you press over it

Source: May/June 1990 Vogue Patterns

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