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HEG 76-36
(Revised January, 1987)



Sewing With Plaids

This NebGuide contains useful suggestions for sewing with plaids.

Rose Marie Tondl, Extension Clothing Specialist

- [Selecting The Right Pattern](#)
- [Buying Extra Yardage](#)
- [Plaid Placement](#)
- [Matching Point](#)
- [Bias-Cut Plaid](#)
- [Sewing Techniques](#)

Plaids remain popular and have no season. They can create dramatic effects, be dainty, gay, subtle or forceful. Their coloring may be rich, subdued or bizarre, depending upon the spacing combination and intensity of colors. Whatever the desired effect, perfection in matching plaids can make an inexpensive dress look expensive.

Simply stated, a plaid is a fabric design made by crossing lengthwise and crosswise stripes. All plaid fabrics are made of pattern repeats. It is the arrangement of stripes, sizes and colors within a repeat that determines whether the plaid is **even** or **uneven**. It is important to know which your fabric is, because it is the evenness or unevenness of a plaid design that determines the style of pattern to buy and how much extra yardage to purchase.

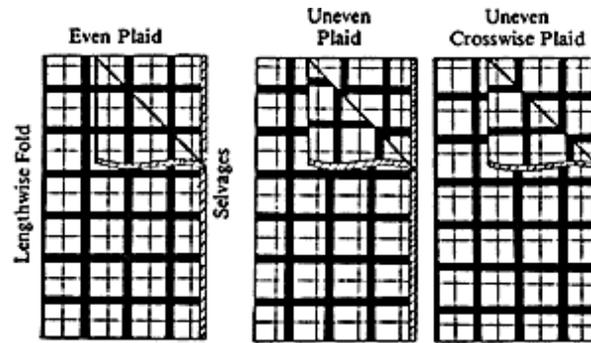
In an even plaid, the arrangement of both lengthwise stripes and crosswise stripes are the same, creating a perfectly balanced repeat. The even or balanced plaid is the easiest to match during layout and sewing.

In an uneven plaid, the arrangement of either the lengthwise stripes or crosswise stripes are different on either side of the main lengthwise and/or crosswise bar.

To tell which plaids are even or uneven, make your own "in store" test. Fold the fabric diagonally through the center of any repeat. The plaid is uneven if the spaces and bands of color do not match along the outside side edges. The plaid is even if the spaces and bands of color match.

Check both the vertical and horizontal plaid design. It may be even in one direction and uneven in the other. (See *Figure 1*)

Figure 1.

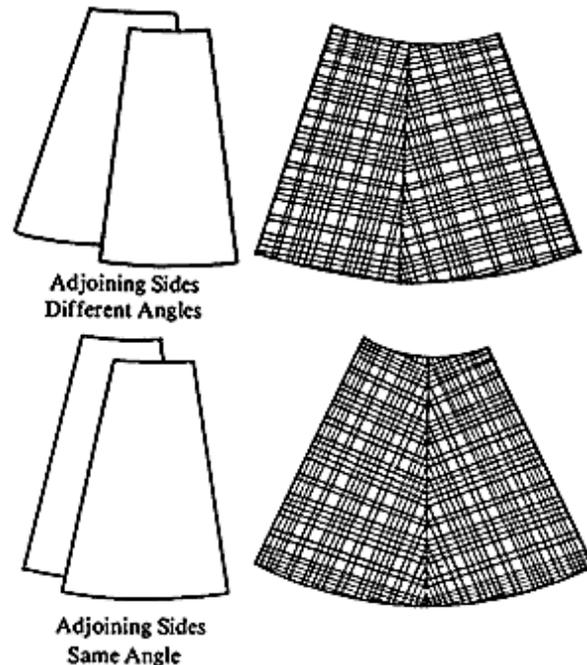


Selecting The Right Pattern

Patterns with few seams are the best choice for plaids because the pattern lines and the fabric design won't compete with each other. Avoid style lines that have curves (such as princess lines) since they make working with a plaid more difficult.

Check the back of the pattern envelope to see if the "yardage" section recommends the use of a plaid. Do not use a plaid if the pattern envelope is marked "not suitable for plaids." Also, check to see that adjoining sides of a seam have the same angle. If they don't the fabric design will not match. (See *Figure 2*)

Figure 2.



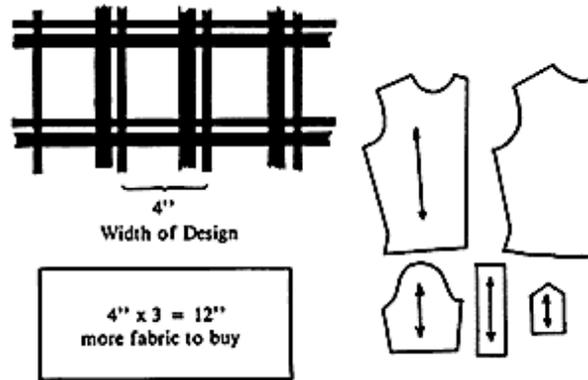
If the pattern envelope states "Extra fabric needed to match plaids," then you can use that pattern with both even and uneven plaids. You only need to know how much extra fabric to buy.

Buying Extra Yardage

When you work with plaids, you can expect some wasted fabric. You will need to purchase more yardage to match the design than you would when buying a plain fabric for the same pattern.

First, measure the width in inches of each design repeat. Next, count the number of major pattern pieces you plan to use. Multiply these two numbers together to determine the number of extra inches to buy. (Example: 4 inches between repeats \times 3 major pattern pieces = 12 extra inches or 1/3 yard (See *Figure 3*).

Figure 3.



Add the number of extra inches to the "with or without nap" yardage recommendations if you are working with an even plaid. Add the number of extra inches to the "with nap" yardage recommendations if you are working with an uneven plaid.

Plaid Placement

Make all pattern adjustments before you begin to lay out the pattern. Seams will not match if changes are made after cutting. Since accurate matching is essential, you may want to cut the pattern pieces separately.

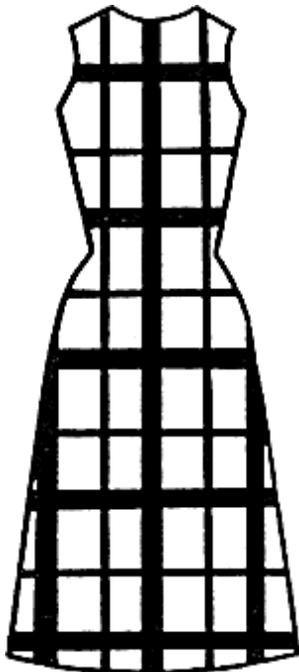
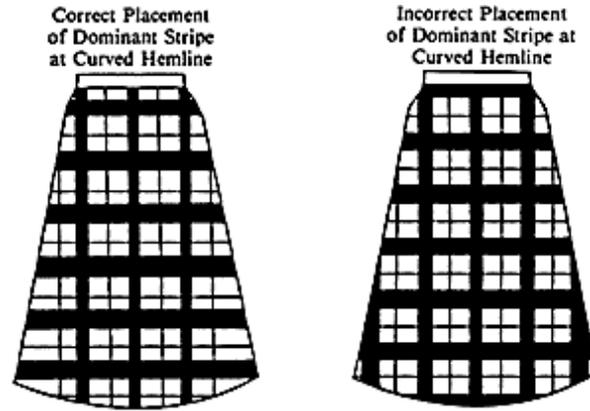


Figure 4. Dominant Lengthwise Stripe-Center Front

Give some thought to your plaid design. Identify a dominant color stripe in both lengthwise and crosswise direction. Plan the garment so the prominent vertical stripe is at the center front and back of the garment, the center of sleeves, yoke and collar (See *Figure 4*). Plan for a dominant crosswise stripe to come just below the shoulders and at, or just above, the hemline. It will not look attractive lying right at the waistline, bustline, or hipline. If the pattern has a curved hemline, the least dominant horizontal stripe of a plaid should be placed at the hem since the hem and plaid will not match at the edge (see *figure 5*). As you lay out your pattern pieces, remember that design lines should be continuous from front to back and from neck to hem in both one- and two-piece garments.

If your fabric is an even plaid, or a plaid uneven only on the crosswise grain, fold the fabric lengthwise along the center of the dominant bar. This may not be the midpoint of the yardage. Pin baste the fabric layers together at intervals along the corresponding lines of the plaid to keep the fabric from shifting as you cut.

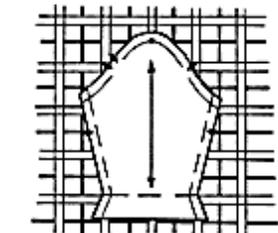
Figure 5.



Matching Point

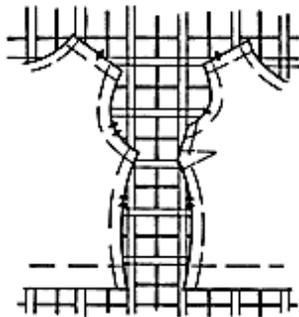
To have a well-made professional look, the plaid stripes must match at all garment openings and at all of the more noticeable seams. When matching adjoining pattern pieces, **match the seamlines rather than the cutting edge**. Use the notches as matching guides. For plaids, match the notches both lengthwise and crosswise (See *Figure 6*).

Figure 6. Match seamlines rather than the cutting edge.



Match crosswise stripes at the following places:

- Center front and center back seams and skirt and bodice openings.
- Bodice side seams and below the underarm dart if there is one.
- Side seams of skirts and pants.
- Sleeve seams. Closely fitted or darted sleeves will not match the full length of the sleeve seam. On Kimono sleeves, match the front and back from the notch down. Raglan sleeves will not match.
- Set-in sleeve to bodice front armhole notches. Generally the back will not match.
- Horizontal bars of collar should match the bars at center back.



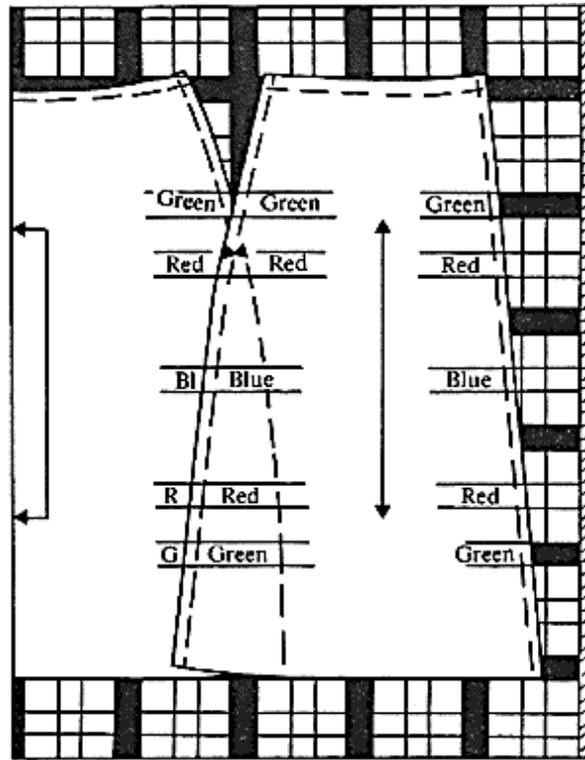
Match lengthwise stripes at the following places:

- Center back of collar or yokes to center back of garment, if possible.
- Center back of yoke at center back of bodice.
- Center front and center back of bodice at center front and back of skirt.

Pockets, yokes, cuffs and bands should match where they join other garment pieces. They may be cut on the bias to create an interesting change.

For accurate matching, transfer the plaid design onto the pattern piece. With a soft lead pencil, trace the plaid design of the fabric onto the pattern along the seam line. Write the names of colors in the spaces. Place the pattern piece to be joined over the first pattern, matching the notches having the same numbers. Trace the plaid design from the first pattern piece to the second one. Place this piece of pattern on the plaid so the thread design matches the design of the fabric under the pattern (See *Figure 7*).

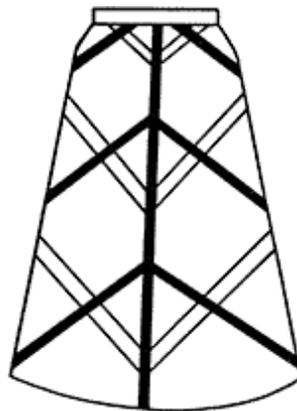
Figure 7. Match pattern pieces for percent match at side seams.



Bias-Cut Plaid

Cutting a plaid on the bias results in a chevron, which is two sets of stripes meeting at identical angles. The specific angle of the "V" formed depends on the angle of the seams in relation to the lengthwise grainline. Choose an even plaid as it will chevron easily. Uneven plaids require a "mirror image" layout and a pattern with a center front and center back seam. The pattern pieces are cut once, then reversed and turned upside down before they are cut again (See *Figure 8*).

Figure 8. Bias cut resulting in a chevron pattern.



Sewing Techniques

When you stitch plaids, you may find that the top layer of fabric creeps forward and prevents a perfect

match. To help prevent this, try the following suggestions:

1. Use a special presser foot -- such as the roller foot or the even-feed foot.
2. Slip baste the seams using regular thread or a washaway basting thread. To slip baste, turn under and press the seam allowance on one garment piece. Working from the right side of the fabric, lay the folded edge along the seam allowance to the other piece. Match the plaids and pin in place. Slip needle along upper fold, then through the lower layer. Continue this way until seam is basted. Make a stitch at each important plaid, bar or stripe. Machine stitch seam from the wrong side following the basting line (See *Figure 9*).
3. Use double-faced basting tape. Place the tape in the seam allowance, but away from the seamline.
4. Use a washable glue stick to hold the matched plaid together.

Figure 9. Slipbasting holds matching stripes in place.



Select a color of thread slightly darker than the main color in the plaid fabric. Thread appears darker on a spool than it actually is.

Machine stitch at a slow to moderate speed to reduce slippage between the two pieces of fabric.

Plaids add an additional design dimension to many garments. When sewing with plaids, avoid complicated fashions and let the plaid tell the story. Those extra minutes spent in matching plaids during layout and sewing will result in a garment with a professional look.

File HEG36 under TEXTILES, CLOTHING AND DESIGN

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