

1970

## EC70-462 All About Plaids

Jane Williamson

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# ALL ABOUT PLAIDS

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E. C. 70-462

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**P**laids have a perennial charm that has intrigued men and women for many years. One feels comfortable and at home with most plaids, yet each season brings refreshingly new ways of using them. In the spring the pastel gingham seem perky and cool while in the fall, plaid wools are warm looking and bright.

There are many interesting ways that plaid fabrics can be used to look their best. Whether buying a ready-made garment or planning to make one, you will find that there are some important things to consider if you want to have the best looking garment for the money you spend.

Plaids come to us from many lands. Two of the most influential areas have been Scotland and India. A look at the history of plaids in these two countries will point up some of the reasons for their continuing popularity.

## TARTAN PLAIDS, THEIR HISTORY AND USE

History tells us that tartans have been used for some five centuries in Scotland--mostly by the Highlanders. King James in 1471 purchased tartan, according to his treasurer's records. Even in 1572 housewives were having trouble in clothing their families. One housewife gave colored wool to a weaver to make into cloth. He didn't make it up according to her instructions and used his own plaid designs instead. She hauled him into court, where he was found guilty and punished.

The first tartans, it is believed, were simple ones of two or three colors, depending on the natural dyes available in the district where the cloth was woven. The color pattern or sett was marked, thread color by thread color, on a wooden stick, which was used as a reference when the plaid was to be duplicated.

To put down rebellion to the British Crown in 1746 an Act of Parliament made it unlawful for the Highlanders to wear their tartans. By 1785, when the Act had been repealed, many of the old patterns had been lost and the Scots no longer had the desire to wear the tartan

clothing. In 1822 King George IV suggested revival of tartans and many "original" tartans were invented.

Of the tartans in use today there are three general classes, the clan tartan, the dress tartan and the hunting tartan. The clan tartan is for general use, the dress tartan, in lighter colors, for the ladies and the hunting tartan in colors easily camouflaged. These colorful tartans have come down through the pages of history as constant favorites on the fashion scene.

## ALL ABOUT CHECKS

Most checks also came from Scotland. The district checks are named for the valleys or mountains in the various districts of Scotland. The original pattern was the shepherd check in black and white, and it is older than the district check patterns, which date from the mid-19th century. These patterns developed on the estates of the landowners, who provided their employees with clothing. Each estate had its own pattern. The colors chosen were of the flowers, rocks and soil of the local countryside.

Nearly all of the checks have the same colors going crosswise and lengthwise of the fabric, so the patterns consist of evenly colored squares.

## TYPES OF PLAIDS AND CHECKS

A shepherd's check usually is a color with white and has even sized blocks; gingham is an example. District checks are even-sized blocks of two or three colors. A hound's tooth check has even sized checks but is done with a twill weave. An argyle plaid is of multicolored blocks with bars of two colors centered through the blocks.

A windowpane plaid is a one-color bar evenly spaced on a solid ground, while a tattersal plaid has two color bars evenly spaced on a solid ground. Tartans, are, of course, Scotch clan plaids. Other types of plaids are shadow plaids and monotonies. Texture and weave of fabric can be varied to give the effect of plaid in a subtle way.



EC 70-462

## THE STORY OF MADRAS PLAIDS

Madras, or "bleeding Madras" as it is sometimes called, is an Indian fabric made by villagers from the province of Madras. The men do most of the work, dyeing the yarn hanks in earthenware pots with non-fast vegetable dyes. The yarn is woven into the fabric, which is then collected and taken to the river for washing. It is washed three times and then dried on the riverbank sand. It is ironed by hand, folded and sorted. Collected from the village weavers, the Madras is taken to the exporter's warehouse to await shipment to America.

As the Madras is dyed with vegetable dyes which are not fast to laundering, Madras garments must be washed separately. Many people feel that the resultant blending of the colors enhances the appearance of the fabric.

Madras, being woven on hand looms, is not regular in size, so it is almost impossible to have the plaids matched in clothing.

American chemists have developed chemical dyes which bleed, so you may find an American fabric similar to Madras in the stores. It, however, is of a standard size, since it is woven on machines and thus the plaids can be matched perfectly.

## SELECTING PLAID GARMENTS

View the garment from a distance through squinted eyes to get the effect of the plaid. . . bright or dark, bold or muted. The effect of the plaid changes with its size. Small checks or plaids give an all-over effect and conceal pounds! Medium and large sized plaids give the reverse effect. Plaids with heavy vertical bars add to the illusion of height while heavy horizontal bars will add to the appearance of width.

Small sized plaids are best for children. Teenagers, if slender, can wear the boldest plaids and the brightest colors. Medium and small plaids in more conservative colors are best for the mature figure.

Consider the proportion of colors in the plaid. They should be related to each other in the same proportions as any good color scheme, with one color predominating and the others blending or contrasting. A dark background is more slimming than a lighter one. A muted plaid is more slimming and conservative than one with great color contrast. The colors in the plaid will give you the key to your accessory colors.

A plaid top and a plain skirt will make the hips appear smaller and the top larger. A plain top and a plaid skirt will reverse the illusion. Touches or parts of the ensemble in solid colors will set off the plaid as a frame does a picture.

Plaids, being of a tailored nature, call for tailored styles in clothing. Bias areas and pleated skirts or

tucking will provide opportunity to create interesting patterns. Plaids have enough pattern of their own; they need no competition from other decoration, such as scalloped edges, laces and fancy trims.

Plaids should be matched on center front, center back and side seams of skirt or slacks. It is best if the sleeve plaid matches the bodice plaid at the notches, and pockets should match or be on the bias. The center back collar plaid should match the center back bodice plaid. Kimono sleeves should match all of the way down the arm at the top seam if a balanced plaid.

A major bar of the plaid should run down the center of the belt, waistband, cuffs, collars, pockets or tucks. Pleats should be made so that an attractive pattern is repeated around the skirt.

Bias pieces should be on true diagonals. If the bodice is bias and has set-in sleeves, the sleeves should be on the straight grain. See illustration below.

When a plaid is used in an ensemble the other items should be in related plain colors. Occasionally fashion dictates the use of stripes with plaids. If carefully done with the two patterns related in size and color, a striking combination can be achieved. All too often, however, the effect is merely a jumble of clashing patterns.

When the plaid is an uneven one, in which the colors are not the same on either side of the main bars, be sure that the directions are identical on each piece of the garment. You don't want the plaid on the sleeves upside down or traveling from right to left instead of left to right. The exception would be if a chevron effect was desired with the plaid reversing at the chevron. See illustration.

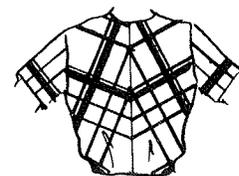


Fig. 1 CHEVRON EFFECT

## PRINTED OR WOVEN??

Plaids may be woven or printed. The woven ones generally are reversible while the printed ones are not. Printed plaids usually are less expensive. Be sure that the printed plaids are printed on grain; that is, the bars of the plaids should be along the crosswise and lengthwise threads. (See illustration.) Off grain printing never is satisfactory for if the garment is cut according to grain the plaids will be crooked, or if the garment is cut according to the plaids the garment will hang crooked.

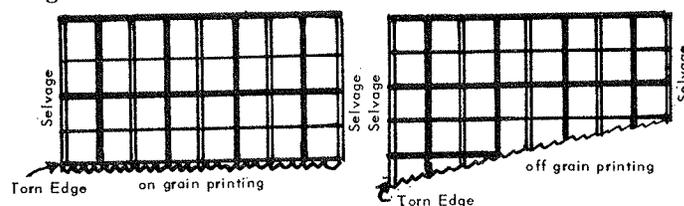


Fig. 2 PRINTED PLAIDS

## GETTING THE BEST FOR YOUR MONEY

In store stocks of the same item, often some garments will be better matched than others. After you have decided on a particular item, inspect all in that style in your size and select the best one. Be sure to consider fiber content, fabric finishes and care required.

## HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR PURCHASE

Remove any trims which overdecorate the item. Maybe a plainer button is better, for instance. Restitch seams where plaids almost match if it will not change the fit needed.

## BALANCED AND UNBALANCED PLAIDS

There are several different ways that plaid patterns are woven or printed. The balanced plaid is one that reverses on all sides of the main bar. Unbalanced plaids are not the same. Some are balanced crosswise but not lengthwise while others are balanced lengthwise but not crosswise. The most complicated plaids are those that are balanced neither crosswise nor lengthwise. Study these illustrations.

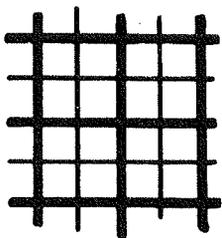


Fig. 3 BALANCED

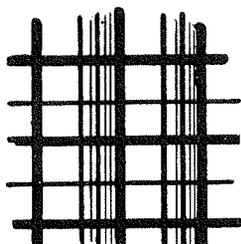


Fig. 4 RIGHT AND LEFT

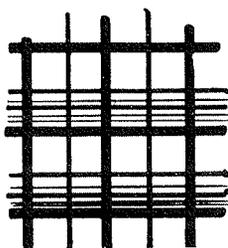


Fig. 5 UNBALANCED  
UP AND DOWN

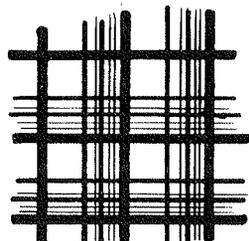


Fig. 6 UNBALANCED UP AND DOWN  
AND RIGHT - LEFT

To check your fabric for balance, fold it lengthwise and then turn the top layer back. The bars will match if the plaid is balanced crosswise. Then fold the fabric crosswise, and again turn the top layer back. If the plaid is balanced lengthwise the bars will match. Sometimes a plaid is evenly spaced but the colors don't repeat, so it is an unbalanced plaid.

When a plaid is not balanced crosswise it is said to have a right and a left. A plaid not balanced lengthwise has an up and down. Look to see if there is a right or a wrong side to the fabric. Printed fabrics will not be reversible and some woven plaids have napped or other finishes on one side only. These one-sided fabrics cannot be used if a balanced effect is desired and the plaid has both an up-down and a right-left.

## SELECTING THE PATTERN

Choose a pattern that is sketched in plaid or stripes in the pattern book or suggests plaids under the recommended fabrics. It may be impossible to match plaids if other patterns are used. You will find that the best patterns are simple ones with few pieces, which will minimize the matching and set off the beauty of the plaid.

Avoid patterns with princess lines, curved seams, scallops, raglan sleeves, or many-gored skirts. If you have an unbalanced plaid and the fabric is reversible, try to select a pattern that has a seam down the center front and back.

A very simple pattern is suggested for Indian Madras as this fabric is hand woven and often the plaids cannot be matched.

If you select a pattern that has a bias skirt and does not recommend using plaids, make sure that the angles of the various skirt seams are identical at each seam or you will not be able to match the plaids.

## BUYING THE FABRIC

The selection of plaid fabrics for sewing is similar to the selection of ready-to-wear in plaids.

1. View plaid from a distance.
2. Consider the proportion of colors.
3. Relate size of plaid to size of garment and wearer.
4. Purchase only those printed plaids that are printed on grain.
5. Consider present wardrobe. Will you need to buy new accessories?

If you are working with plaid for the first time, choose a plaid that matches in both directions . . . a balanced plaid. Examples are tattersals and gingham made of squares. (Some are made of rectangles.)

Read the labels on the bolt end to see what the fabric is made of and the care that it requires. Note this information on the salescheck. Later transfer fiber content and special finish information onto garment by writing on the seam allowance with a laundry marking pen or writing on tape to be sewn inside the garment. It's easy to remove a spot when you know what the fabric is!

If you are buying from samples be sure that the sample shows the entire design repeat . . . across as well as up and down. You may find there is quite a different effect in a large piece of fabric.

When thinking of a pleated style garment, fold the fabric to see what effects you will get from the pleating. A plaid and a pattern should enhance each other and be related as to proportion and design.

If using plain colors as trim for the plaid, consider washability of each piece. It may be better to use detachable collars and cuffs if of white pique, etc.

If the fabric guide on the pattern envelope doesn't indicate yardage for plaids, allow about 1/4 yard extra for the smaller plaids and about 1/2 yard for the larger plaids. To figure more closely, allow one repeat for every two places you have to match plaids. (For example, if you are matching a blouse center front, back and sleeves this would be four places to be matched so you would allow for two repeats.)

### PREPARATION OF FABRIC

Preshrink all fabric, interfacing and lining. Be sure the crosswise threads are running at right angles to the selvages. If there is no resinous finish the fabric may be pulled on the diagonal to restore the fabric to its proper shape. Press with a press cloth and a steam iron. If the fabric has a resinous finish it cannot be straightened and should be avoided.

If you cut two pieces at a time there is a possibility the underpiece will slip and be crooked.

The most accurate way to cut plaids is to cut each piece individually, so press fabric open to have it lie flat.

### PLACEMENT OF PATTERN

The major vertical bar should go down the center front and back of the bodice and skirt or slacks and down the center of the sleeve. If the bar is not too large it should be centered on the cuff, collar, pocket, belt, waistband and tuck details. Try out the various parts of the plaid to get the most pleasing effect. All of the details should repeat the same part of the plaid. Plan the size of any pleating to accommodate the size of the plaid. The pattern should repeat all the way around with the same bars reappearing.

If you place the main bar up the center of the garment, where will the other bars fall? If the colors and sizes of the plaid are fairly evenly proportioned, you can change the effect of the plaid by positioning the stripes differently. One bodice appears lighter than the other as it has less heavy bars appearing.

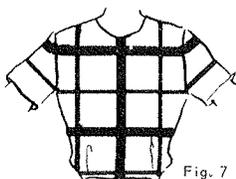


Fig. 7

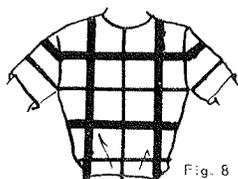


Fig. 8

Take care in the placement of the horizontal bars too. One should fall just below the shoulders. Allow one-half the width of the main bar at the hemline so the

skirt doesn't appear too heavy. Alternate bars at the waistline. If top of skirt ends in a heavy bar try to have the bodice start with a light bar. Two heavy bars together may create an undesirable pattern.

### WHICH PLAIDS TO MATCH

The plaid should match in the following places: Center front, center back, center of back collar with center back, sleeves to bodice at notches, pockets if on the straight grain, yoke at center back, side seams of bodice above darts, and all skirt seams. Vertical bars of the plaid should match center front and back to skirt if separate. Jacket vertical bars should match skirt bars all the way around. Dress bodice and skirt should match all around if the dress is a fitted style.

### HOW TO MATCH PLAIDS ON A BALANCED PLAID

You match the plaids at the stitching line, not at the notches, so, where possible, fold back the seam allowance when pinning and press flat again when ready to cut.

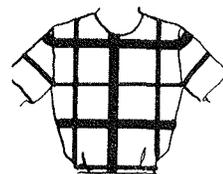


Fig. 9 BALANCED PLAID

1. Pin the front bodice to the fabric with the main bar down the center front and the main crosswise bar just below the shoulders:

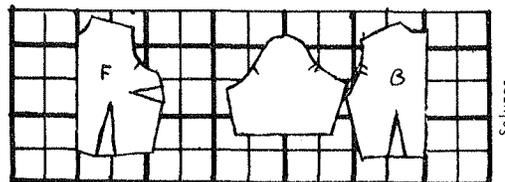


Fig. 10 BALANCED PLAID

2. Pin sleeves, matching corresponding bars with main vertical bar down the center of the sleeve. When you have the bodice front pinned where you want it, lay tracing paper at the armseye notch. Trace the plaid onto the tracing paper. Indicate the notch and curve of the armseye. Then when you are ready to lay out the sleeve it will be easy to place the tracing paper on top of the sleeve pattern at the notch and match the fabric plaid bars to the tracing paper plaid bars. Repeat for other parts of the garment. Sometimes you will want only to match the horizontal bars, so draw only these, it will be faster and less confusing.
3. Pin back bodice, matching corresponding crosswise bars and the main bar down the center back.
4. Consider the location of the darts. They should not distort the plaid. Generally they should run alongside a major bar or in an inconspicuous part of the plaid - not down the center of a bar. Fold your fabric to determine best placement. Move location of darts on paper pattern if necessary.

5. Pin the pieces of the skirt or slacks in the same manner, considering the vertical bars down the center front and back and the horizontal bars traveling around the garment.
6. Before you cut, check each piece for lengthwise grain and for matching.
7. Cut out pieces and mark with tailor's tacks. Reverse cut fabric piece and use as a pattern to cut out the other half (or flip pattern to cut other half if on a fold). It is easy to match the plaids in this manner. Or you may draw the plaid on the paper pattern and match this up. Be sure to remember to reverse the pattern or the fabric -- whichever you use!
8. If there is no nap to the fabric, balanced plaids can be cut with the pattern piece tops in either direction. This is generally more economical of fabric.

A balanced plaid, as far as colors are concerned, will have to be considered an uneven plaid if the blocks of the plaids are rectangles instead of squares. Often gingham checks fall into this category. If you have plaid fabric of this nature, follow the directions under uneven up and down plaids.

### HOW TO MATCH PLAIDS ON AN UNBALANCED PLAID

- A. Right/Left Plaid . . . Where there is no reverse from left to right of the central bar, but there is a reverse up and down. See illustrations 11 and 12.

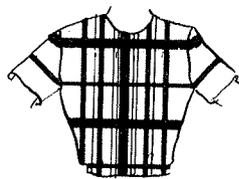


Fig. 11

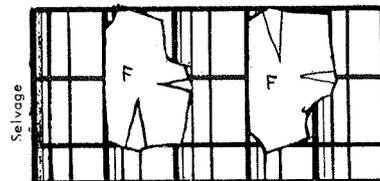


Fig. 12 RIGHT AND LEFT PLAID

Read rules for sewing on the balanced plaids first. Then note these differences. All of the pattern pieces must head in one direction if not balancing at center front. Sleeves should continue the design around the figure. When you do plan to balance, have a center front and a center back seam on the bodice and skirt. Have seam line at center of main bar. Cut one piece and reverse the pattern for the other half. See illustration. (In certain cases, the garment could be cut crosswise of the fabric, in which case follow the direction below.) Uneven plaids cannot be perfectly matched along a true diagonal seam.

- B. Up and Down Plaid . . . Where there is no reverse above or below the central bar but there is a reverse

left and right. See illustrations 13 and 14. Read rule for balanced plaid, page 4. Place pattern pieces so they head in one direction. Proceed as for balanced plaid, keeping in mind placement of crosswise bars.

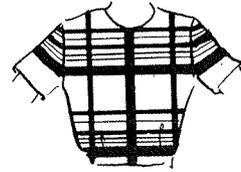


Fig. 13

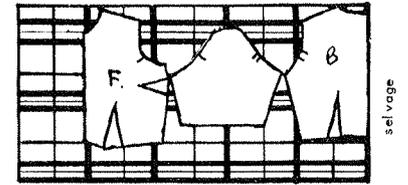


Fig. 14 UP AND DOWN PLAID

- C. Right/Left and Up/Down Plaid . . . Where there is no reversal of pattern in either direction. See illustrations 15 and 16. Read preceding rules.



Fig. 15 PLAID UNBALANCED BOTH WAYS

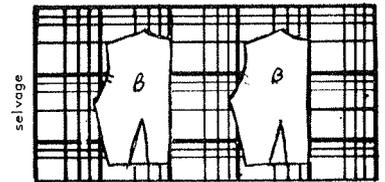


Fig. 16 UNBALANCED BOTH WAYS

1. If the fabric has no right or wrong side, head all pattern pieces in one direction. Cut one side, placing center front seam on the middle of the main bar. Cut another side exactly the same, not opposite. You will have two rights or lefts. Matching is done by having right side cut on one piece and the wrong side cut on the other, so you can see why the material must be reversible. Cut other pieces accordingly, keeping in mind the placements of the crosswise bars.
2. If the fabric has a right and a wrong side (as in a printed plaid), again place all pattern pieces heading in one direction. A balanced effect is not possible. If a center seam is used, place pattern so a pleasing effect may be achieved. When there is no center line lay pattern so overall effect is one of balance. See illustration 17. Match cross bars when cutting out sleeves. In the skirt the bars should progress around the body.

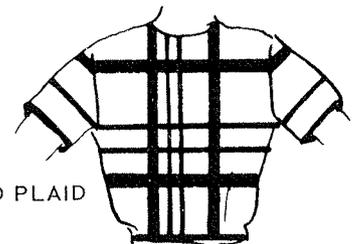


FIG. 17 UNBALANCED PLAID CENTERED

Sometimes an attractive pattern can be obtained if the unbalanced plaid is used on the diagonal. See illustration 18. Lay sleeves on straight grain. You may wish to drape the material on the individual to find the most attractive placement.



Fig. 18

### DETAILS TO PLAN FOR

When you are balancing the plaids (reversing) you will need to do some experimenting to see what effect you like the best. Fold the fabric and bring it together as if it were a seam. Then when you do the layout you will not have an unattractive effect such as two dark bars coming together, which would draw too much attention to the seam.

When it is necessary to piece a plaid, locate your seam alongside a bar, not down the center of the bar. The seam will then be less conspicuous.

The facings must match the outside color bar of the garment both lengthwise and crosswise. Top collar and bottom collar must match too.

If the blocks of an even plaid are not rectangular, consider making yokes and other pieces on the bias where you cannot match crosswise and lengthwise plaids. If the plaid isn't square avoid kimono sleeves, for matching is impossible.

Try mitering collars and pockets and other details for an interesting effect if the plaids are simple, like winduppane and shadow plaids. Harlequin prints are matched the same way as the printed plaids.

If you have a button front with a lapover and are using a plaid with a right and left, the only way to match plaids is to have them travel around the body and not reverse at center front and back. If plaids must reverse, consider a zipper or a button and loop arrangement with no lap over.

A chevron effect is another variation to point up the rhythm of a plaid. Often this pattern is used on a skirt too. See illustration 1.

Review points to consider under selecting plaid garments.

If self fabric interfacing is used, match it to outer plaids when using sheer fabrics.

### SEWING ON PLAID FABRICS

Careful planning will mean correctly cut plaid pieces and easier sewing!

As most fabrics tend to creep slightly when pinned and sewn or are of a spongy fabric (like wool) the slip basting method usually is employed. Slip basting is done on the right side. One seam allowance is folded under on the seamline and pinned to the right side of the other piece along the seamline. Plaids are matched. Pins should be at right angles to the seamline.

To slip-baste, catch threads on under side, then slip needle into the fold for 1/4 inch. See illustration. Repeat. Press out the fold and stitch along basting thread. Remove basting and press. If the machine moves the bottom layer of fabric along more quickly than the top, place a strip of tissue paper between the feeddog and the fabric before stitching. Tear away tissue after stitching. You may wish to lighten the pressure somewhat, too. Accuracy is a must in matching plaids, so do not be satisfied until your seams are perfect.

Another method of sewing plaids is to pin the right sides together with the pins at right angles. Place pins in the fabric at the seamline on the top layer and slightly below the seamline on the bottom layer. As the pin exits it slides the fabric down so the two seamlines do not lie directly under each other. Place pins no more than one inch apart. You will need to experiment to get the right placement; each fabric differs. When you are satisfied with the pinning, sew as for a regular seam, removing the pins as you come to them. Press.

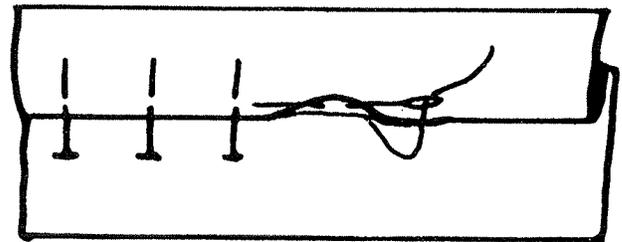


Fig. 19 SLIP STITCHING