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Rose Marie Tondl

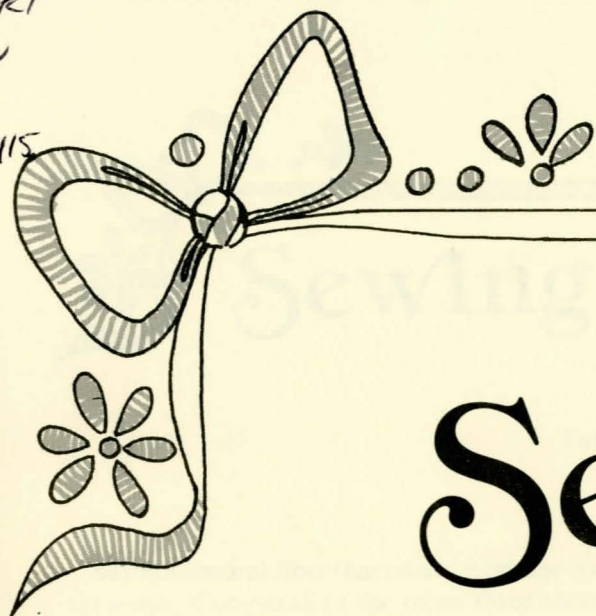
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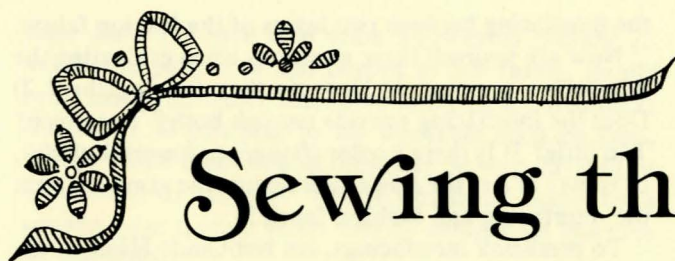
Sewing the Silkies



Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Leo E. Lucas, Director of Cooperative Extension Service, University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.



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Sewing the Silkies

Rose Marie Tondl
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Silk is a natural fiber that comes from the cocoon of a silkworm. Compared to the other three natural fibers (wool, linen, and cotton), silk is the strongest. Silk retains 80% of its strength when wet. It can be made into fabrics ranging from very sheer and drapable to heavy, stiff bouffant fabrics.

Silk is considered the queen of fibers because of its luxurious feel and hand. It is resistant to wrinkles and soiling. Other remarkable qualities include its ability to absorb moisture to keep cool in summer and warm in winter, and its resistance to mildew and moths.

Silk also has some disadvantages. White or light colored silk fabrics may turn gray and yellow with age. Body perspiration and strong sunlight tends to weaken the fibers, and will frequently alter the color and strength. Strong detergents, enzyme presoaks, and chlorine bleach are too harsh for use on silk.




Silk Fabric Types

Silk comes in a wide variety—from tissue-thin sheers to medium and heavier weights. The following are some common types.

- **Noil and noil types**—The fiber comes from the inner most part of the silk cocoon. The fibers are shredded, combed, and spun. These fabrics, which include tussah, noils, and blends of these, have a heavier weave and are soft, slightly nubby, and cotton-like in appearance.
- **Crepe de Chine**—This plain weave fabric has a soft drape.
- **Spun silk, Habutai, and China silk**—These fabrics are very soft and extremely lightweight. They are used primarily for linings, underlinings, and lingerie.
- **Douppioni types**—These light to heavy weight fabrics have a nubby texture caused by slub yarns. They include shantung with slight and heavy crisp textures, and pongees.

- **Peau de soie**—This fabric varies in weight. It is a strong, firm fabric with a dull, satiny surface.
- **Silk blends**—Silk is often combined with other natural or man-made fibers. This blending may contribute to the hand, drape, surface interest, warmth and/or washability of the fabric.

Silk-like fabrics are made from synthetic fibers or a blend of silk and synthetic fibers, including acetate, rayon, nylon, triacetate, and polyester.




Selecting Fabric and Pattern

When sewing with silk fabrics, keep in mind the type being used. Choose the right fabric for each garment design. Consider construction details such as seams, pleats, and gathers, and determine how the fabric will respond to them.

If the garment calls for soft gathers, choose a fabric that will drape easily. Lighter weight types gather and pleat without being bulky. The firmer weight fabrics are best used for garment designs that have straight lines.

Since silk has an intrinsic beauty, select patterns with little detail and a looser fit. Because of silk's draping qualities, you don't need as many seams, darts, and fitting lines.



Preshrinking Silk Fabrics

Ready-to-wear silk garments are usually labeled "Dry Clean Only." This is often because it is not practical for the manufacturer to prewash the fabric, linings, and interfacings before constructing the garments.

Before sewing with silk fabric at home, preshrink the fabric, notions, linings, and interfacings. This allows you to wash the finished garment. Before preshrinking the silk, TEST a 4x4" swatch or corner for a change in these four silk qualities:

- 1) *Color*—There will be some color loss in the washing due to run-off of excess dye. Check prints for permanent running of darker colors onto light ones.
- 2) *Texture*—There may be a change in the softness or stiffness of the fabric.
- 3) *Sheen*—There may be a change in the surface quality. The fabric may become duller.
- 4) *Size*—Some silks may shrink more than others. If the test patch shrinks 1/4 inch in the length, the fabric will shrink 2 1/4 inches per yard, and you may want to buy extra fabric.

If none of these changes are objectional, wash, damp dry, and iron the fabric following these directions:

- a) Use lukewarm water (100°F) and a mild liquid dishwashing detergent. Use the bathtub for several yards.
- b) Place the loosely folded fabric into the water and swish it around for a few minutes.
- c) Rinse the fabric thoroughly in cool (50°F) water.
- d) Squeeze the water from the fabric. Do not wring or twist it. Roll the fabric up in a towel to remove the excess moisture. Remove the fabric from the towel, and using a dry or steam iron on a low setting, iron it.

Another option is to take the fabric to a dry cleaners to be preshrunk. Brocades, velvets, chiffon, metallics, and some crepes and satins are best preshrunk by the dry cleaners. They will lose their sheen, shrink excessively, change texture, or streak if washed.

Selecting Interfacing

Interfacings are an important part of a well-made garment. They prevent stretching and add body to garment edges and detail areas. To achieve these results, it is important to choose interfacings wisely.

Select interfacings that are lighter in weight than the fashion fabric. Experiment with different weights and colors.

Do not use fusibles on fine silky sheers as the bonding agent can "strike through" to the right side. Use a sew-in interfacing instead. Self fabric may be used in lightweight fabrics.

Always TEST sew-in and fusible interfacings on a sample of the fashion fabric being used. To test a fusible interfacing, follow the manufacturer's directions. If you'll be washing the finished garment, wash and press the test sample. To test a sew-in interfacing, sandwich

the interfacing between two layers of the fashion fabric.

Now ask yourself these questions when evaluating the interfacing samples: 1) How do they feel together? 2) Does the interfacing provide enough body? Too much? Too little? 3) Is there a color change, or lumps, bubbles, or spots? 4) Are the care requirements the same for both the interfacing and fashion fabric?

To preshrink interfacings, see NebGuide HEG 76-45, "Interfacings."

If you do use a fusible interfacing, fuse it to facings, undercollars and undercuffs. Any texture change or strike through will then be on an inside layer of fashion fabric (Figure 1).

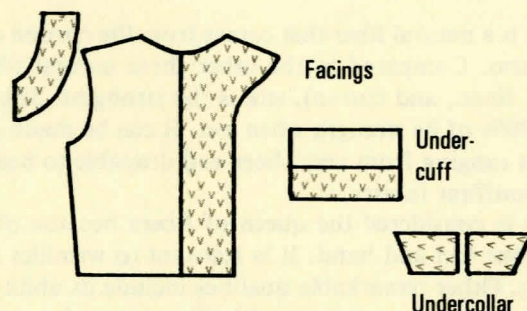


Figure 1.

Notions and Sewing Techniques

Threads — Select the finest, softest thread available. Long staple polyester, 100% cotton, or polyester core/cotton wrapped threads are the most commonly available for silk and silk-like fabrics. You may want to try thread labeled "extra fine" or "for lightweight fabrics and machine embroidery." Avoid bargain threads as they tend to fray, cause lint problems, and break easily. Silk thread is not recommended for sewing on silk as the thread is extremely strong and can actually "cut" seams in a fitted garment.

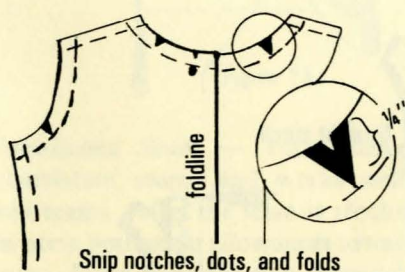
Pins — Use fine, sharp pins that are labeled silk or pleating pins. Pin in the seam allowances, not in the garment, to avoid pin marks. Do not sew over pins.

Needles — Use a new sewing machine needle for every new silky garment. The size of the needle should be compatible with the fabric and thread. Machine needle sizes 9-14 (European 65-90) work best. Use ballpoint needles for knits, sharp needles for wovens. Hand needles sizes 9-10 are best for most hand sewing.

Cutting and Marking — Make sure you have sharp shears for lightweight silks. If you have a slippage problem, cut on a felt surface or pin the fabric to tissue paper. Then pin the pattern pieces through all layers. Cut with long, even strokes.

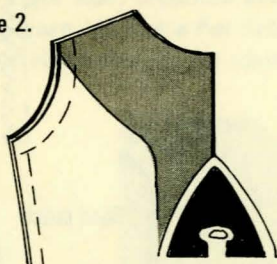
Mark silk or silky fabrics with snips or press mark-

ings. Snip $\frac{1}{4}$ inch into seam allowances (*Figure 2*). While the pattern is still pinned to the fabric, lightly press mark the center front fold lines, pleats, and tucks (*Figure 3*). If you plan to use washable marking pens, always TEST them first as they may be very difficult or impossible to remove. The indentations made by a smooth edge tracing wheel may be enough for marking on the fabric.



Snip notches, dots, and folds

Figure 2.



Mark fabric by pressing

Figure 3.

Pressing — Set the iron on the silk setting or use a lower steam setting (275-300° Fahrenheit). Always test as silky fabrics react differently to heat and steam. Press on the wrong side whenever possible. Use a press cloth on the right side to prevent “iron shine.”

Avoid using shiny, silicone ironing board covers. They can make the fabric too hot. Pad the ironing board with an old wool blanket and use a cotton board cover.

Sewing — For fine silk and silk-like fabrics, set the machine stitch at 10-12 stitches per inch. Use a small holed throat plate or cover a wide zigzag hole with transparent tape (*Figure 4*). Your needle will form a small hole in the tape. Use a straight stitch foot rather than the zigzag foot if your machine has one (*Figure 5*). This will give more control over the fabric.

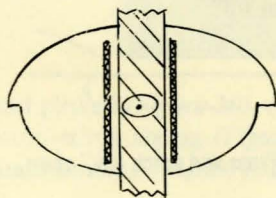
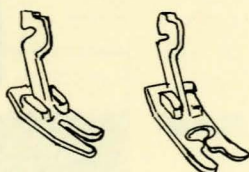


Figure 4.

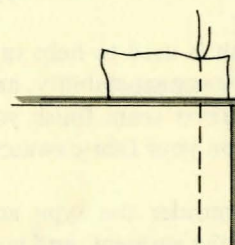
Figure 5.



Straight stitch foot

Zigzag stitch foot

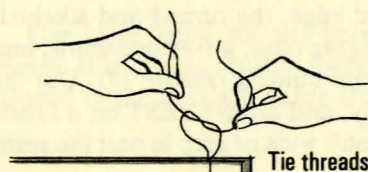
To support lightweight fabric, place tissue paper, adding machine paper, or non-woven tear-away fabric under the fabric layers at the beginning of seams. Start stitching on the paper. This helps to avoid jamming problems. Then, tear away your support material (*Figure 6*).



Start stitching on paper

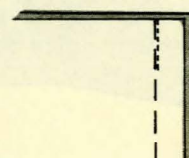
Figure 6.

Avoid backstitching at the beginning and ending of seams to eliminate jamming of the machine. Instead, tie the threads together (*Figure 7*), backstitch in the $\frac{5}{8}$ inch seam allowance area (*Figure 8*), or adjust the stitch length to 15-18 stitches per inch and stitch $\frac{5}{8}$ inch into the seam (*Figure 9*).



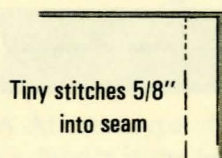
Tie threads together

Figure 7.



Backstitch into the seam

Figure 8.



Tiny stitches $\frac{5}{8}$ " into seam

Figure 9.

To prevent puckering, try “taut sewing” by pulling equally on your fabric in front and behind the needle as you sew. Let the fabric feed through the machine on its own. You may need to adjust the upper tension and lighten the presser foot to let the fabric feed evenly (*Figure 10*).

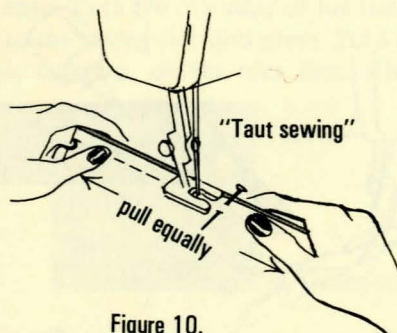


Figure 10.

Other ways to prevent puckering are to shorten the stitch length, sew at a steady, even pace, wind the bobbins slowly, use a finer needle and thread size, and adjust the pressure regulator and machine tension.

If the top layer of fabric is pushed forward, making the seams uneven, use a roller foot or an even-feed type of foot.

Seam Finishes — A seam finish is used to help support the garment's shape, give the garment stability, and prevent fraying or raveling. Whatever seam finish you choose to use, be sure to TEST it on your fabric swatches.

In choosing a seam finish, consider the type and weight of the fabric, the design of the garment, and how often the garment is going to be worn and laundered. Also consider how much the fabric frays or ravels.

Plain Seams — These finishes can be used on any seam, straight or curved. They work best on dark colored or opaque, lightweight fabrics so the seam allowances do not shadow through. Suitable seam finishes are the stitched and pinked edge, the turned and stitched edge, the multi-stitch zigzag edge, a fray preventor, and a sheer, nylon, bias seam binding (*Figure 11*). Use the fray preventor sparingly, and always TEST on a fabric swatch to be sure it doesn't wick or seep in past the seam and cause a stain.

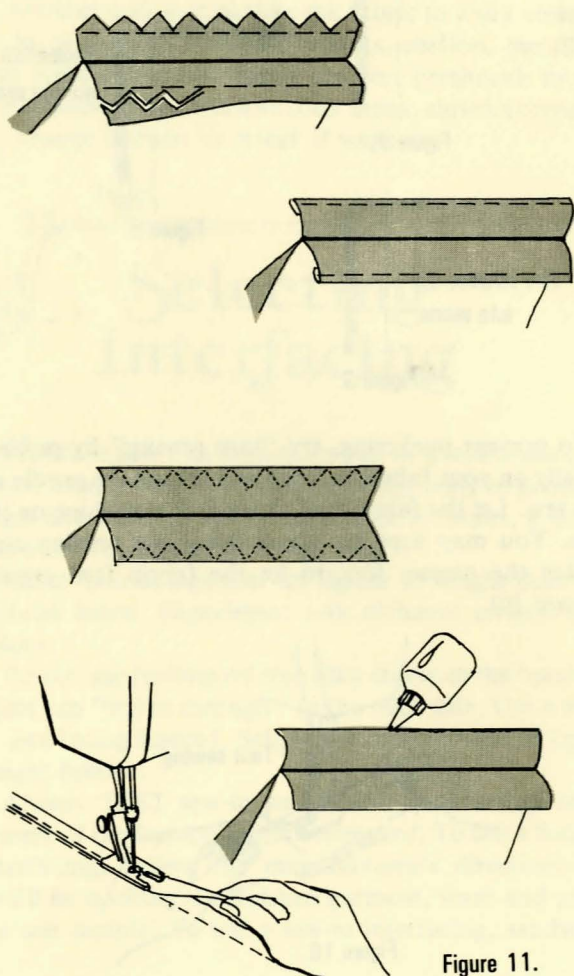
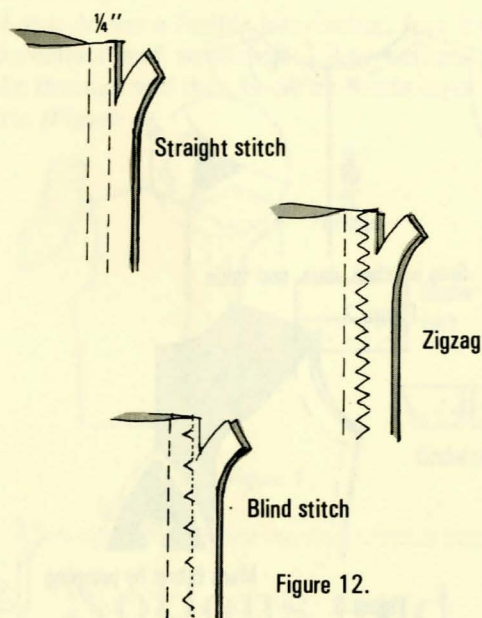


Figure 11.

Narrow, Double Stitched Seam Finish — This seam can be used on any straight or curved seam. The seam is stitched on the seam line. Stitch again 1/4 inch from the first stitching in the seam allowance, or use the blind hem stitch or zigzag. Trim close to the stitching. Press the seam allowance to the front of the garment (*Figure 12*).



French Seam — Use this seam for sheers so that the raw edges of the fabric are totally covered. This seam works best on straight or only slightly curved seams. Place the wrong sides together and stitch a 3/8 inch seam. Trim the seam allowance to 1/8 inch (*Figure 13*). Press both seam allowances to one side. Fold the right sides together with the stitched line exactly on the edge of the fold. Press again. Stitch 1/4 inch from the fold (*Figure 14*). Press the seam allowances to the back side of the garment.

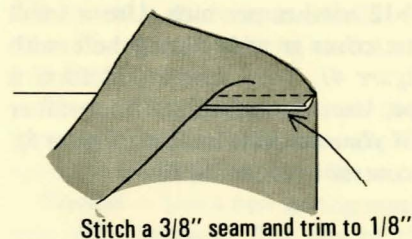


Figure 13.

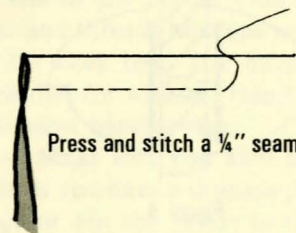


Figure 14.

Mock French Seam — Use this seam for just about any seam, even armholes. Make a regular plain seam, right sides together. Trim both seam allowances to 1/2 inch. Press open. Press 1/4 inch on each seam allowance toward the inside. Edge stitch the folded edges together (Figure 15).

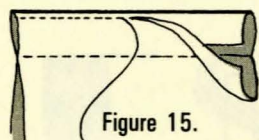


Figure 15.

Topstitched Seam — Topstitching gives durable, ravel-resistant seams and works well on straight or curved seams. After the seam is stitched, press it open. Then press both seam allowances toward the back of the garment. From the right side, topstitch about 3/8 inch from the seamline (Figure 16). For a flat-felled look, put another row of topstitching close to the seamline (Figure 17).

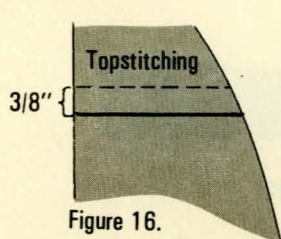


Figure 16.

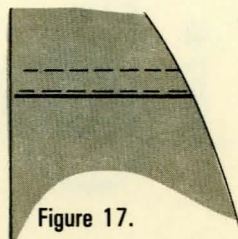


Figure 17.

Hems — Keep the hems on silks and silk-like fabrics simple and without extra bulk. To minimize bulk, trim the seam allowances inside the hem before turning it up (Figure 18).

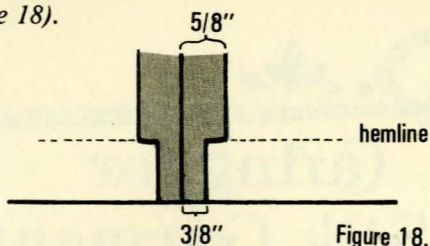


Figure 18.

The hem can be hand stitched or machine stitched. If you hand stitch the hem, finish the raw edge using one of the following methods: pinked (Figure 19), stitched

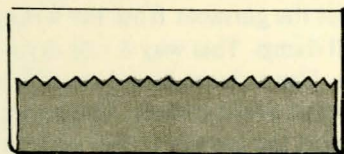


Figure 19.

and pinked (Figure 20), turned and stitched (Figure 21), multi-stitch zigzag (Figure 22), and sheer, nylon, bias seam binding (Figure 23).

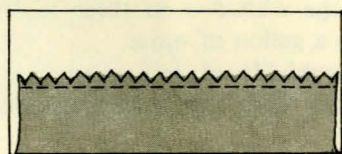


Figure 20.

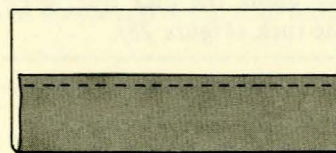


Figure 21.

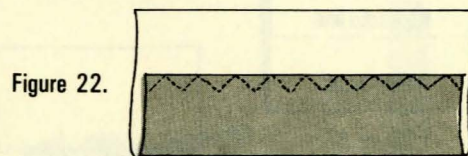


Figure 22.

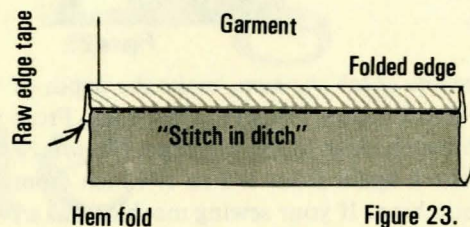


Figure 23.

Use loose blind stitches between the two layers of fabric (Figure 24). Pull or loosen the stitches. Knot the thread in the hem allowance (Figure 25).

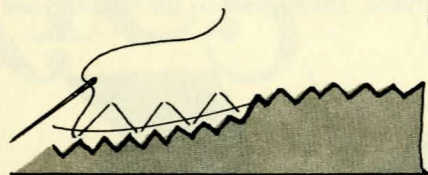


Figure 24.

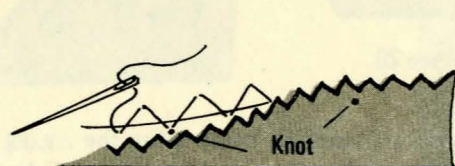


Figure 25.

A different type of hem to use on dresses or skirts in plain fabrics is the *tucked hem*. This hem gives the appearance of a separately applied banding. The hem is hand stitched to the tuck so no stitching shows on the right side. The width can range from 1/4 inch to 3 inches, depending on the curve of the hem.

First, mark the hemline. Decide on the finished width of the band. Mark that amount above the hemline, which will be the tuck line, and below the hemline for the cutting line of the hem edge (Figure 26). Trim along the hem edge. Turn the raw edge of the hem edge under 1/4 inch to the wrong side and press. Fold the garment, right sides together, on the tuck line. Stitch 1/8 inch

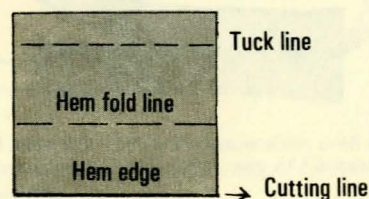


Figure 26

from the fold and press the tuck down (Figure 27). Fold the hem to the wrong side along the tuck line; press. Hand stitch the hem to the tuck (Figure 28).

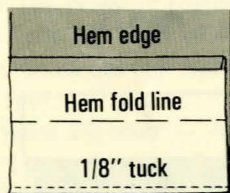


Figure 27.

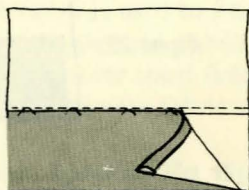


Figure 28.

If you *machine stitch the hem*, make the depth of the hem from 1/2 to 2 inches. Finish the raw edge. From the right side, topstitch close to the top edge, (Figure 29). If desired, topstitch again from 1/8 to 1/4 inch from the first line of stitching. If your sewing machine has a twin needle, use it to create the same effect.

For a *narrow blouse hem*, stitch 1/4 inch from the raw edge. Press the fabric to the wrong side on the stitching line. Turn under 1/4 inch again. From the inside of the garment, stitch close to the fold (Figure 30).

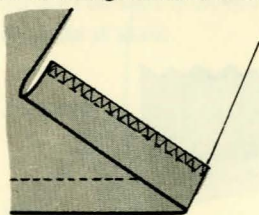


Figure 29.

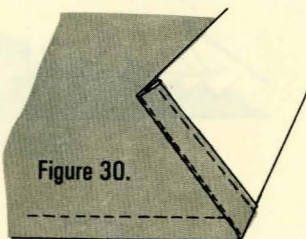


Figure 30.

Two types of machine hems using the zigzag setting are the *Swiss Edge Hem* and the *Scarf Edge*. These methods are suitable for lightweight hems or any straight, curved or bias edges (not recommended for loosely woven fabrics).

With the *Swiss Edge* method, set the machine about 12-15 stitches per inch and on a medium zigzag. Trim the hem allowance to 1/2 inch. Using one strand of pearl cotton or buttonhole twist, zigzag directly over the thread 1/2 inch from the edge. Trim close to zigzagging. With the same or a slightly wider stitch, zigzag again over the cut edge (Figure 31).

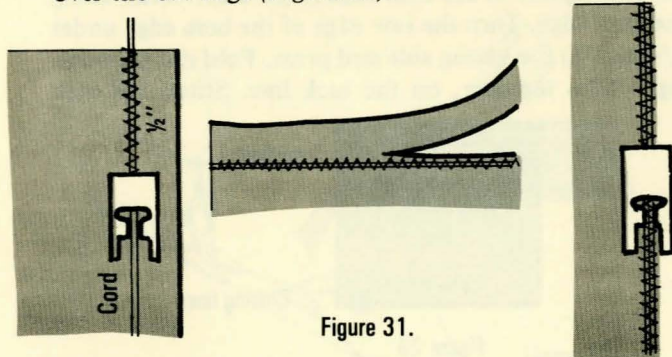


Figure 31.

The *Scarf Edge* method begins with the hem allowance trimmed to 1/2 to 1 inch. Straight stitch along the hemline. Fold the hem allowance to the wrong side on this stitching line. Zigzag along the edge, using a close, medium width stitch. Trim the hem allowance close to the stitching (Figure 32).

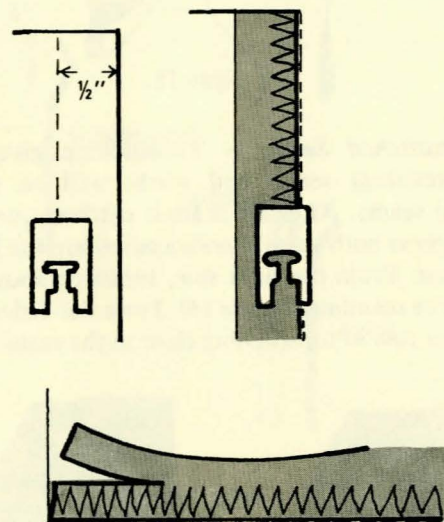


Figure 32.

Caring for Silk Garments

Wash your garment in the same way the fabric was preshrunk. Press the garment from the wrong side while the fabric is still damp. This way it will dry instantly and be wrinkle-free. Use a sleeve board to press small detail areas and sleeves to avoid creases. Use padded or plastic hangers to support the garment; thin wire hangers cause wear and fading lines.

If your white or light colored silk garments have grayed, wash them with one or two drops of ammonia and peroxide in one gallon of water. Wash garments yellowed with age with two or three tablespoons of white vinegar in a gallon of water.

Wearing dress shields will protect the garment from perspiration stains and from chemicals used in anti-perspirants.