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Farm and home - Sewing with plaids

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When mention is made of the word "plaid" we immediately think of the Scottish tartans and plaids, which at one time were exclusively clan tartans to be worn by a particular group. These tartans, in ancient times, were worn as kilts or trews by the menfolk while the women used them to cover their heads. This was the origin of the famous Paisley shawls.

Fortunately today it is not necessary to belong to any clan in order to be able to wear garments made of these colourful and attractive materials. Many of the plaid fabrics now on the market no longer follow any set pattern and are planned largely to give a pleasing appearance in colour and design, regardless of the authenticity of the tartan motive.

CHOOSING A PATTERN

Before you choose a pattern to be used on a plaid fabric, examine the design carefully, especially in regard to the number of seams involved. The most effective results are obtained with designs featuring the least possible number of pieces, thus involving the minimum amount of cutting and matching of the fabric. Choose a simple pattern with unbroken lines, avoiding as much as possible curved or shaped pieces such as yokes and gores. Panelled styles such as the popular Princess line are best avoided. Taken on the whole, tailored styles are much smarter for plaid fabrics. If you intend using a fabric with a small design, some of these rules can be relaxed, as the matching of the fabric pattern will be less conspicuous and thus less necessary.

Most commercial patterns state whether a design is definitely not suited to a plaid material so make a point of noting this before you buy. If a style is suited to a plaid, usually one view of it is illustrated thus in the catalogue and on the pattern.

Fig. 1.—An even or balanced pattern. The pattern is even both across and from top to bottom.
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Fig. 2.—This pattern is uneven or unbalanced horizontally (across) but is even vertically (up and down)

envelope and these designs should be given special consideration. These patterns usually contain special plaid layouts and points about construction of the garment, not normally found in styles for plain fabrics.

CHOOSING THE MATERIAL

A beginner is wise to choose an even plaid in which the design is woven into the material. In the case the right and wrong sides are identical and the placing and cutting of the pattern is much simplified as the material can be reversed. Woven plaids are the only ones which can be made to match perfectly. A printed plaid has the design only stamped onto the material with the result that the wrong side appears faded and cannot be reversed and used as the right side.

Although the price of a woven plaid may be considerably more per yard it is a much better buy, as less material is required. It is easier to work and has a far superior finish, resulting in a more attractive garment. The extra work entailed in making up a plaid design warrants a good quality material.

Examine the plaid pattern itself before buying and you may be able to anticipate some of the difficulties which are likely to arise. You may discover that the fabric which at first may appeal is not the one for your design.

Plaids fall into two groups—even and uneven—and the novice would be well advised to choose an even design. Every plaid has a predominant stripe which is usually in a brighter or deeper colour than the remainder and is also wider. The position of all the other stripes of colour on either side of this main band and also above and below it determine whether the fabric is an even plaid or an uneven one.

In an even plaid the design forms a perfect square and the pattern is exactly the same on either side and above and below the predominant band.

Uneven plaids may form a square but are more often in a rectangular design. The design may be uneven in one or in all respects, i.e., it may be uneven on the left and right of the central stripe and may or may not be unbalanced above and below it. These plaids require much more care for successful cutting to match the design, and to achieve this more material is required.

QUANTITY OF MATERIAL REQUIRED

Examine the fabric you intend using for the garment before you buy, as if there are many parts to be matched it may be necessary to purchase more material to allow for effective matching. The quality needed for matching depends largely on the type and size of the plaid, and for a large patterned material it may be necessary to buy so much extra that it is not an economical proposition. Obviously a 5 in. plaid design is going to require more material for matching than a 2 in. one.

Fig. 3.—This pattern is uneven both horizontally and vertically
The number of pattern pieces also influences the amount of material required—a pattern with six pieces is going to require less than one with 16.

Always buy more material than stated on the pattern envelope as no allowance is made in the commercial layouts for matching of plaids owing to the vast range in the size and design of these fabrics.

The most reliable guide to the amount of extra material needed for matching is to count the number of places on the pattern where matching is necessary and allow an extra plaid group for each point.

**PLANNING YOUR LAYOUT**

Having analysed your fabric, next decide where the matching points will be—the more conspicuous they are the more important they become. The main points for matching are at the centre seams on the skirt and bodice, side seams on skirts and especially armholes and shoulder or sleeve seams. It is not always possible to match side seams on the bodice owing to the darts. Where possible, avoid darts on the central or most conspicuous band of colour.

The position of the predominant stripe requires some consideration. It is most effective when centrally placed on the garment, i.e., centre front and back. In all cases where this centre line is required it will mean folding the fabric half way across the main stripe before cutting.

The predominant band should be placed high on the chest and not just on the bustline.

Where matching is required, the corresponding notches on the pattern must be placed in the identical position for cutting the second piece. This applies on skirts, sleeves, and bodices. To match the armhole notches, place them in the same position as the corresponding bodice notches in relation to the predominant band, i.e., the notches on the front of a sleeve must match those on the front of the bodice.

Where there is a straight hemline, i.e., on sleeves, straight or gathered skirts, the edge of the hem is most effective if cut so that it falls on the lower edge of the main stripe. This gives a better balance to the design. It will entail careful measuring of the length of this particular piece of pattern as the finished hemline must be placed at the edge of the stripe and not the hem allowance.

The bodice and skirt patterns should be so placed that the plaid design is continuous as much as possible from shoulder to hem. Avoid having a wide stripe just above and below the waistline as this unbalances the plaid pattern. By cutting the belt on the basic colour band the block design can be balanced up despite the waistline join.

In some cases it may be necessary to piece certain sections but avoid piecing in a conspicuous position, e.g., it is better to join a facing which will be underneath than a collar. When cutting facings try to ensure that they match the design of the part being faced.

Where the pattern has to be cut on two thicknesses, pin the fabric together for its entire length to avoid slipping while cutting. In some cases it is necessary to snip the selvedge to allow the pattern to lie flat in order to match up the checks.

When the pattern has to be matched along a seam (e.g., skirts), it is a good idea to draw in the main plaid pattern on the paper pattern in order to obtain the exact
Fig. 5.—This is not intended to be a perfect layout, but is designed to show the following points:

(a) Centre front and back lines placed on a main line to give balance to the design without a join down the front and back.

(b) Patterns for the top and the skirt placed so that the plaid design will be continuous with the addition of a belt across the main check. It is not always possible to obtain a perfect match in this regard.

(c) Where the side seams for the front and back skirts join, the notches are so placed that the seams will match.

(d) The design for the plaid traced on to the paper pattern so that the correct match along the side seams will be obtained.

(e) The bottom of the sleeve placed on a large check to give a definite line across the bottom.

(f) The centre of the seam placed on a main line to give balance to the design.

(g) The matching notches on the sleeves and the front and back bodices placed in corresponding positions on the plaid.

match on the second piece. Draw in the widest or most conspicuous colour on the paper, colouring with chalk if available or noting the colour on the sketch. To match up the second piece it is simply a matter of placing the pattern over the similar design on the fabric.

If you must cut certain pieces on single material, make sure you have reversed the paper pattern. Where the paper surface is similar on both sides, mark it in some way in order to avoid cutting two pieces for the one side.

Matching plaids on gored designs must be marked carefully and the width and amount of flare on each side noted. Find the centre of the gore and measure the distance from this point to the edge of the pattern. It is not possible to match the plaids in gored designs when the width of the gores varies greatly, for instance, a gore which covers two groups at the top and five at the bottom edge cannot be matched for its entire length with one which covers the same distance at the top and only three groups at the bottom as the difference in the amount of flare is too great.

SLIP TACKING

To match the plaid designs, careful tacking is needed and this is most successful if done from the right side. Turn under the seam allowance on one piece and pin it into position with the fold placed on the seam line of the second piece, with the design matching. Take up a small piece of the bottom piece on the seam line and then a similar piece through the hem fold. If this tacking, which is known as slip tacking, is done carefully the seam can be machined on the wrong side as normally with perfect matching. The chief point to watch is that the second stitch is slipped through the fold of the hem and is not taken through the two layers formed by the fold.
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