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What kind of scissors do I need for a sewing project?

The scissors that you will use when creating a sewing project are a pair of good quality fabric shears, a pair of pattern construction scissors for paper patterns and two pairs of small embroidery scissors. The small embroidery scissors are perfect for cutting threads after you sew a certain part of your project and also for snipping notches into a pattern piece. Two small scissors are recommended as this is easier when sewing, one pair would be kept by the iron and the other by the sewing machine, that way you are never without them.

Fabric scissors or fabric shears as they are more commonly referred to are the main tool used for cutting out your fabric. There are various different types of fabric shears on the market which range from general purpose to a traditional tailors shears.

Shears should cut cleanly and smoothly so the type you choose usually depends on what material you need to cut and what you find comfortable to use. If you are buying hand crafted shears, your choice will also be influenced by the shear manufacturers skill and the quality of steel used. Heavy fabrics such as leather and denim are easier to cut using shears that have longer handles or sharper blades. Synthetic fabrics tend to slip on smooth blades so a serrated pair for better control would be the answer. Elastic or pivoted shears offer precision cutting right to the tip of the blades. Most dressmakers shears are angled (or bent) to keep the blades flat on the table reducing disruption to your lay. But very angled shears can be awkward to use if you need to stretch across a table. Lightweight shears are recommended for occasional use where as drop forged shears are for more prolonged use.

The size you choose should depend largely on what you find comfortable to use. If possible try to borrow a pair to handle them and see if they suit you before buying. They mustn't be too heavy for comfort. If you are in doubt, then go for the larger size.

The maintenance of scissors and shears is very important, yet often neglected. Very soon you will find cutting disappointing so keep them oiled and clean.

Scissors and shears work by grinding two pieces of steel against each other under pressure. You increase their life considerably by keeping cutting edges oiled and free of fluff and fibres. Because most shears are made from untreated steel, they will rust if left without protection from the moisture in the air and the acid from your skin. To prevent this from happening, regularly wipe the blades with a lightly oiled cloth. After applying oil, always make a few cuts on waste material to remove any surplus. Shears can be kept sharp with a scissors sharpening tool.

A comprehensive but basic range of tools and equipment is an excellent starting point for any sewer. More specialized pieces of equipment may be purchased in time. Small pieces of equipment such as pins, needles and cutting implements are relatively inexpensive items while a sewing machine is more costly but indispensable. A steam iron and an ironing board are both essential and a sleeve board is helpful. Tools such as hem markers, stitching tapes and fabric markers are useful for specific purposes.

Cutting tools: Always buy good quality cutting tools made of high-grade steel and keep them well sharpened, since dull blades can damage fabric and slow the cutting process. Bent-handled shears are used for cutting out and sewing scissors for trimming seams and facings. Pinking shears are used to form fray resistant edges and embroidery scissors are designed for needlework. Leather shears cut leather and suede and rotary cutters produce precise straight edges. Awls are used for piercing small holes in fabric for eyelets and buttonholes. Thread clippers snip threads, while seam rippers open seams and are used for detailed work such as undoing buttonhole stitching. Stitch rippers are smaller than seam rippers and can cut stitches close to the fabric.

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