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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Friday, July 7, 1944.

Subject: "MAKING A DRESS AT HOME." Information from clothing specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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For several years past good ready-made dresses have been easy to find, so many women didn't try to make clothes at home. But war has brought changes in the supply and quality of fabrics for ready mades and many garment manufacturer's are now making service clothing instead of civilian wear, so home sewing is once more in order.

Maybe you've never made a dress before, and feel a little timid about cutting into a piece of goods. The first thing to do is to write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture for a brand new bulletin which has just been issued to help you--and others-- who have had but little experience in sewing. The bulletin contains lots of professional hints, too, for more experienced home sewers.

The title of this bulletin is "Making a Dress at Home", and its official number is Farmers' Bulletin 1954. The author is Margaret Smith, one of the clothing specialists of the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics. Miss Smith literally "tells all"---all you are likely to want to know, no matter how new you are to the delightful craft of sewing. Of course Miss Smith can't tell you how to operate and take care of a sewing machine if you don't know how. Follow the manufacturer's instruction book for operating your machines. If lost, perhaps the manufacturer can supply another. The Department has a bulletin, on cleaning and adjusting sewing machines, which you might like to send for when you write for the one on making a dress. In regard to choosing a style and selecting a pattern, Miss Smith says: "A good choice of style for the first dress you make is one with a collarless neck or plain collar, smooth or darted sleeves, gored skirt, and few buttonholes. Don't

try set-in pockets, fancy shirrings, or drapery until you have more sewing experience.

"Compare your measurements---hip, bust and waist---with those of the pattern given on the envelope or in the large pattern books that you find at pattern counters. Select the size that has measurements most nearly like yours. You don't necessarily get the same size on a pattern that you wear in ready-made clothes, the measurements may not be the same.

Then Miss Smith advises you to choose a pattern with a good sewing chart, with clear-cut illustrations and directions that are easy to follow. And here are some other tips on materials, threads, and "findings:" (By findings dressmakers mean tapes, bindings, buttons, buckles, and so on.) "Look for a material that will wear well, is easy to handle, and doesn't require much seam finishing. For summer a good choice is a closely woven cotton---percale, chambray, or seersucker. Look for a fabric that is colorfast to sun and washing and that is finished so it will not shrink more than 1 percent. Plain fabrics cut to best advantage, and next best are all-over prints.

"Use mercerized cotton thread on wash fabrics and on all dull-surfaced materials. Buy a thread that is a shade darker than your material. You'll need about two 100-yard spools for a dress. If you buy tape, be sure it is preshrunk. Buy your buttons when you are getting your pattern and your goods. Choose buttons that will stand washing or dry cleaning, or you'll have to take them off and sew them on again every time the dress is cleaned. Of course you want to have the buttons on hand when you make the buttonholes. And you might get a belt at the same time unless you intend to make one from the dress material."

When you get ready to fit your dress, baste seams, darts, tucks and pleats accurately. Wear the same kind of undergarments and the same height heels you will wear with the dress. If the pattern calls for shoulder pads, make them before you fit the dress and pin them in place before each fitting. Always fit a dress right side out, in case you have one shoulder or hip higher than the other. See that crosswise yarns are parallel with the floor at the bust and hip level. All length-

wise seams and stitching lines, except in dresses of unusual design should hang straight down. Side seams of the skirt and waist should be in line, and sleeves should hang smoothly without a wrinkle.

One big secret of a professional look in making a dress is pressing as you go along. Press each seam or stitching line before you cross it with another line of stitching. For example, press shoulder darts before you baste the shoulder seams together----finish and press underarm and shoulder seams before you put in the sleeves. To save frequent heating of the iron, plan your stitching so as to press several parts at one time. Of course different materials call for different ways of pressing, and the bulletin tells you about each one.

Another important "trick of the trade" for a home dressmaker is to look over the patterns and study the construction chart carefully. Miss Smith advises beginners to write some of the directions directly on the pattern---as where a certain straight edge must be laid on a fold. She tells how to get the material ready to cut and how to lay out the pattern--and particularly how to avoid that unfortunate mistake--cutting two sleeves for the same arm!

If you don't know how to make tailors' tacks, darts, or different kinds of seams, hems and facings, the information is right in the bulletin. The author explains how to make professional-looking buttonholes, either worked or bound. And when it comes to putting a dress together--setting in sleeves, putting inverted pleats in skirts, joining the waist and skirt, making the placket, and measuring and finishing the hem, the bulletin tells you just what to do, step by step. So, if you'd like to try making a dress or two this summer, write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture for this comprehensive little handbook---Farmers' Bulletin 1954. It's free, by the way.

