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Housekeepers' Chat

Thursday, January 29, 1931.

(Not for Publication)

Subject: "Pressing Out That Home-Made Look."

Bulletin available: Fitting Dresses and Blouses.

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"What are you going to talk about today, Aunt Sammy?" asked my Next-Door Neighbor this morning.

Whenever she asks that question, I know that she has something on her mind, so I always reply, "I'm ready for suggestions. Have you any ideas about what my friends would like to hear?"

"It's a long time since you have given a talk on sewing. I think it's high time those of us who make our own and our children's clothes were given a little of your valuable help."

"Please don't embarrass me with compliments," I said. "Do you mean to say that you are asking me for help in dressmaking, when everybody in the neighborhood knows that you are a genius about making an old, even dilapidated, dress over so that it looks like the latest model from Paris? I'm willing now and then to give a suggestion to an amateur dressmaker, but what have I to offer to a successful professional like yourself?"

"Aunt Sammy, I'm very serious this morning. I really need help. And what's more I don't deserve any of the kind things you've been saying. Indeed, I don't. I'll tell you why. You know that I've needed a new wool dress all winter. I've been wearing made-over dresses for years until there isn't anything left in our house to make over. So, when the sleeves of that navy wool jersey wore through at the elbows last week, I decided to be generous, and give myself a treat. I went down town and bought a pattern exactly to my liking. I also bought some of the best-looking wool crepe you ever saw, and I came home thinking that very soon I would be wearing the kind of dress I'd been longing for for years--a brand new dress, for a change, and not a made-over one. I was so pleased with the material, because dark green is one of my favorite colors. Well, please look at the result, Aunt Sammy."

My neighbor took off her coat and asked, "Did you ever see such a home-made looking thing in your life? Now Aunt Sammy, won't you give a little talk called: 'When the Home Dressmaker is a Failure?'"

The green color of the new dress was, as my neighbor said, most attractive and becoming to her. Moreover, I could see that the style was good and the fit,

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especially around difficult places like the shoulder and arm-holes, was excellent. But there certainly was something about the whole thing that did look home-made. The smart tailored look that a wool dress of that sort requires was lacking. The seams looked vague instead of neat and trim, and the edges were not definite and sharp-cut.

"In my opinion, the dressmaker is all right," I said. "She's done a fine job of fitting and finishing. But there seems to be something the matter with the presser. I'm willing to bet that all that dress needs is some skillful work with steam and a good iron."

"Well," suggested my neighbor, "why not give a talk on the art of pressing?"

"Why not?" I said. So I put on my hat and went over to see the clothing specialists at the Bureau of Home Economics. I knew they could tell me all about ways to press that wool dress so that it would look trim and smart as it should. Moreover, it occurred to me that if I learned all the secrets about ironing boards, pads and pressing cloths, it might help my own household. It might even mean that Uncle Ebenezer's trousers would never look baggy or shiny again.

Did you ever realize that little things like the padding on the ironing board, whether it is smooth or whether it has seams, fold or wrinkles, would affect your success in pressing? I've learned that these little things are very important. A smooth, tight, well-padded ironing board that stands firmly on the floor or is solidly attached to the wall so that it doesn't shake when you work on it--a board like that is a necessity for good pressing. To pad it, use several thicknesses of smooth old blankets or canton flannel or some of the pads that the stores are selling for the purpose. Then stretch a clean smooth cover tightly over the top. Old sheets may be used for the cover, but new unbleached muslin is inexpensive and makes a stronger cover. The board should be padded until it feels cushiony, but it should not be so soft that the iron sinks in it.

If you want to do really top-notch work in pressing, you will need pressing pads as well as an ironing board. These pads are made like small hard cushions--either long and narrow or with one wide rounded end and one pointed end, so that they will slip into the sleeves easily or can be used under any other part of the garment that is hard to reach yet needs careful pressing. You can make these pads yourself, and if you have two of different sizes and shapes, you will be prepared to give a professional press to any dress. Make one pad for general use about 8 inches at its widest part and run it into quite a decided point at one end. It should be, as I said, about 8 inches wide at the wide end and 16 inches long. Then, for special use in sleeves, make another 15 inches long and about 5 inches wide throughout the length. To make the pads, cut





heavy ticking or some similar material the right length and width. Sew the edges together, stuff with sawdust as firmly as possible, and then close up the open end. Cover the pad with some soft material like outing flannel and over this put another cover of muslin, which can be removed and laundered like the ironing board cover. There. The pad is now complete and is as smooth and hard as the ironing board itself without one lump, wrinkle or soft spot.

The clothing specialists tell me that these little pads are most useful also in ironing blouses and children's clothing.

One more article of equipment--the pressing cloth. It may be a yard square of cheesecloth or a slightly heavier material like muslin. Of course, it should always be clean so that it won't stain the material being pressed.

Now for the actual process of pressing. But wait a minute. Let me remind you of one or two points you may have forgotten. Before making a wool dress, or even cutting it out, the material must be sponged. Otherwise it will shrink when it is pressed with steam and make a dreadful mess and it will also spot with water. Then, all the while you are making either a silk or a wool dress, every part must be kept carefully and thoroughly pressed as you progress. That, by the way, is an argument for having your sewing machine, cutting table and ironing board all in the same room. There's no use wasting time and steps running back and forth to the kitchen or the laundry to press each little piece. Don't wait until the gown is all together and then attempt to press it. Stitch, finish and press all seams, pleats and finishes thoroughly as you go.

Now to press that dress. Lay it flat with the weave straight on the ironing board and wrong side out. Pressing on the right side may cause a shine on the fabric. And always press with a cloth. Lay the pressing cloth over the dress after it has been wrung out of water. Now test your iron. Is it clean? Is it hot enough so that it snaps when water touches it? It must be sufficiently hot to drive the steam into the fabric, but it is well to remember also that no material scorches more easily than wool.

There's an art in using that iron. It mustn't be allowed to stand in one spot for a moment. Keep it moving gently back and forth and from side to side so that it won't mark or stretch the fabric. And be sure the material is thoroughly dry before you stop pressing.

The heavier the cloth you are pressing, the more steam you need and the hotter the iron you use. For heavy wool a muslin pressing cloth is better than cheesecloth because it holds more moisture and thus produces more steam. For





thin material like silk, less steam is needed, so a thin cloth, wrung out very dry and a cooler iron will do the business. But always remember that some sort of a cloth must be used in all pressing. This is the only way to get an even amount of moisture and a flat seam and to prevent shining or scorching the material.

Oh, yes. I almost forgot to tell you what I learned about removing the shine from Uncle Ebenezer's trousers. Sponge the worn shiny places with a solution of a little ammonia in water. Then press with a damp cloth. The result--a nice, new-looking, dull finish even on old trousers.

Tomorrow: Planning the Day's Meals.

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