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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, May 24, 1932

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(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Equipping the Sewing Corner." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

When I went over to see Miss Scott the other day, what do you think I saw on her sewing table? A brick! Yes, an ordinary building brick, the kind used for chimneys and house foundations and so forth. Only this brick was carefully dressed up in a covering of cotton flannel neatly sewed on.

"Surprises will never stop," said I. "Will you please tell me how you happen to have a padded brick in this scientific sewing room?"

"That brick," said Miss Scott, "is one of the most convenient things we have around here. We call it a basting brick. It's so handy that we think every home dressmaker ought to have one. They're easy enough to make."

"What on earth do you use it for?"

"I use it as a weight to pin my material to when I'm doing fine hand sewing like blind stitching a hem or binding. Before I had this brick I used the old method of pinning the material to my knee to hold it taut. Now I just set the brick on the edge of the sewing table in front of me, like this. Then I pin the garment I'm working on to the top of it and sew a fine seam with the greatest ease."

This padded brick is just one example of many handy articles that help the job of home sewing. In sewing, as in any other household job, the right tools count so much in doing good work, in turning out good-looking, well-made clothes. And, more than that, the right equipment saves time, money and labor and makes the work pleasant.

Fortunately, most sewing equipment isn't expensive. Many little useful devices like this basting brick can be made at home. Other articles cost very little. More than this, most sewing equipment you buy is not perishable and lasts a long time. That applies also to the more expensive items such as your iron, your long mirror, your sewing machine or cutting table, if you have one.

Exactly what equipment does the home dressmaker need?

Let's consider the list of necessities first and then take up other items that might be added to make the job easier.

First, a pair of shears of the best steel. It pays to buy the best for they can be sharpened over and over and always kept in condition. No use



expecting to do a good job with poor dull shears. You need shears that will cut a nice, even line with long strokes and that will cut the entire length of the blade. And, by the way, your dressmaking shears should be used for that purpose only. Don't let Lily Bell cut out paper dolls with them and don't let little Johnny use them for making cardboard aeroplanes. Before you buy shears, try them out and see if they fit your hand comfortably when you are cutting.

Next, the thimble. Be sure you have one that fits your finger comfortably and has no sharp edges or roughness. A celluloid thimble is a good cheap kind. More expensive ones are silver and gold.

Now the tape measure. Choose one sixty inches long with numbers starting at each end on opposite sides. If one end of the tape measure is stiffened, perhaps by a metal end for two inches or so, you can use it for a gauge for measuring hems, facings, and so on.

Then, you'll need plenty of pins. It's much more convenient to buy them in a quarter-pound box than in the usual paper. Steel pins are the sharpest and best. Those called silk pins, in number 4 size, are thinner and easier to use than ordinary pins and they don't rust or leave dark spots on the fabric. Safety pins belong in this list too, because they're so handy for turning bands and belts inside out.

Speaking of pins, brings me to the subject of the good, old-fashioned pin cushion, which hasn't gone out of date in the sewing room. Most of us have our pet style of pin-cushion. I use one that was handed down from my great-grandmother's sewing basket. In general, however, the most convenient kind is small and flat, so needles won't get lost inside it, one that can be fastened on to the seamstress so she'll have it with her while she works. Hair makes a good filler for the pincushion. Cover it with some firm, durable cloth. Miss Scott suggests that a small pincushion fastened on the arm of the sewing machine is also very convenient to take care of any pins that you remove as you stitch.

Needles? It's a good plan to buy an assortment of sharps in sizes from 8 to 10, also crewel needles for embroidery and very fine sewing. A tape-needle or bodkin belongs in your collection, too. And Miss Scott tells me that she finds a round-end or blunt-end needle very useful for turning fine, narrow bias folds inside out. Keep a little emery on hand to take care of rough or rusted needles.

Now, the thread supply. You need a supply of black and white cotton thread in sizes 60, 80 and 100. Sewing silk or other thread may be purchased to match the garment you are working on. A bit of buttonhole twist is always convenient for reinforcing ends of collars, pockets, or bias corners that ~~that~~ show, and hence require a very tailored bit of work.

For marking goods, you'll want some tailor's chalk. Crayon chalk is best because it brushes off easily. Avoid wax or grease chalk.

Then you'll want a tracing wheel, made of good steel so the prongs won't bend or become blunt, and a lap-board or table to trace on. The tracing board may be made of composition board or wall board; the table of soft wood.

Next, you'll need a 6-inch ruler or a yardstick. A metal square is also very useful. These articles, like the shears, should be sacred to your sewing



corner. Teach the children not to use them, or you'll find, some busy sewing day, that half the things you need have been borrowed.

It often happens that you need some kind of small but heavy weights to hold down a paper pattern while you smooth it out, pin it to the fabric and cut the fabric. Any small pieces of heavy metal that won't soil the goods or tear the pattern will do for this job. I've seen women use heavy iron nuts to anchor patterns. If you have a metal square rule it will come in handy here.

Keep a steel crochet hook among your sewing things. Then when you need to put belt supporters on dresses, you can make crocheted ones. Crocheted loops are stronger, take less time to make and look more attractive than those made by buttonholing.

You'll find a few empty spools are convenient to have ready for winding up any stray floss in a strand. You'll also find some sheets of tissue paper handy for cutting out your own collar and cuff patterns. Some pieces of carbon paper will help you trace them.

I haven't mentioned such items as hooks and eyes, snaps, and tape-- which you'll find on hand in most sewing rooms. You generally buy these articles as you go to suit the garment you are making.

However, you won't go astray if you keep on hand a few cards of very small snaps, both light and dark, and some very fine hooks and eyes. Present-day clothes generally require small, inconspicuous fastenings. Very narrow twilled tape also is convenient for many purposes. You can use it for reinforcement under the buttons in children's clothes and for strengthening the seams of kimono sleeves where they are likely to pull out -- under the arm.

Oh, yes, and don't let me forget the cleaning items for your sewing corner. A bottle of carbon tetrachloride or some other non-inflammable cleaning fluid and some art gum will take care of smudges and spots that happen to appear while the dress is being made.

Every sewing corner needs an ironing board and an iron. Pressing has to be done as the job progresses and it's a waste of time and effort to have to run to the kitchen or to the laundry every other minute to press. Along with the ironing board you'll need a couple of those useful tailor's pads for pressing sleeves and other difficult places, a supply of pressing cloths, and a basin to dampen them in.

Among the more expensive equipment for the sewing corner there's the machine and the long mirror, as I said, and such labor-savers as a pinking machine for finishing edges on material that will not fray, and a buttonhole machine. If you are sewing for several children, the buttonhole machine is a worthwhile investment because it is such a time and labor saver.

There now. That's all I have to say today about sewing equipment. But if you have questions on the subject, I'll be glad to take them to Miss Scott or the other clothing specialists for reply.

Tomorrow we'll finish the story of the six vitamins. Vitamin G, the last on the list, will be the topic of our talk tomorrow.

