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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, August 29, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "SEWING SECRETS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Everybody is familiar with oilcloth in the kitchen. The oilcloth-covered kitchen table is almost an American institution. But not so many people know that oilcloth, turned wrong side up, can also be very useful in the sewing room.

You see, I'm already on the subject of family sewing and the sewing room, and I'm starting off fast because I'm afraid I'll forget some of the good ideas I heard from a friend last night. This friend -- the most practical home dress-maker I know -- has discovered some nice little ways to save herself work and time when she's making clothes. And she doesn't mind my passing her secrets along to you. Isn't that lucky?

The first secret is that oilcloth idea I mentioned a minute ago. A piece of oilcloth laid upside down -- or rather, wrong side up -- makes an excellent surface for cutting out clothes. Spread it over the big table where you usually do your cutting -- or even on the floor. You'll find that its slightly rough wrong-side keeps the cloth and the paper pattern from slipping and sliding as it will on a hard, smooth surface. Then, if you happen to choose oil cloth with a plaid design, that will help in keeping your pattern straight.

There's one good idea for easier cutting -- an oilcloth cover, wrong side up.

Here's another idea: Try weights instead of pins when you're having trouble keeping your pattern and fabric together while you cut. Sometimes on sheer and slippery fabric, and again on very thick, pins don't hold material in place well. Small weights will save the day. I'll tell you what this friend of mine suggests for weights. She says paper weights are good; so are those glass coasters you use under the legs of furniture; and so are plain ordinary smooth heavy iron nuts -- the kind that go with bolts. Any one of these common articles will make a set of good sewing-room weights.

When you have a very large pattern to cut out, you have another weighting problem. You have to keep this large piece of paper flat and straight with the grain of the material underneath. Pins often allow the material to shift. What you need here is a long, flat weight of some sort. My friend suggests a yardstick -- or any smooth, flat stick, for that matter. She finds a yardstick does the job better than either pins or small weights.

Beside a yardstick, you'll find a ruler convenient for your sewing room. My friend prefers one of those transparent 6-inch rulers that draftsmen use instead of the ordinary wooden ruler. When you can see through a ruler, of course, you can measure more accurately. And you'll find its lighter weight easier to handle. Also, these rulers are marked for measuring in two directions.

Now, a couple of pressing points. A good dressmaker is always a good presser, you know. She understands little tricks with the iron as well as any tailor. She knows all about using a damp thin cotton cloth for pressing lightweight wool, and a damp thicker cloth for heavy wool. She also appreciates what a good job tissue paper can do in pressing silk. You can use tissue paper, either dry or dampened, to press any silk fabric. And you can often make an old silk look like new by just such a press. Lay the paper over the right side of the silk fabric. Dampen it lightly with a sponge. Press with a medium iron. No danger of leaving iron prints with this method.

"Dampen with a sponge," says my friend. She thinks a small sponge in a shallow dish of water is more convenient and usually safer for ironing-board covers than the wet cloth most people use.

Even basting has its fine points, I've learned. Too heavy a basting thread may make holes or mark the fabric. Then you may have difficulty getting those marks out. This is especially true if the fabric is velvet, or firm, smooth silk. Even the thread sold particularly for basting may give you trouble. You see, it has such a soft twist that it is likely to leave fuzzy lint on the cloth after you have pulled it out. Well, try very sheer, smooth thread. Silk is generally safest for basting velvet. But it's expensive. Fine cotton thread that goes by the name of "sheer-fabric thread" pulls out smoothly and easily.

But now when you come to making tailor's tacks -- to finding the ideal thread for marking, darning cotton or soft basting thread may be just the thing, because it doesn't slip out so readily when you handle the fabric. Sometimes a good way to mark through a pattern is to rub your basting thread over chalk and then run it in and out of the fabric and pattern together.

Marking the pattern perforations on your cloth is sometimes a problem. Remember the first dress you ever made by yourself when you cut all those perforations into the cloth with your shears? Well, maybe you missed that sad experience of the beginner. But I remember it well enough. Tailor's chalk is the ideal marker for all perforations, because it brushes off easily later. But if you haven't any of that around the house, one of the children's colored chalk pencils will do nicely if you sharpen the point. Be sure you use chalky, not wax crayons.

There is my collection of easier-sewing ideas for today. If you have some of your own, I wish you'd tell me about them. And now, if you are seriously interested in further supplies and equipment for home sewing, I'll remind you that the Bureau of Home Economics at Washington, D. C., issues helpful material on the subject. Any items of printed or mimeographed material issued by the Bureau which are in stock at the time requests are received will be sent without charge.

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