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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHATS

Monday, Feb. 13, 1933.

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Subject: "Tools for the Home Dressmaker" Information approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Here it is time to be doing something about spring clothes for one and all, and whatever a good many of us do about spring clothes for one and all in our families we will have to do ourselves. Not so much eating of strawberries and cream this spring, but plenty of sitting on pillows and sewing fine seam--at least plenty of sewing a more or less fine seam. Plenty. In fact, more than plenty to the homemakers who haven't done much sewing in the previous years of their young lives.

So Aunt Sammy will have something to say each week, or oftener, from now on about the new ideas in home dressmaking that may be of use to beginners and also to experienced needlewomen. But today, I am going to talk with the beginners exclusively. Be glad to have the attention and the criticism of the experts on sewing, but I think the beginners are entitled to one radio session devoted to giving a list of the tools that are indispensable, and the ones that are almost indispensable for the home needle worker. Let me tell you what I told one of my young friends about the equipment for home dressmaking.

Now in her small house she couldn't have a whole sewing room, but we got together last week and inspected the premises to find out where to locate her garment factory that will turn out most of the clothes for her and the children this spring. We decided to place the factory in a sewing nook or corner that we would make in the large upstairs bedroom. We'll use a three-panel screen to fence in the factory grounds. This screen will be useful on the factory side and decorative on the other side. We'll fasten pockets to hold sewing articles on the inside of the screen.

All right. Now we've got the factory located. How about equipping it? Well, here's the inventory, and if it seems too elementary to you, please bear with me. I'll be through in less than five minutes. All right for the inventory..

First, scissors. Sharp shears, made of good steel. If they're made of good steel, you see, they'll hold an edge well, and will take sharpening. Get a good pair. And keep them away from the family. Use them for sewing only. Get a cheap pair for Percy to use in haggling cardboard or tin, and for Jane to use when she cuts flowers in the garden. And when you buy the scissors see that they not only are of good quality steel, but that they fit your hand comfortably. And get a pair with at least a seven-inch blade.

Second, the thimble. Yes, even this small article is worth a little thought. See that you have one that fits the finger and isn't sharp on the edge. I like celluloid thimbles. They're light and inexpensive. If I lose one, I can replace it without too much expense. Of course, silver and gold thimbles are far better looking -- but they cost more. Brass is a poor choice. It may stain the finger.

Well, we've talked about the scissors and the thimble. Now, the tape measure. Get one sixty inches long, with numbers starting at each end on opposite sides. You see, this makes it convenient to use either end. If one end of the tape measure is stiffened, it's that much more convenient for measuring hems, facings, and so on. One of my friends has an ingenious way of stiffening the end of her tape measures. She inserts a small corset steel and sews it firmly into place.

So much for the scissors, the thimble, and the tape measure. Now for the other items that are mighty handy, but not absolutely indispensable. These are a tracing wheel, a lapboard or softwood table, a ruler or yardstick, a carpenter's square, and a dressform. Here's what I told my young friend about these pieces of sewing equipment:

Get a tracing wheel of good size, made of good steel, so that the prongs won't bend or become too blunt for efficient marking. The lapboard or table of soft wood is very handy when you're using the tracing wheel. You'll find the carpenter's square handy, and the ruler or yardstick almost indispensable. A dress form is a great convenience, but not absolutely necessary. You don't have to buy an expensive commercial form with mechanical adjustment devices just for your own use at home. You can buy nonadjustable forms at various prices, or you can make a form to fit your own measurements.

Of course ironing boards and irons are absolutely necessary. I suggested to my young friend that she have an ironing board set in the wall of the sewing corner where she could fold it up when she wasn't using it. Also that she keep the sleeve board handy in the corner, and a lightweight iron there also. But that's a little bit luxurious -- getting this duplicate equipment for the sewing corner --- and luxury I know is taboo in most homes this year.

Finally, let's talk over the smaller equipment for the beginner's sewing corner. Equipment such as needles, pins, tailor's chalk, and thread. To start with, an assortment of needles in packages of standard sizes running from 5 to 10 will be enough. O, yes, you might add a few tape needles to this collection. Since a dressmaker needs so many pins, you'll probably find it most convenient to have them in quarter pound boxes, rather than in the usual paper. As for tailor's chalk, be sure it is tailor's chalk. Don't get a wax or a grease chalk which won't brush off easily.

To keep your spools of thread in order, you'll need a basket or a box or a convenient little rack. You might make yourself a small pincushion with a needle case attached. Dressmakers often have these little cases made to fasten to their belts. By the way, hair is a good filling for pincushions because it is light and doesn't mat.

I hope you have a full length mirror. That's real luxury for the home dressmaker. It's a great satisfaction to be able to see how the new dress fits, from collar to hem, in all stages of the construction!

Well, that's all for this time. More about home sewing methods later on. Meanwhile, we'll have tomorrow another discussion of the year's most important household topic, "Budgeting Food Money."

