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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

September 28, 1933.

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Subject: "Homemade Clothes without the Homemade look." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

A common complaint about homemade clothes is that they have a "homemade look." Only the other day a friend of mine, talking about home sewing, said, "I know clothes made at home are often a great saving. I know they often wear longer and cost less than ready-mades. But somehow the dresses I make never look smart and stylish like those I can buy."

So there's an important problem for any home dressmaker. How to avoid that homemade look? How to give a professional touch to coats or dresses or other garments made at home?

Fortunately, the clothing specialists are in on most professional secrets about clothes. And, fortunately, they're willing to tell their secrets. They know the little tricks in sewing that will make your dress look as if it stepped right out of a smart shop-window.

Have you ever noticed that the small details often make the dress look homemade? Again, details-- just little things--may give a dress the professional look of style and smartness that we all admire. So let's spend our time this morning going over some of the tricks of the trade that will help make your spring sewing a success.

The clothing specialists suggest that whenever you go shopping and have a chance to look at ready-made models, you keep your eyes open to learn how they're made, how new effects are produced, how this seam is finished and that neckline is cut. You can get ideas about construction, selection of pattern and material, and suitable finishes as well as the effect given by all these things if you keep your eyes open. As styles change each year, construction also changes. Just because you knew the tricks of cutting and finishing five years ago doesn't prove that you know how to get smart effects today. But you can pick up all sorts of new ideas with your eyes that I can't give you by my talks.

The first step toward that smart professional look is choosing the right pattern. You don't need to buy an expensive pattern necessarily, but you do want to choose one that is simple, becoming and distinctive and one that has clear diagrams and illustrations. Be sure to get your size; don't try to buy a large size to cut it down. For best results, follow the pattern directions exactly. New styles usually require new methods of construction which the pattern designers

have worked out. Before you cut the material, check the size and fit of the pattern carefully. Wise home dressmakers often cut the pattern first out of an old sheet or old white curtains or a piece of unbleached muslin. This is to test its fit and make any adjustments necessary. They baste this test garment and try it on, making any changes that are needed. This takes extratime, but it is the surest way of preventing disappointments later.

The next step is cutting out the pattern. Here again, care pays. Always press the material before you lay on the pattern. Press the pattern, too. This makes the paper cling closer to the material and helps prevent error. Then spread the material out on a large flat surface. If you haven't a table big enough, use the floor. It isn't so convenient but it brings good results. I've heard of cutting out a pattern on a bed. I've also heard that the results were far from good. A few wrong moves of the scissors and you know what happens to the dress. Keep your eye on the pattern's construction guide as you lay on the pattern. Be sure each piece is straight with the grain of the goods. Every pattern has perforations or lines indicating this. Even one piece a little askew will make a dress hang in a funny way or spoil the fit. To hold the paper pattern in place use small weights, like those from a set of scales. You can be much more accurate in your pinning and cutting if every corner of the piece is carefully secured. The clothing specialists own a little set of brass weights which they always keep in their sewing drawer with their other sewing supplies. As for pins, these specialists recommend silk pins number six as the best for pinning patterns. These silk pins are extra sharp, so they don't mar the goods. And by the way, be sure your pins are kept clean. Dusty or soiled pins can leave ugly black holes in your material. Of course, I don't need to mention to you that you need sharp shears that cut clean to the points. When you cut, open the shears wide and take long strokes. Little mincing, choppy cuts tend to haggle the goods making accurate seams difficult. Mark notches with darning cotton, which doesn't slip out as easily as other thread or with tailor's chalk, which rubs off easily. And be sure to get all notches marked before lifting the pattern.

Basting is the next step--another safety move. I know some women who say they never have to baste, who stitch up the seams without bothering to fasten them together first. But this often means ripping out and trying again. And ripping takes far more time than basting and is likely to stretch the material out of shape, weaken it, or make holes in it. Even experienced dressmakers believe in basting and then trying on. Though it takes extra time at this point, it usually saves time in the end. So, baste and then try on over the underwear you intend to wear with the dress. Of course any fitting should be done over the right foundation.

Now a word about the machine. Oil the machine ahead of time, wipe it off, let it stand awhile, and then try some scrap material to be sure no oil will get on the dress. Before you start stitching see that the stitch is well regulated and won't pull or draw the material up, also that you have a needle of the right size for the material. If your material is sheer, lay it on a strip of paper and stitch the material and the paper together. If you have trouble stitching in a straight line, use the machine gauge for seams, mark the line with tailor's chalk and then stitch along it. Press as you go. The most successful results come from stitching and pressing alternately. That's one good reason for having an iron and ironing board in the room where you use your sewing machine. For pressing seams in silk use a piece of good quality hard wood. You don't need a pressing cloth for silk. Press over tissue paper instead. For pressing wool, you'll need a damp pressing cloth.

