

Great Scott!

By Scott Goodman



Scott Goodman, owner of Sewing Machine Warehouse & Kneedle.com has been servicing the sewing public since 1976.

THREAD 101

Thread... Seems simple enough. It is the most visible part of your embroidery process.

An archeologist digging through the sewing basket in most homes would reveal thread from the mid-century era; wooden spools, or seventies-era styrene foam. Embroiderers know (or should know) better:

Some basic information and sound recommendations:

Fiber

Rayon seems to be the “Go to” for home embroidery. Rayon features a naturally beautiful luster. Unfortunately, rayon is not colorfast in the washing machine. Polyester is the standard of our industry. Modern technology has made the differences in luster and sheen quite minimal. In side-by-side comparisons of similar colors, polyester appears to “sparkle” just a bit.

Scott's advice? Go with your heart! Activewear screams for polyester. Elegant projects will benefit from rayon.

Dye

Dyeing is harsh! (Pun intended). It takes alchemy and toxic substances to produce the wide range of hues and shades that make up your embroidery paint box. Processing can take its toll on your thread fibers, changing strength, thickness and stretchability characteristics. Better name brands are more consistent. Some of the value brands can cause all kinds of chaos. Sometimes one color sews great, while another from the same manufacturer shreds or breaks.

Scott's advice? Stick with the name brands.

Spools

Cones are great for multi-needle machines. Thread is drawn evenly from the top of the tapered spool. Spool thread is much more manageable for home machines. 1000 meter spools go a long way on your project; about 200,000 stitches. Most home models have horizontal spool pins and work better with spools. Larger cones can be used, but the risk of stray threads catching on random objects may not offset the savings on oversized cones. Some bargain threads are wrapped around cardboard tubes with oversized openings. These spools can sit off-center or eccentrically,

causing thread to pinch against the thread compartment as it draws into your machine.

Scott's advice? Keep it short (the distance between spool and machine). Keep it reasonable. Bargain-basement thread in your \$9,000 machine? Come on!

Brand

The major brands have it all figured out; from quality control during manufacturing, to spool design (or put-up). Some of the value brands work great, others do not. Quality inconsistencies from color-to-color or lot-to-lot will cause you to talk to your toaster. Your local sewing machine dealer has done their research and can recommend brands that work best with your machine.

Scott's Advice? Listen to the recommendations of your local dealer.

Selection

A lot of colors on smaller spools are better than fewer colors on bigger spools. Embroiderers know that a rose is not just pink, but six shades of pink! While I love tone-on-tone, it can take several shades to bring out the dimensionality of your designs. Some brands are available as a complete set; full color range, that is

organized and indexed. These kits are usually available at a discount and offer a great advantage over buying individual spools. When should you buy “big”? A half dozen of the most popular colors: Black and white are a given. Add red and blue for Memorial Day and Fourth of July projects, orange for Halloween, and throw in some green during the holiday season.

Scott’s Advice? Bite the bullet and by a complete set.

Color numbers

Every brand has its own color numbering system. To make matters more confusing, due to differences in the way fibers react to the dying process, numbers differ from polyester to rayon. It is hard to resist the temptation to build your thread stash in small bites from different resources. Designs usually include a color chart keyed to the designer’s favorite brand. The brand may differ from your own. No problem, charts are available that convert one brand to another. This process is way more complicated when you are converting to six different brands and fibers.

Scott’s Advice? Try and stick to one quality brand.

Metallics

Tubular, dude! Better metallic threads are more true to shape. Think spaghetti; long strands of smooth pasta, no bumps, no dips. Slubs, bumps and dips cause friction, snags and broken thread. Slowing down the speed of your machine or switching to a metallic needle might help, but higher quality thread usually solves the issue.

Scott’s Advice? Spend more gold and silver on your gold and silver.

*Is there an embroidery topic that perplexes you? Need a high five for a job well done? Fascinating gossip? Drop Scott a line:
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