

e ducation

Special Techniques for Plaids
by Kathy Ruddy



Sewing plaid fabrics can offer special challenges but offer wonderful combinations of colors and texture. Plaids make great Bermuda shorts as in pattern 5019 or for jumpers like patterns 9016 or 9008. Here are a few tips to make your next plaid project more fun.

Choose your pattern and your plaid carefully. Complicated designs with many details are difficult to work with and should be avoided. Some patterns even note that they are "not suitable for plaids". Materials offer a wide choice of accents that will affect the way you ultimately lay out and cut for best pattern matches and design advantages. A wide or bright horizontal bar can be unattractive if placed across the fullest part of the bust or hips, so place your fabric carefully before cutting.

TYPES OF PLAIDS: Plaids are "even" if the arrangement/colors of bars or stripes is the same on both sides of the center bar. This is a balanced design and is relatively easy to match. Fold back a piece of fabric on a 45-degree angle. If you can match the design it is "even".

Plaids are "uneven" when different on either side of the center bar. These unbalanced plaids can only be readily matched if both right and wrong sides of the cloth look the same. To match, cut two identical lefts and flip one over using the wrong side of the fabric to create a mirror image for the right side.

YARDAGE REQUIREMENTS: Yardage requirements change due to the matching problems and the length of the plaid repeat.

One way of estimating your additional fabric needs is to measure the length of the plaid repeat. Count how many times you have to match, and multiply these two together. For example, if the repeat is every 5" and you need 3 match layouts, then you would need about 15" of extra fabric.

Also, consider cutting using bias and straight grain together. Any pattern piece can be converted to bias by drawing a new line at a 45-degree angle to the existing grain line.

CUTTING: Think of plaid as stripes going down in two directions. All stripes have to be at right angles to each other to cut correctly. Pre-straightening and matching the cloth is sometimes

impossible. Instead, mark length and cross grains on all pattern pieces. Straighten only the amount of cloth surrounding the pattern. Cut all pattern pieces single. This is actually faster and more accurate than trying to cut double.

Pick up the front bodice or skirt or pant leg and place it onto the single layer of fabric. Place the brightest stripe on the smallest part of your body to balance your figure. For example, a small bust would get the bright stripe while a large bust would look better with the weakest stripe. Pin the lengthwise grain to lengthwise stripe. Pin crosswise grain to cross stripe. If the fabric is quite crooked, mark as many length and crosswise grains as necessary on the pattern piece until all are parallel then cut. Even if the fabric is rumpled, it will relax when removed from the larger piece of cloth.

Use first cloth front as a pattern to cut the second front. This makes it easier to get a correct match. On "even" plaids, cut with the right sides together. On "uneven" plaids (only if both right and wrong sides of the fabric look the same), match corner points of plaid and pin throughout until all stripes match. Cut mirror image to get two matched fronts.