

Which sewing machine do I buy?



Please read our T & C's – www.rosamaycrafts.com

DISCLAIMER: Please note this is my very own guideline, there are so many guides and tips, use which one you feel works for you.

I would like to firstly point out that this blog/tip/advice is more for the beginner than the advanced sewer/seamstress. Even though I have been sewing for several decades – taught by my beloved Mamma and lots of self-teaching and errors, I am still learning all the time, plus technology changes.

Buying a sewing machine is very personal. There are several brands, heavy and light, small and big, some computerised others mechanical.

Chat to different sewers and seamstresses, go in chat to sewing machine suppliers. If you are buying online - check all the reviews and descriptions. I have used a variety of sewing machines - Singer, Elna, Brother and Janome. I have loved them all.

Some questions to ask yourself - What is your level of experience - are you a beginner or advanced?

What do you need your sewing machine for - crafting, home decor, small projects or clothing?

And of course, your budget. Read below for more information.



TIPS WHEN LOOKING FOR A SEWING MACHINE

1. Are you a beginner or need an upgrade?

As a beginner you need a basic sewing machine – entry level mechanical machine. It will have a basic range of commonly used stitches.

Often these machines have a foot pedal so that you control the sewing speed and go at your own pace. Speak to other sewers and seamstresses, read reviews, contact suppliers. My personal opinion is if this is your first sewing machine, call or visit a supplier and make notes, then if you wish to buy online you have great pointers to reference from.

They are cost effective and perfect for small projects. You can also decide to buy second hand. Once you become more experienced you will then know which features you would like and decide which sewing machine/brand suits you. Make a list of all these preferences – Fashion – you will need a one-step buttonhole (we will go into each part of the machine further down)

As an intermediate to advanced sewer, you now have your list and start searching for that specific machine. You can now spend more on getting the additional features. You have decided you want to go into soft furnishings and you are looking for a machine that is more heavy duty and has more decorative stitches.

There are 3 basic types of sewing machines.

Mechanical – this is the basic and most cost effective. Perfect for beginners and advanced. I do love my mechanical machine.

Digital Screen – This type of machine has a digital screen, and you can choose your stitch and length by pressing the screen. There are various options available on the different brands and types of machines – buttonholes, needle up and down.

Computerised - This is your very 'smart' sewing machine. One of the biggest features is that it has different stitches programmed into the machine. You select your stitches, tell it what type of fabric you are using and it will set the correct tension and stitch length, all with a press of a few buttons/

2. Look at the size and weight of the sewing machine.

Ask yourself these questions: -

Do you have a craft room, or will you be sewing from your dining room table?

Will you need to store away once finished with your project or time has run out and you need to place your machine in the cupboard or under a table, etc.?

Will you need to move your machine upstairs or carry it to workshops – Do you need a heavy and bulky machine or a lightweight?

Heavy weight fabrics – canvas, curtain – you will need a strong and heavy-duty machine

Medium weight fabrics – cottons – a middle of the range sewing machine

Light weight fabrics – silks, satins – a middle of the range sewing machine – but with silk and satin you will need to look for specific features as it slips and slides.

Take fabric samples with you to test the sewing machines.

3. What are you going to need your sewing machine for?

As a beginner you will be creating small projects, but as an advanced you will be creating soft furnishings, larger or multiple craft projects or fashion.

For example: -

If you are going into fashion, look for a sewing machine that creates automated buttonholes.

If your direction is soft furnishings, then look for a stronger and heavy-duty sewing machine.

What type of fabric will you be using - Next, consider the fabric you will be sewing with cottons, stretch or heavy weight

Thick Fabrics - To sew thick fabric, you will need a strong machine with a high presser foot lift, adjustable presser foot pressure, good needle penetration and a long stitch length. If the machine is too lightweight, it will dance around the table - so the heavier the better.

Stretch Fabrics - Generally speaking, top loading machines (bobbin is dropped in at the top next to the needle plate) perform better on stretchy fabrics. All good sewing machines will have a stretch stitch included. So, if you intend to sew stretchy fabric or knitwear you will need this stitch.

Light Fabrics - An adjustable presser foot pressure is very important if you intend to sew silks and satins because the feed dogs can mark the underside of the fabric if the foot pressure is too high

As a beginner, I would start with easy projects - cushion covers, placemat, elasticised shorts.

Your sewing machine manual is a wealth of knowledge, read it thoroughly. We will be going through the basic anatomy/features of the sewing machine: - Some examples

Type of stitches and range.

Bobbins - are they front or top loading.

Accessories - most machines come with basic accessories - sewing machine needles, buttonhole foot, etc.

Controls; Motor types; Foot pressures.

Length/width controls; Feed dogs. As you can see the list is endless.

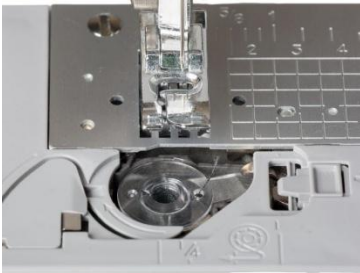
Bobbins – front loading or top loading

Front-Loading Bobbin



As per the image above, they are found at the front of the machine. They can be fidgety to load, trying to fit a bobbin at the odd angle with your fingers holding onto the bobbin. Then making sure it has slotted in correctly is time consuming. Front loaders are known to jam more often.

Top-Loading Bobbin



These are much easier to load. You just drop the bobbin into the machine and follow the instruction/images for the thread and voila, it is done. They are also easy to clean.

Motor types – basic



There are two main types of electric motors, you have the direct current (DC) or alternating current (AC). They have different power, speed, functions and uses.

AC Motors

These are found in your standard domestic sewing machines.

DC Motors

These motors are powerful and are perfect for when working with heavy weight fabrics or if you are using your machine on a regular basis, plus they are much faster.

Foot pressure



There are two types of foot pressure – adjustable and Non-adjustable

Adjusting your pressure is not something you do very often. Depending on the brand and model of your machine you will either have a dial – top or side of the machine or a button or a lever inside your machine or it be adjusted digitally. Your sewing machine manual will direct to this.

Adjustable

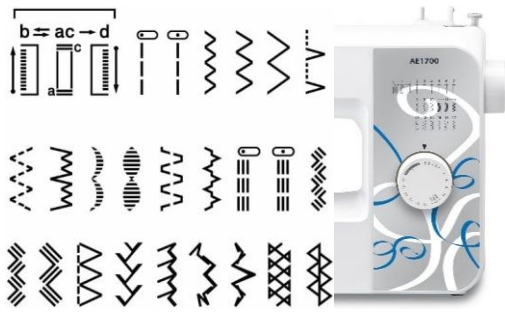
This is the better option of the two as you can use on different types of fabric from canvas to chiffon. It allows you to create different projects – tea cosy to napkin rings. You can sew with different types of fabric and create different types of projects.

Non-Adjustable

This is often found on basic beginners' machine, where you are using your machine for small, lightweight projects. You are limited to the types of fabric and projects you can create.

Most Computerised sewing machines built in sensors that will automatically detect the thickness of the fabric and adjust to the foot pressure.

Stitches



Each brand, model and type will come with varying stitches. Regardless of which machine you buy, they will have a straight stitch and zig-zag with a few added extra decorative stitches.

Depending on the type of machine your have purchased, you will either manually turn a dial or select the stitch and press a button if digital.

Machine Control Types

This is your 3 main types of sewing machines – mechanical, digital or computerised.

Mechanical



These sewing machines are controlled by using dials. You have several dials performing different functions – adjusting stitch width and length, dial for stitch choice, dial to move your needle up and down.

You are in control.

Computerised



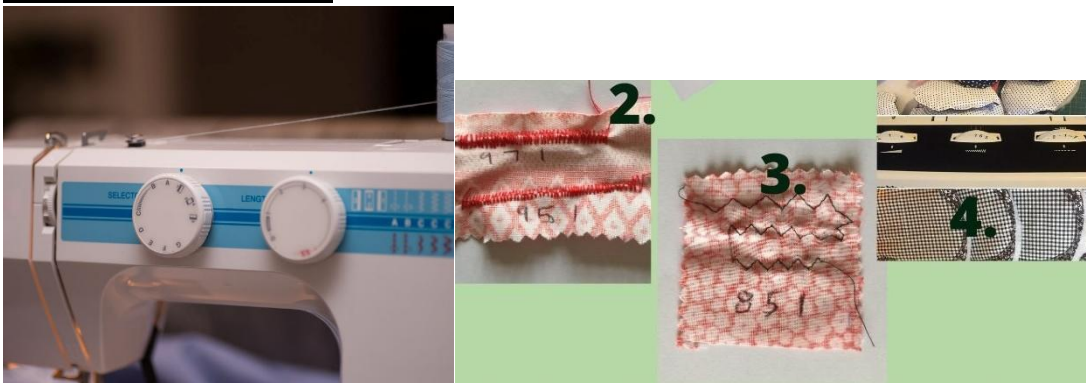
These machines are controlled by either dials or buttons or both. These machines offer a large selection of decorative stitches, which is wonderful to have.

Digital/Touchscreen Controls



These sewing machines you use buttons. You select the stitch and off the machines starts sewing. I have an embroidery machine that does this, and my kids call it the Ghost machine as it stitches all on its own. You can continue with other projects whilst keeping an eye on creation working away on its own.

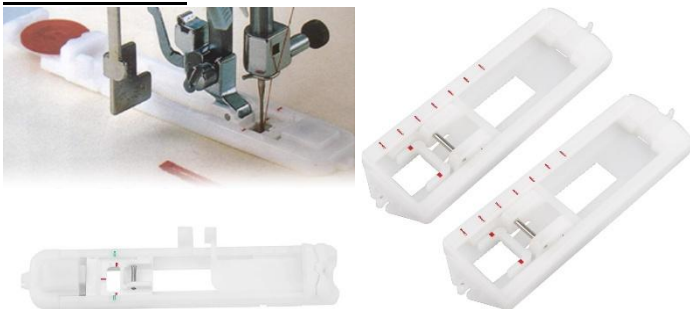
Length width controls



These dials allow you to control the width and length of your stitches. For example, you need to gather your project, you will use a large stitch length and width.

When creating several of the same projects, make sure to note the width and length of your stitches.

Buttonholes



Whether you are a dressmaker or not, having the right buttonhole is important as far as I am concerned. How important it is to you will depend on how often you will be creating buttonholes. There are two main types - 4-Step Buttonholes and 1-Step Buttonhole.

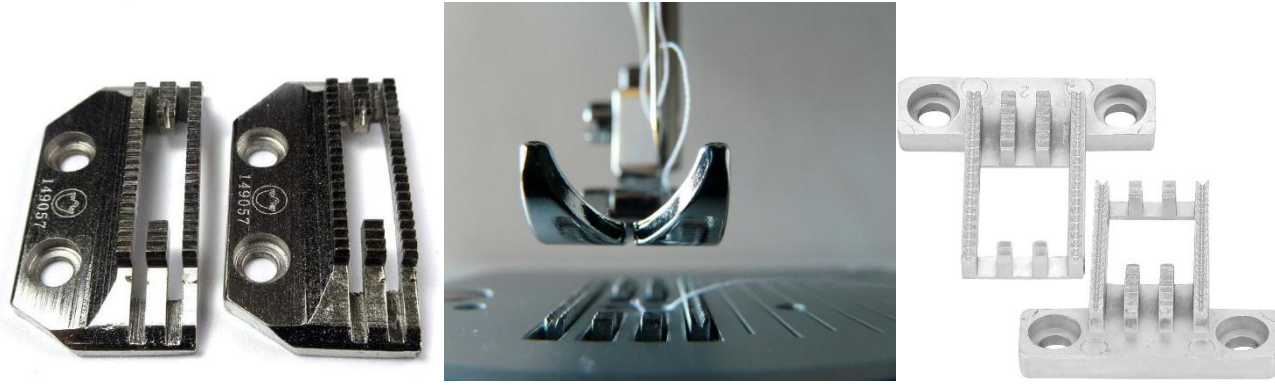
4-Step Buttonholes

You have to manually measure the button, mark your fabric and then create the button in 4 steps – front and back and 2 sides.

1-Step Buttonhole

This type of buttonhole process is only found on computerised sewing machines. This stops all the manual process as the measuring and making your buttonhole is created by placing your button under the foot. You then put your button into the special buttonhole foot provided and the sewing machine then completes your buttonhole. You now have a perfect buttonhole done in seconds. Wonderful

Feed dogs



How does your fabric move from front to back whilst you are sewing – with a ‘feed dog’. It is constantly moving as you are stitching.

These are the saw-shaped teeth that fit under your metal plate and allow fabric to move as you are stitching.

Amazing!

There are a variety of feed dogs and again depending on the type of sewing you will be doing; you will need to choose the right feed dog.

You have a universal feed dog that can be used for various projects and stitching.

The feed dogs’ purpose is for allowing great stitching and feeding of fabric. The more feed dog pieces the easier the fabric will move from front to back.

There are a variety of feed dogs – Box Feed; SFS; Walking Foot; Dual Feed – just to mention a few.

A few other features to ask questions about.

Manual or Automatic Tension:



These dial settings help create the perfect stitch. If you have too much thread passing through your machine, you will have a looser stitch. If you do not have enough thread passing through your machine, the stitching will be tight.

This is not always the problem when you have tight or loose stitching, it is always best to check your needles, are you using the correct thread to fabric.

Bobbin Winder



As far as I know all sewing machines come with a bobbin winder. Some are at the top and outside of the machine, some are under a flap at the top of the machine and sit sideways. Some are manual and others are automated.

Foot control



This is where you control how fast or slow you sew. It is also handsfree and your foot does all the hard work. You are in full control of your sewing.

LED Sewing Light



This is a definite must have, you need a light when sewing. It helps with your sewing projects and eases the pressure on your eyes.



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Needle plate



This is metal plate covers your bobbin and fits over the feed dog. Most sewing machines have engraved lines with seam width guides.

Needle Threader



This is a very useful tool to have whether it is built in, or you buy one. I love this, especially since I wear glasses, I am not spending time trying to thread my cotton through the sewing needle by hand. It is found near the sewing needle (red circle)

Needle Up/Down



Often found on the side of the machine (red circle), you turn the dial clockwise or anti-clockwise for your needle to go up or down.



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Presser foot Sewing machine presser feet – visit www.rosamaycrafts.com for a detailed guide of sewing machine and uses



This foot holds your fabric in place as you are sewing.

Most sewing machine will come with 3 to 4 different types of sewing machine feet – your standard/general use; zipper foot, a bias binder and/or buttonhole foot.

Red circle – where you lift the presser foot up and down.

Other tips to look at when buying a sewing machine.

What type of cover would you like – soft or hard.

What accessories come with your machine – hem picker, 3 or 4 sewing feet, needles, mini screwdriver....

This is just the basic information, there is a wealth of knowledge and guidance out there. If you have a question, message me or email me – nadia@rosamaycrafts.com and I will gladly help or guide you.



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