



*Lush, velvet
fabric dresses
up Vogue
jacket pattern
2934 and dress
pattern 1025.*

Velvet Indulgence

Take on the most luxe fabric **BY LINDA LEE**

Woven with an extra set of warp yarns that form a pile, velvets range in weight from chiffon to heavy upholstery fabrics. Originally made of silk, velvet is now available in cotton, rayon, acetate, polyester, and various blends. It's usually woven as double cloth; two layers of fabric are woven simultaneously, one on top of the other. The pile, which joins the two layers, is then cut to create that signature, luxurious nap.

With new technical information and new sewing aids, velvet is no longer intimidating to sew. After you get a few skills under your belt, you'll be able to include it in your day or night wardrobe with ease. Read on to learn how to distinguish between the different types of velvets and the best styles and patterns

to use. You'll also find great information on how to cut, mark, sew, press, and even hem this tricky fabric.

STYLES AND PATTERNS

Because of velvet's nature, stitching lines tend to show. Try to minimize design details such as darts, seams, buttonholes, and topstitching. Choose simple semi-fitted to loose-fitting garment styles. Gathers, soft folds, and drapery styles work better than those that are fitted and contoured.

Some straight lengthwise seams, e.g., back seams, can be eliminated by placing the seamline on the fold of the fabric. Other details such as zippers and buttonholes can be hand worked instead of machine sewn.

Avoid ripping out stitches because that makes the fabric look damaged; refine



the fit before you start your project. Or, make a garment from a pattern you have already perfected.

Velvet has a definite nap (direction of the pile). When you run your hand over the fabric, you will be able to tell whether the nap feels smooth to the touch (the pile is going down) or pushing against the pile (the pile is going up). If the nap is up, the velvet looks darker. If the nap is brushed down, the fabric looks lighter.

CUTTING AND MARKING

There are no hard and fast rules about which way to cut the fabric. Typically, velvet garments are cut with the nap going down, but if you prefer a richer, darker color, cut the garment with the nap going up. On the other hand, velvet will often wear better and mat less when cut with the pile down. It's important to be consistent and cut all of the pieces with the nap running in the same direction. Use a chalk marker or a sliver of soap on the wrong side of the fabric to mark the nap direction.

Lay the fabric wrong-side up in a single layer on your cutting table, so the pattern pieces are on the fabric backing. When pattern tissue is placed on the pile side, it moves and shifts, making pinning difficult and cutting inaccurate.



Velvet's nap has different shades when draped in opposite directions.

Here, a casual dress made from Vogue 1025 becomes elegantly chic in crimson velvet.

Photos: (pp. 38, 40, left, and 42, left) Jack Deutsch, stylist: Jessica Saal, hair and makeup: Elena Lyakir; all others, Sloan Howard, Styling credits: (p. 40) Jewelry—RJ Graziano (Available at select Macy's stores); (p. 42) Dress—Inc. (available at select Macy's stores); Necklace and earrings—Ben-Amun (Ben-Amun.com), Ring—Liz Henry (LizHenryJewelry.com)

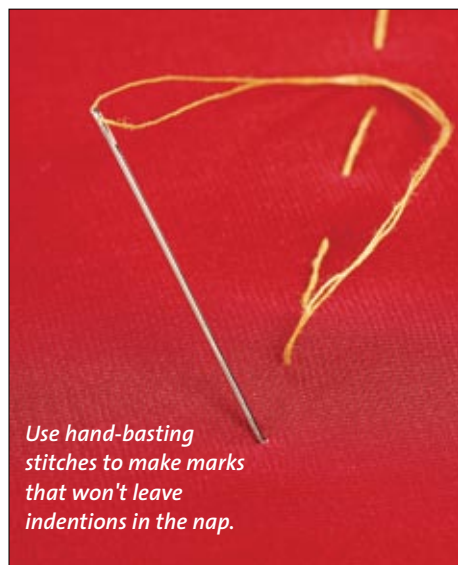


Lay out pattern pieces on the wrong side of the fabric for easy cutting.

Use chalk or tailor's pencils to mark dots and other necessary markings from the pattern on the fabric's wrong side. The best way to mark velvet is with tailor's tacks. Thread a very fine, sharp hand-sewing needle with silk thread to sew the tacks. Silk thread is less damaging to the fabric than the pressure of chalk and can be removed easily. If you need to mark long edges such as a hem, use thread-tracing. Avoid using a tracing wheel and tracing paper. To mark notches on the edges of the pieces, make a small snip into the seam allowance for a single notch or multiple snips for double and triple notches.

SEWING

Stitching two pieces of velvet together has long been the frustrating aspect of



Use hand-basting stitches to make marks that won't leave indentions in the nap.

working with velvet. The traditional methods of sewing simply do not apply to this luscious fabric. No amount of pinning and/or basting will prevent the fabric from shifting and moving—in both directions—when you sew. Here are some classic tips for sewing seams in velvet:

- Hand-baste with one or more of three basting methods—double, backstitch, or diagonal basting.
- Loosen the machine tension.
- Hold the fabric taut as you sew.
- Use a walking foot, Teflon foot, or roller foot.
- Use the stop and start sewing method.
- Stitch with tissue paper or a stabilizer between the layers and/or between the fabric and the feed dogs.

Although all of these suggestions are useful and certainly aid in the sewing process, there is a revolutionary new product that saves time and enormous frustration—temporary spray adhesive.



For easy stitching, try loading your machine with a walking foot.

Now, instead of painfully pinning, basting, and stabilizing, and hoping for the best, simply spray a light line of adhesive along the seamline on the fabric's right

GLOSSARY OF COMMON VELVETS

Velvet is available in a variety of types. Here are a few to get you started.

BURNT-OUT VELVET (DEVORÉ)

A pattern is produced on a fabric made with two different fibers by destroying one of the fibers in a printing process that uses a fiber-eating chemical instead of color.

CRUSHED VELVET

A texture created by pressing in different directions to create a pattern from repositioned pile.

CUT VELVET

A brocaded pattern woven on a jacquard loom to create a distinct pattern in pile on a plain background. The background can range from sheer fabrics such as chiffon, georgette, or voile to heavy satins.

EMBOSSSED VELVET

Non-permanent embossed finish done with engraved rollers and heat.

PANNÉ VELVET

A lightweight, highly lustrous velvet with flattened pile, which is laid in one direction, finished with very heavy roller pressure. This is usually a knit.

SCULPTURED VELVET

Trimmed to various heights to create a sculptured pattern in the pile.

VELOUR

This term is loosely applied to all types of fabric, woven or knit, with nap or cut pile on one side.

VELVET AND VELVETEEN

True velvet is made with a warp pile, and velveteen is made with a filling pile. When folded with wrong sides together, velveteen will “break” on the lengthwise grain, and velvet will break on the crossgrain. Velveteen pile unravels on the crossgrain between filling rows and velvet pile unravels on the lengthwise grain between warp piles.



Vintage Vogue pattern 2934 looks modern and ladylike in charcoal velvet.

side. Then place the right side of the corresponding piece along the seamline, and stitch the seam. You don't even need pins! If you don't get the pieces positioned perfectly the first time, pull the fabrics apart, and place them together again. There is no need to spray the adhesive again; the first spray will retain its sticking power.

You can also use this process when sewing a layer of velvet to other types of fabric such as lining or any other smooth, no-pile material. The most amazing thing is that the adhesive dissipates cleanly.

The adhesive dissipates from the fabric, but it won't disappear from your table, the floor, or the surrounding surfaces, so



Temporary spray adhesive helps hold layers together without shifting.

always cover your work space to catch overspray. Adhesive manufacturers also make products to help remove the overspray from hard surfaces.

PRESSING

Pressing velvet is always delicate work. It is easy to mar the pile with an iron, so use only steam—never allow the iron to touch the fabric. There are several pressing-board surfaces you can use to safely position the velvet pile-side down while steaming from the wrong side.

Needle and Velva boards are both good surfaces, but they are rather small and need to be moved frequently while you work. It's better to cover your entire

pressing surface with a piece of stiff-pile fabric such as heavy velveteen, mohair



upholstery, frieze, or even a thick terry towel; that way, you don't have to shift the surface as you steam.

If your hands are sensitive to heat, use a press mitt or a finger mitt. Use a large scrap of velvet as a press cloth.

VELVET STANDARDS

When sewing velvet, use universal or sharp machine needles sizes 70/10H or 80/12H and 100-percent cotton or silk thread. Always stitch in the direction of the pile. To minimize bulk, trim and grade seam allowances, and slash darts along the fold. Press the darts open.

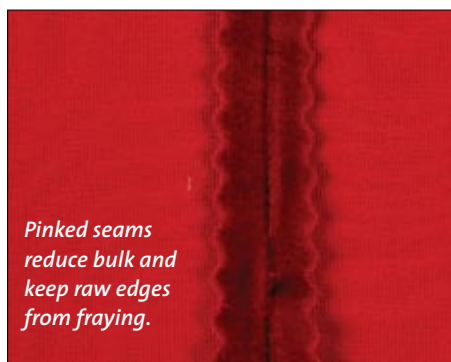
When understitching by hand, use a pickstitch and lining-fabric facings to reduce bulk and shifting; two layers of velvet on garments often “walk” when worn.

When gathering, use a heavy cord in the bobbin. Sew two rows of basting stitches—one on the seam and one inside the seam. Pull the bobbin cord to gather the fabric.

If you like using a walking foot, stitch on a swatch first to make sure that it doesn't leave tracks on the pile that don't steam or brush out.

SEAM FINISHES

Some of the finest and most expensive designer garments do not have seam finishes and are left raw-edged. Unless your velvet ravels excessively, this finish is the flattest and the least bulky; it is



perfectly acceptable. For extra security, try trimming your seam allowances with pinking shears.

If your garment needs a seam finish, experiment with serged edges. A three-thread overlock might work—unless it doesn't grip and tends to fall off the edge. In that case, use a four-thread overlock. Long before the invention of sergers,



sewers used a version of the Hong Kong finish, incorporating strips of tulle fabric wrapped around the raw edges.

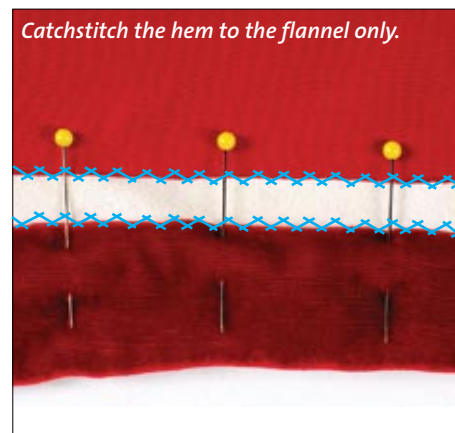
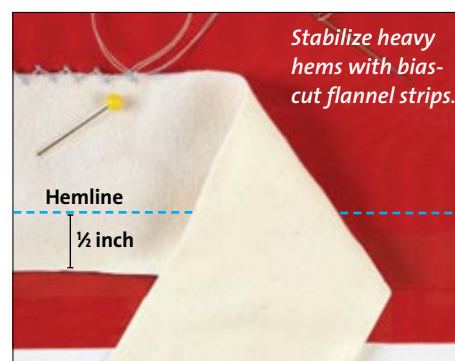
HEM FINISHES

Before hemming your garment, let it hang for at least 24 hours, giving it time to relax. Re-measure and re-cut the hem length if necessary.

A hem may not need an edge finish. Simply turn it up, and stitch by hand,

using a hand catchstitch, or by machine with a blindstitch. Either way, steam the hem; never let the iron touch the fabric. Finger-press the hem to leave a soft fold at the bottom.

For longer, lined garments such as coats and capes, use strips of bias-cut cotton flannel 1 inch wider than the hem



allowance to interface the hem. Position the strip parallel to the hem with the lower edge, crossing the hemline by 1/2 inch. The upper edge will extend above the hem allowance 1/2 inch. Catchstitch the top and bottom interfacing edges to the velvet's wrong side. Fold the hem allowance up, and catchstitch the bottom edge to the flannel only.

Now armed with all of these tricks and techniques, you can approach sewing velvet with a new attitude. Introduce it into your wardrobe with confidence, and wear your newly (and easily) stitched velvet garments with pride.

Linda Lee owns the Sewing Workshop Pattern Collection (SewingWorkshop.com).