

A Stitcher's Pantry

What the Well Stocked Sewing Room Contains

by Jill McCloy

The stitcher's pantry is very much like a cooks pantry in that a creative sewer, just like a creative cook, needs to have certain supplies on hand for moments of inspiration. Each stitcher will accent her own specialities when stocking her particular "pantry", but these are the building blocks. Just as we don't want to have to shop every time we wish to eat, we want to have the basics of our sewing on hand at all times.

Sewing machine: Yes, the number one sewing tool is your sewing machine. Get the best machine you can afford, it is an important household tool as well as an outlet for creativity.

Accessory Feet—these are the workhorses of the sewing world, they will save you time, help make your stitching perfectly accurate and expand the abilities of your sewing machine.

New Clear Quilter's Feet: These four wonderful feet all work together, they all have a center needle hole, are transparent and have 1/8" and 1/4" markings making them the perfect quilting feet.. The Quilter's Clear Edge Stitching foot has a right side guide to make perfect 1/4" piecing. The Quilter's Clear Edge Joining foot has a center guide for perfect stitch in the ditch. The Quilter's 1/4" piecing foot has an extra flange for perfect contact with the feed teeth. The Quilters Free Motion foot is all but invisible for the best view for stippling and quilting.

Left Edge Top Stitch Foot: My favorite for applying quilt binding, oh, and top stitching, too.

Edge Joining Foot: This foot has a center guide that makes it easy to stitch a variety of techniques. Fine tucks, under 1/8"; Stitch in the ditch sewing and quilting with plain or decorative stitching; Top and Edge stitching and Edge Joining.

Edge Stitching Foot: The guide is on the right side of this foot. Make Large Tucks, up to 5/8"; use it as a Seaming Guide, change needle positions to get a perfect 1/4" Seam; Outline Quilting; and Top Stitching.

Braiding Foot: Use this foot as a guide to apply Middy Braid, Soutache, Rick Rack, Narrow Ribbon (use a Twin needle to apply), Twisted Cords, Specialty threads and Elastic Application.

Narrow Braid Foot: This is the foot I use for couching fibers on a non-smooth background such as quilting or a multiple seamed garment. Also, for zig-zagging over cord for adjustable, extra strong gathering.

7 Hole Cord Foot: Use this foot to create Decorative Trims; Mock Smocking; Sheering; Corded Entreeux; and multiple Elastic Cord application.

Gimping Foot: The built in fiber guide makes it a snap to stitch perfect Corded Satin stitch and to do Wing Needle work over a centered cord. Try hemstitching over #5 pearl cotton or adding gimp details to your next vest or collar. The results will be unbelievably easy and beautiful.

Braiding Guide: An indispensable tool, it keeps your hands free to guide fabric.

Pin Tuck Feet: There are four sizes of Pin Tuck feet, 3, 5, 7, and 9 Grooves, the 3 groove being the largest and the 9 Groove foot being the finest. The feet are used with Twin needles to create instant Raised Seam Pin Tucks. Use the 3 Groove foot to make Corded or Shadow Tucks and Baby Piping. Use a 2.0 to 3.0 twin needle with a 3 Groove foot for medium to heavy fabrics, a 2.0 with a 5 Groove foot, a 1.6 to 2.0 with a 7 Groove foot, and use a 1.6 needle with a 9 Groove foot for the finest fabrics.

Gathering Foot: Use for easy Gathering, Gathering to flat fabric, and Puffing.

Ruffler: Actually pleats, use for large home dec projects.

Piping Foot: Make and apply Piping quickly and easily. Use with the Red Hot Piping ruler for perfect ¼" and ⅝" seams on your piping. If you love home dec projects, you'll want the *Welting* and *Double Welting* feet as well, for making larger sized piping.

Open Toe Applique Foot: Use for all types of Applique, Traditional; Heirloom; Penny Wool; Shadow; as well as Decorative Stitching; or any technique that requires a clear visual field.

Overcast Foot: Picôt Edge, a beautiful off the edge trim.

Clear Foot: The perfect guide for Wing Needle Lace application; Motif placement; and Lace Making.

Stippling and Free Motion Feet: Use these feet for Free Motion Quilting and Embroidery, Outline, In the Ditch, and Stippling; and for Cut Work.

Special Marker foot: This very underrated foot is designed to make Tailor's Tacks, but is not what we actually use it for. It makes strong, attractive Open Work seams that are just the finishing touch needed to spark any special project. It also makes beautiful Textured Accents.

Spanish Hemstitch Foot and Stitch Plate: This is wonderful for beautiful fagoting that is strong enough for seams. It is easy and accurate and consistent, one of my favorites.

Roller Foot: Goes over multiple layers without shortening the stitches—great for crazy quilting.

Narrow Hemmer Feet: If you make a lot of napkins or round table cloths or bridal hems, these feet are perfect for you.

Bias Binders: These are self-explanatory, I often use them for binding the edges of vests.

Open Toe Stippling Foot: This is the foot I use for almost all my quilting.

Narrow Zipper Foot and Invisible Zipper Foot: Great for garment makers.

Needles

Standard 80 (12) needles: This is the most commonly used needle for light to medium weight fabrics. It is also the needle for which hooped embroidery was designed.

Size 70 needles: These are for fine fabrics.

Denim needles: These sharply pointed needles are designed to pierce heavy fabrics. A size 12 or 14 is perfect for making Buttonholes on textured fabrics because the sharp point penetrates the heavy threads instead of bouncing off and sliding to the side as a Universal or Ball Point needle would do. A #120 Denim or Top Stitching needle creates lovely, delicate Entredeux and Hem Stitching on delicate fabrics. Of course, they may even be used for stitch heavy fabrics!

Stretch needles: When stitching on knits, the longer shank and larger eye allow a larger loop to form in the shuttle area which prevents skipped stitches. The rounded point can prevent damaging the fibers which can cause runs in the fabric. The larger eye makes stretch needles a good alternate to Metallica® needles when using decorative threads and the last Metallica needle has been used.

Metallica® Metafil® needles: These needles, with extra large, smooth eyes, prevent decorative threads from stripping back and breaking.

Quilting needles: The extra hard, sharp points are designed to handle the wear and tear of going through batting and multiple layers of fabric.

Wing needles: These needles come in sizes 16 and 19. They are used for dramatic Entredeux and Hemstitching designs on fabric as well as Lace Joining. Size 19 is too large for Lace Joining, but is wonderful for Hemstitching on medium to heavy fabrics.

Twin needles: The perfect needle for top stitching narrow ribbons as well as general Top Stitching, Decorative Stitching and, with the Pin tuck feet, Raised Seam Pin Tucks.

Microtex needles: With their sharp point and extra fine smooth shank, these are the best needles for use on Micro-fiber, rayons, silkies, or any fine fabrics with a firm finish.

Stabilizers

HTC Tear-away, Pellon® Stitch and Tear or Sulky® Stiffy are a must if you do any kind of wing needle work. I've never found any other stabilizer that gives adequate support for hem stitches. Use Sulky® KK2000 to keep the fabric from shifting.

Softer tear away stabilizers are used for hooped embroideries.

Iron on stabilizers are necessary for sealing the backs of fabrics for crayon work and some types of dying. They are great for stabilizing soft or stretchy fabrics for any type of embellishment or top stitching and button holes. They are perfect for stabilizing large areas of fabric for all over embellishment.

Cut Away stabilizers for permanent stability in fabrics that need body for embellishment, such as knits and loosely woven fabrics.

Liquid or spray stabilizers are perfect for delicate fabrics and/or stitches that would be distorted removing a tear away type stabilizer.

Dissolvable stabilizers are used on top of napped or textured fabrics to prevent uneven stitching, for marking delicate fabrics or intricate designs, and are a must for cutwork and creating your own fabrics from fibers.

Aqua Magic® is my favorite when the stabilize absolutely must go away completely and the fabric is washable.

Heat away stabilizers are perfect for lace and mesh making, and when the stabilizer must go away and the fabric is not washable.

Stick On stabilizers are a must for hoop embroidery near the edge of a garment or other sewing projects as well as for use with any fabric that would be crushed or damaged by hooping.

Spray on temporary fabric adhesives, such as Sulky® KK2000 will turn any stabilizer into a “stick on”, and they are sanity savers when using layering techniques, because they prevent multiple layers from shifting when Quilting, Top Stitching, working with tricky placements, Applique, and even for temporary shoulder pad placement.

Steam a Seam II®: This heat bonded appliqué mesh is both a temporary and permanent adhesive which allows the fiber artist to change her mind at any time before pressing for permanent placement. It is my personal favorite.

Single and double sided adhesive tapes: These come on grain or bias for myriad uses such as applying decorative bias and trims, stabilizing shoulder seams, replacing stay stitching, stabilizing button holes, fusing hems and keeping facings in place. Steam a Seam Lite® and Ultra Soft Double Side Fusibles from LH Designs® are my favorites.

Favorite Notions and Marking Tools

Water soluble Pens: For use anywhere that a clear and easily removable mark is needed.

Air erasable pens: For use where clear marking is needed on fabric that is not to be washed immediately.

Chalk pencils and Chalk dispensers: These come in many colors, do test them to make certain that they are easily removed from your fabric.

Template marking pencils and pen: You'll need an erasable one for temporarily marking embroidery templates and a permanent one such as a Sharpie® extra fine point marker for marking permanently and accurately on template plastic.

Quilter's Template plastic: I use this stuff all the time to make templates for collar band stitching lines, so that the curves match. Ditto for collar points. Use it for making any type of template such as Scalloped Edges or Doll Body Stitching Lines, to mark stitching lines for curved bottom pockets or cuffs, Lace Shaping Panels, and the list goes on. Be sure to purchase a nice heavy grade that comes in **flat sheets**.

Tracing Wheel and Transfer Paper: Necessary for marking Curved Darts. Be careful about permanency, always test. Saral® transfer paper doesn't have a wax base and is often easier to remove than those papers that do contain wax.

Glass Head Pins: Good, fine, sharp pins that can be pressed over make all sewing easier and are absolutely necessary for heirloom sewing—look for small pin heads.

Hem Gauge: It's been around forever, but I'm lost without it. I like the metal ones better than the plastic because the sliders stay in place better. The newer one's all have markings in both inches and metric, making it very easy to estimate the size of hooped embroidery designs.

Tape Measure: So basic, I almost forgot it! If you like to do your own designing, it's great to have one that shows yardage on the backside, or mark the yardage yourself with a Sharpie® pen.

Magnetic Seam Guide: I've used these for Long Seams, Strip Piecing, or Top Stitching Casings and Hems. They are really handy, especially if you are ever tired when you sew or you can't find your Edge Stitching foot.

Buttonhole Chisel: These handy gadgets are the best for opening Buttonholes without damaging the thread or fabric. Look for the one with the little green cutting pad, you'll love it. I won't open buttonholes without mine!

Gridded Rulers: My favorites are Omnigrid© and Creative Grids, which come in many handy sizes and are easy to read on both light and dark fabrics. The grid lines help keep everything square and on grain for both pattern drafting and fabric cutting. Get all the sizes that appeal to you, they also make the best pattern weights that I have ever used.

Cutting Mats: If you have the room, try the 40" X 72" Sew/Fit cutting mat, it's just wonderful for laying out fabric. It may be lightly pinned into as well as cut on, which makes it perfect for keeping slippery fabrics on grain. The actual grid is 38" X 68" with a two inch border all the way around. It is also marked in metric. Another one I can't seem to do without for travel and classes is the June Tailor, Quilter's Cut and Press, which has a cutting mat on one side and a pressing pad on the other.

Rotary Cutter and Extra Blades: Everyone has their own favorite, but do keep extra blades on hand all times. Rotary cutters are supposed to save time not make you crazy, keep them sharp.

Scissors, Scissors, Scissors and Snips: There are many, many specialty scissors and snips to choose from. Get the best pair of dress maker's shears that you can afford, then get the specialty scissors that work best for you.

My favorites accessory scissors are: **Ginger© Tailor Points** (recently renamed Craft Scissors), these are short, heavy duty scissors that are perfect for grading seams; **Applique Scissors** are a must if you do Heirloom sewing or any kind of applique; a curved pair for sniping threads for machine embroidery; **Ginger© snips** are a must in the work room and for classes—put them on a cord and wear them around your neck and they're there when you need them. I must also confess to a great love of all the antique and stork scissors, they're nice for snipping threads, but I really like them just because they are so beautiful. **Don't forget a good seam ripper!** And, **I love the new delicate, curved blade snips.**

Bodkins: My favorite bodkin is a giant safety pin, they never seem to come undone in the middle of the casing.

Tidy Tote®: A Tidy Tote is a heavy pincushion with a Velcro® attached scrap bag for easy emptying. The bag has plastic tubing around the opening so that it stays wide open. I've got one by each of my sewing machines which makes it easy to keep everything tidy, so I guess they are well named. The patterns are available from your Viking dealer.

Quilter's Gloves: Helps you get a grip. I like to put lotion on my hands so that I get a nice smooth hands while I'm working. I cannot do free motion work without them!

Lighting!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Nothing will make a bigger difference than being able to see. And, being able to see true colors is Heaven in the work room. You deserve an Ott light, get one and use it! It has the added benefit of being cool so it won't over heat you or the sensors on your sewing machine. Get all the lighting you need, consider it a safety feature. And, I love my "E" light.

Pressing Tools

Steam Iron: Don't stint here. **Get the best you can afford** and don't let anyone talk you into an automatic shut off iron. Real sewers need to have an iron that stays on and stays hot. Connect your iron to an outlet that turns off when the wall switch is turned off and have a light connected to the same outlet so that it is obvious when the iron is on or off.

Point Presser: This is my most used pressing tool. I use it to press open any seams that are on a fold such as collars, facings, or lined to the edge garment seams.

Press Cloth: Protects fabrics from less than perfect irons and irons from less than perfect memories. For example, forgetting which side of the iron on stabilizer is the bond side.

Iron Cleaner: Make certain that you have a clean iron available when you need it.

Teflon® Pressing Sheet: This thin see through Teflon sheet makes composite bonded applique so easy. And, it protects your ironing board cover at the same time so you can use to apply iron on interfacing.

Odds and Ends

Eight Spool Thread Rack: I love it, it fits on the back of my machine and is a must for annoying but beautiful metallic threads. I also keep a spool of white and a spool of black on it so that they are always at my finger tips.

Tilt Table: Tilts your machine so that you can see what you are doing without hunching over and no, door stops won't do the job. They don't support the entire bottom of your machine! Please use the proper tool to keep that wonderful machine supported and in good working order!

Fasturn, Tube Turner: For handles, pulling through batting, straps, doll parts and more. These help you keep your sanity.

Extension Table: Support where you need it, fabulous for quilting and home dec projects.

Cut and Press Mat: I take mine to classes and also using it at my sewing machine with one of those **mini-irons**.

Hemostat: Perfect for turning small items such as collar corners or small doll parts or turned appliqués.

Threads, You can never, never ever have enough thread!

Sewing thread, serger thread, decorative threads, bobbin thread (I buy it by the box), bobbin work threads and ribbons, couching threads, metallics, etc, etc, etc. Don't forget Lingerie thread for the bobbin when the wrong side will show, you can match the fabric or the needle threads.

Hooped Embroidery Supplies

Most of these have already been listed in other areas, but here are a couple more.

Embroidery Software: Wow, it is all fun, but if you aren't ready for the whole package, get Editing Software, it is easy, fast and creative, you'll have a blast. I love it!

Extra Hoops: I've got about every size and really use them all, but have doubles of those that I most use. One of my favorites is the mid-size hoop.

Lots and Lots of Embroidery Designs!

Believe it or Not—these are my basics. I've lots more specialty notions and feet for specific sewing techniques and categories. For instance, a special bobbin case for decorative bobbin work and I haven't even started on the Serger Pantry or the Quilter's Pantry (New fabric mover, yes!).