

# Choosing a Sewing Machine (TOOL-1)

If you're thinking of buying a new, or second-hand sewing machine, here are a few essential tips to ensure you are satisfied with your purchase.

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## 1. Make a List of Features

Before you go approach a sewing machine dealer, think very carefully about all the projects that you're ever likely to want to tackle. Make a list to take along with you to the dealer.

## 2. Research Your Local Dealers

Ask sewing friends or tutors for details of any reputable sewing machine dealers in your area. Only choose a dealer that will offer you help and instruction on your chosen machine before and after you've bought it.

## 3. Buy From a Reputable Dealer

Supermarkets, catalogue stores, shopping channels or newspaper ads will not be able to give you any advice on what you need. Once you've paid your money you're on your own.

## 4. Choose a Machine with Separate Stitch-width / Stitch-length Controls

There are a number of budget sewing machines on the market that have many fancy built-in stitches but no separate stitch adjustment controls. You will soon find that these are of limited use.

## 5. Choose a Sewing Machine with Drop-Feed

Choose a sewing machine that has a drop-feed facility (where the feed dogs can be lowered out of use) and avoid those that come supplied with a plastic plate to cover the permanently raised feed dogs. You can only do proper machine embroidery with a drop-feed facility.

## 6. Check-Out Both New & Second-Hand Machines

Ask your dealer to show you his range of second-hand sewing machines. You may be able to pick up a good robust second-hand

model that has all the basic features you need, for the price of a new, flimsier one.

## 7. Check Which Presser Feet Are Included

Generally, new machines have fewer extras than older, second-hand ones. You will need:

- a standard zig-zag foot.
- a zipper foot.
- a buttonhole foot.
- a darning or open-toed embroidery foot (compulsory for machine embroidery but you may need to buy it separately).

## 8. Check Which Thread Reel Sizes Can Be Used

Choose a sewing machine that will take all sizes of thread reels. Machines with self-threading cartridges may look inviting and easy to use but they're a real pain when the thread you want is on an awkwardly sized reel, which will not fit in the cartridge.

## 9. Choose a Front or Vertical Loading Bobbin

If you want to try machine embroidery (and you will when you see just what you can do) choose a machine with a front-loading rather than a drop-in bobbin. These are more robust, easier for adjusting bobbin tension and much easier to dismantle for cleaning and snarl-ups.

## 10. Choose a Robust Machine

Whatever machine you choose, make sure it is robust enough to cope with your sewing needs but light enough for you to manage to sewing classes and one-day workshops. And remember, you will need a dust cover (hard or soft) for those windy, rainy walks to classes (you won't always be able to park near the door) and those periods between sewing projects.