



## Ultimate Sewing Machine Guide

Your Go-To Guide for Buying, Setting Up, Using,  
Cleaning, and Maintaining a Sewing Machine

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Choosing a sewing machine can feel like an overwhelming process. From picking the right machine and deciding where to buy it, to setting it up at home and keeping it running smoothly - there's a lot to consider. But have no fear - this guide has all the information you need to solve any sewing machine woes you may have.

In it, you'll learn what to consider before you even begin looking for a machine. You'll also get tips on how to set up and use your machine, including threading, winding a bobbin, selecting a stitch, and adjusting the tension. Then you'll learn how to care for and troubleshoot basic sewing machine issues to keep you happily sewing for many projects to come.

## Buying a Sewing Machine

Buying a sewing machine can be intimidating, whether it's your first or you are looking to upgrade. There are hundreds of models under numerous brands that all have something different to offer. Here are some things to consider when buying your first, or next, machine.

### What is Your Skill Level?

Understanding your skill level is important when buying a sewing machine. If you are a beginner who is buying their first machine, select a beginner type model. More advanced machines come with many extra features that may be intimidating when first starting out. Many sewing machine company sites have their machines categorized as beginner, intermediate, or advanced, which can help narrow the amount of machines in your search.

**Check out this video for more info:**

[Tips for Buying a Sewing Machine](#)

### How Often Will You Use the Machine?

Knowing how often you'll use your machine is important when selecting one, especially if you are a beginner. If you plan to use it a lot and you buy a very basic machine, you may outgrow that machine quickly and be back in the market for a new one.

### What Do You Like to Make?

This is something many people don't think to consider when looking at how to buy a sewing machine. If you are in the market for a sewing machine you obviously want to sew, but you may also want to do quilting or embroidery. While you could buy a separate machine for each task, there isn't a need for that. Many machines are multi-purpose and will allow you to do some aspect of all three.



## How Much Are You Willing to Spend?

Sewing machine costs range from \$100 to the cost of a small car. Knowing how much you are willing to spend on a machine is something to determine before you start looking. As a beginner, the cheapest isn't always the best option especially if you plan to use it often. Having an amount predetermined will help keep you from being overwhelmed by expensive machines and also help you see that you may be able to get a machine with several extra features and still stay within a certain price point.

## Computerized vs. Mechanical

Today it is not uncommon to find a sewing machine that has a USB port, a

tablet-like touch screen, or even WiFi. While these are great features to have, some people prefer pushing buttons or turning dials. Most machine companies offer machines in both categories and will even have them sorted on their site. Knowing which type you prefer can help narrow your search when buying a sewing machine. If you are unsure which type you like, find the nearest local dealer and try them out.

## Where to Buy a Machine

While you may be able to find a good deal on a machine at a local big box store, it may not be the best place to purchase it. Buying a sewing machine from a dealer will not only get you the machine but also advice and assistance. A dealer can give you sewing machine buying tips to help you narrow down the selection. Dealers can also show you how to use a machine and allow you to try them out before buying them. Some dealers even offer small classes on how to use the machine and are available after your purchase to answer any questions you may have. Dealers sometimes even offer trade-in programs, so you can feel confident that if you outgrow your machine you can go back and get a new one. Even if you buy from a dealer you can still begin your machine search online and then find the nearest local dealer.

**Check out this video for more info:**

[Where to Buy a Sewing Machine](#)

## Setting Up Your Machine

Once you've purchased a machine it's time to take it home and set it up. All machines will be a little different, but there are some basic parts that can be found on all machines.

### Power Cord and Presser Foot

One of the first things you will need to do is locate and plug in your power cord and presser foot. On some machines these two cords are joined into one on the machine side, and on others they may be two separate cords. The area to plug in these cords are typically located on the back or right side of the machine.

### Threading the Machine

Needle thread paths can vary by machine and machine brand. Many machines will have the thread path clearly marked on the machine with numbers or arrows as to how you thread it. If it does not have it marked you may need to consult your machine manual. It is very important that you thread your machine correctly. If you don't it may not work, or it may stitch but the stitch quality could turn out very poor or bunched up. Thread paths may seem long and complicated, but each area your thread passes through serves an important part in making your machine sew. In general your thread will pass from the spool through at least a guide, a lever, a tension disk, or knob and then the needle.

### Winding and Loading the Bobbin

When you purchase a new machine it will generally come with a pre-wound bobbin already in place. Depending on how much you sew you may quickly run out of bobbin thread, so it's important to know how to wind and replace the bobbin. On more advanced machines the bobbin can be wound from the needle thread with the machine completely threaded. However, on most machines there is a separate thread path for winding a bobbin. This is also a thread path that should be marked on your machine with either arrows or numbers. In general, a bobbin winding thread path can be as simple as passing the thread from the spool around a tension disk and then to the bobbin. Do not try to wind the bobbin by hand. A bobbin needs to be wound by the machine, or a separate tool specifically made to wind bobbins, in order for it to function properly. Once the bobbin is wound you can insert it into the machine. Bobbins are either top loading and can be dropped straight into the machine, or front loading and may need to be inserted into a bobbin case before being placed in the machine.

### Check out these videos for more info:

[How to Prepare a Sewing Machine](#)  
[Sewing Needle Knowledge](#)

## Turning the Machine On

Once you have the machine plugged in, the needle threaded, and a bobbin in place, you can start sewing. Typically when you first turn a machine on it will automatically be set for a standard straight stitch with a length around 2.5mm. This is considered a construction stitch and is a good stitch

to begin practicing with. Once you feel comfortable sewing with the straight stitch, play around with some of the other stitch options you may have on the machine. Be sure to consult your manual as to what presser foot needs to be in place for any decorative stitches you want to try.

## Changing Settings

Changing settings on a machine varies greatly by machine. Some machines have knobs or buttons to push in order to change a setting, while others have touch screens. Your machine manual will come in very handy when it comes to knowing what setting can be changed on your machine and what they do.

### Stitch Selection

Changing the stitch type or stitch length may be one of the first settings you try changing on your machine. Most machines offer both a straight and zig-zag stitch. You will also have the option to change both the stitch width and length. Longer stitch lengths are generally used for topstitching or basting, while shorter stitch lengths can be used with a zig-zag stitch to create a satin stitch or button hole.

### Tension

Both the needle and bobbin thread have tension on them at all times that can be adjusted. In general, when you purchase

a new machine the tension will already be set to accurate levels for regular stitching on medium-weight fabric. The knob or dial to adjust the needle thread tension can typically be found on the front of the machine while the screw to adjust the bobbin thread tension will typically be found on the bobbin case, whether it is removable for a front loading bobbin or built in for a top loading bobbin. When the tension is evenly balanced the needle thread should only be seen on the right side of the fabric and the bobbin thread only seen on the wrong side. If the bobbin thread shows on the right side the needle tension is too tight and/or the bobbin tension is too loose. If the needle thread shows on the wrong side the opposite is the case. In general it is easier to adjust the needle tension, so that should be tried first when attempting to balance the tension of the machine. When testing or balancing the tension on a machine, it is easiest if the bobbin and needle thread are contrasting colors. This way it is easy to see which thread is the issue.

## Cleaning Your Machine

With every project you sew, your machine gets a little dirtier. This can simply be dust or bits of fabric and thread that may get caught in the machine. It is important to clean your machine on a regular basis to keep it running smoothly.

### Remove Dust and Lint

The exterior of the machine can be cleaned and dusted with a soft cloth. The interior of the machine can be cleaned in several areas and you may want to consult your machine manual before you do so. A lint brush, small vacuum, or canned air can be used to remove lint and dust from your machine. If you are using canned air, make sure you angle the can so the air is pushing the dust out of the machine.

You do not want to push lint or dust further into the machine.

### Oil

It is also important to oil components of your machine from time to time. You want to use an oil specifically made for sewing machines, not any other household oil. Some machines may even come with a bottle of oil or an oil pen. Consult your machine manual for tips on which areas to oil and how often to do so. After you oil your machine you may need to run a scrap of fabric through your machine to absorb any oil left behind so it does not stain new fabric.

**Check out this video for more info:**  
[Sewing Machine Maintenance Tips](#)

## Basic Troubleshooting

Whether you are just learning to sew or you've been doing it for years, it can be frustrating when your machine doesn't work properly. Here is how to troubleshoot some basic sewing problems.

### Machine Not Sewing

If the machine is simply not sewing, this can be caused by several things. First, ensure that the machine is threaded correctly. Some machines will not sew

if this is done incorrectly. Check that the presser foot is lowered completely. When stitching on thicker fabrics it can be easy to overlook this step.

### Poor Stitch Quality

Skipped stitches or other stitch problems can be caused by improper threading of the machine. Recheck the needle thread path and ensure it is threaded correctly. Also check that the bobbin thread is correctly coming from the throat plate

of the machine. If these are both correct and the machine is still stitching poorly, check the needle. The needle could have been bent by hitting a pin.

## Thread Breakage

Thread breakage can be caused by either the needle or the thread. First, ensure that you are using a good quality thread that is not old or brittle. Next, ensure that you are using the correct needle for the thread being used. If you are using a needle that doesn't have a large enough eye it can shred the thread and cause it to bunch up behind the needle.

## Smooth Sewing

Learning how to use and properly care for your sewing machine will keep it running smoothly for years to come. Whether it's your first machine or a new machine upgrade, it's always a good idea to make sure you know how to set up the machine. Once the machine is set up and running, it's a good idea to learn how to change settings, clean the machine, and troubleshoot basic issues. Not only will this keep you smoothly sewing through any project you tackle, but it will keep the sewing process enjoyable and make you want to continue learning more and more.

## Breaking Needles

Needles need to be changed on a regular basis. A dull needle may not be able to pierce the fabric and can break. Also ensure that you are using the correct needle for the type of fabric being used.

**Check out this article for more info:**

[Sewing Machine Troubleshooting](#)

This link will take you to our sister site, National Quilters Circle.

**Check out this video for more info:**

[Sewing Ergonomics: Tools, Tips and Techniques](#)

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