



Know your threads

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If you've ever wondered which thread is best to use on your sewing machine, here's a brief history of thread and some handy tips for your future projects.

Throughout history, 'thread' has been made from a range of materials, including animal and vegetable fibres, man-made varieties and even metal wire. Really, anything that can be used to

stitch with can be classified as thread.

In earlier times, the most frequently used kinds were silk, wool, linen, flax and cotton. Linen threads have been discovered in Egyptian archaeological sites dated between 3000 and 2500 BC.

Flax was processed into fine linen from almost 2000 years ago and by 500AD, Irish linen was held in high regard by European rulers.

The story of silk is a fascinating one. Legend has it that the Chinese Emperor Huang-Ti, who ruled around 2650 BC, was concerned about the blight affecting the Imperial mulberry grove and gave Empress Hsi-Ling-Shi the task of finding out what was causing the damage. Upon inspection, she found that tiny white worms were eating the leaves and leaving whitish cocoons. She carried some of the cocoons to her room and accidentally dropped one into a bowl of hot water. The Empress noticed that it turned into a tangle of threads as fine as a spider's web, but when she attempted to pull it out, she discovered it was one continuous strand. The Chinese kept silk thread a secret for about 3,000 years, until the Japanese 'cottoned on' to it and began producing silk, and later, other countries followed suit.

Cotton thread, which originated in India, has also been produced for thousands of years. As it's quite strong, traditionally it was – and still is – the preferred thread for machine and hand-sewing. Today, however, synthetic threads are also widely used.

THREADS ARE CONSTRUCTED IN SEVERAL WAYS:

Spun thread – Cotton or polyester fibres are spun into single yarns and then twisted together.

Core thread – Spun cotton or polyester fibres are wrapped around a continuous filament of polyester fibre.

Texturised thread – A continuous filament of polyester or nylon is mechanically texturised and heat-set to

