

# Choosing the Right Sewing Machine Needle

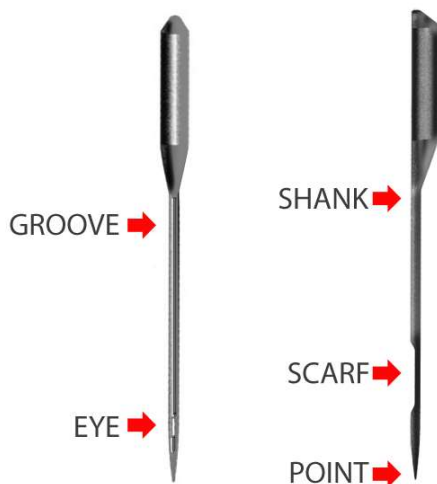
By: Liz Johnson at Sew4home.com

You probably already know the rule of thumb for sewing machine needles: install a new one at the beginning of each project. When a needle is piercing your fabric at 600 to 1,000 stitches per minute, small things like a dulled point or an eye that is beginning to wear, can make a big difference in the quality of your stitches. But it's just as important to choose the right *kind* of needle. Our thanks to Janome America and Janome Canada for helping us with the fine points of machine needles.

If you look at the needle display at your local sewing dealer, you might see a dozen or more different types. They all look pretty much the same unless you pull out a magnifying glass. But, different needles *do* have different tips, eyes, shanks, grooves, and shafts; and what you select can make a big difference in how well your machine sews through your fabric.

Also, it's important to take into consideration *who* makes the needle. Here at Sew4Home, our exclusive sewing machine sponsor is Janome America, and we do our sewing on Janome machines. Because Janome makes a line of needles designed especially to run on their machines, that's the brand of needle we use on a regular basis. However, the needle basics are appropriate for all machines as is the recommendation to change your needle on a regular schedule.

Get to know your way around a needle



All sewing needles have essentially the same parts:

**Shank:** The upper end of the needle, which is inserted into the machine. On the vast majority of needles, the *back* of the shank is flat to make it easier to correctly insert them.

**Shaft:** The body of the needle below the shank. This will vary in thickness depending on the size of the needle.

**Front Groove:** This groove, located on the front of the shaft, acts as the last thread guide before the thread goes through the eye of the needle.

**Scarf:** The short indentation above the eye of the needle. It allows the hook on your bobbin case to get close to the eye of the needle so it can catch the thread loop and form the stitch. Janome needles have a longer, deeper scarf to help eliminate skipped stitches.

**Eye:** You know what this is: the hole at the end of the needle through which the thread passes. Janome needles have especially smooth eye holes to keep thread feeding smoothly and to avoid snagging.

## Understanding needle sizes

What the heck are those random numbers? The first thing you see on a needle package is the needle size. This will usually be shown as one number over another, such as: 70/10, 80/12 or 90/14. These numbers refer to the size of the needle and you only need to pay attention to one of them.

The larger of the two numbers is the needle size according to the European numbering system. European sizes range from 60 to 120; 60 is a very fine, thin needle and 120 is a very thick, heavy needle. Some companies list American first, some list European first.

The smaller number is the needle size according to the American numbering system. The American system uses 8 to 19. So 8 is a very fine, thin needle and 19 is a very thick, heavy needle. In the US, this may be the *only* number you see on the needle pack.

The different size needles have been designed for optimal sewing on different weights of fabric.

For example, if you are going to sew a sheer window curtain, you would want a fine needle such as 60/8. Using a 120/19 would leave giant holes in your fabric. On the other hand, if you were to try to sew through upholstery fabric with a 60/8 needle, it could bend or break. Using a 120/19 would give you extra strength to penetrate heavy home décor fabric and would have an eye large enough to carry the thicker thread you are likely to use.

## Picking the right needle type

The different needle sizes described above reflect the thickness of the shank (the main part) and the size of the eye. You can also get specialized needles that have modified points, eyes, tips, and even heads (the area right behind the tip). Some of our favorites are listed below.

The most common recommendation for general sewing is to use an 11/75 or 14/90 universal needle.

Janome manufactures three main needle styles to help guarantee professional-looking results.



### Janome Blue Tip Needles

These are the original needles manufactured by Janome for general sewing on most fabrics as well as for machine embroidery. They are a **size 11** needle with a slight ball point tip that makes them good for most woven fabrics, although they are also especially well-suited to sewing knits, fine fabrics, and synthetic fabrics. When a needle does not pierce adequately, it can drag the fabric downward toward the bobbin area, causing what is known as “flagging.” You can experience puckered seams, damaged fabric, and thread snags and breaks. A slight ball point tip goes *between* the fabric’s fibers, avoiding these issues. Blue Tip needles also have an oversize eye, which better accommodates embroidery thread, reducing tension and stress on the top thread – and makes threading the eye of the needle easier. The Blue Tip needle is an excellent choice for buttonholes as well.

### Janome Purple Tip Needles

A newer member of the Janome needle family is the Purple Tip. This needle also has a slightly rounded ball point like the Blue Tip but is a larger needle (**size 14**) with a special cobra-shaped head. That sounds scary, but it simply means there are tiny “wings” just above the eye on either side of the needle that force the fibers of the fabric apart, allowing stitches to form more easily, leading to fewer or no skipped stitches. Janome recommends the Purple Tip needle for high-density embroidery designs as well as thick fabrics like denim and even multiple layers of fabric, such as quilts.

### Janome Red Tip Needles

This option is *not* a ball point needle. **It is a size 14** needle with a sharp point and is an excellent choice for most normal fabrics, especially the popular quilting cottons. Since it is a very strong and durable needle, it works well in most situations where a universal needle is indicated. However, unlike traditional universal needles, the Red Tip needle has a larger eye (like the Blue Tip) so it is also a good choice for tricky threads like metallic or monofilament. As with the Purple Tip above, the larger Red Tip needle is a good choice for thicker fabrics and multiple layers.

## **Other specialized needle types**

These are handy options for many home décor projects.

**Jeans:** Has a sharp, strong point for denim, canvas and other tightly woven fabrics.

**Leather:** Features a chisel point for genuine leather only.

**Sharps:** Includes a sharper tip, making it good for silks and micro-fibers.

**Metallic:** if you are topstitching or embellishing with specialty threads, this needle has a larger, polished eye to allow the thread to flow through without fraying and breaking.

## **Which one should you use?**

For the majority of home décor projects, you'll want to use a Universal style needle in size 11 to 14, depending on how heavy your fabrics is. This type works well for most woven fabrics, knits and synthetics. Use the notes above on size and design to determine which needle type to switch to if using a sheer or heavy weight fabric. When in doubt, ask your dealer. They really know their needles.

Your needle is a *very* important part of your project. Think of it this way: a good needle in your sewing room is like a good knife in your kitchen!

**Our thanks again to Janome for helping us give you the information you need to keep your sewing machine running at its best.**