

What's So Special About **SILK** Thread?

Text and photos by **Cindy Scraba**

Who could believe luxurious silk filament is spun from a modest cocoon? After centuries of sericulture, the fascination of this miracle continues to capture our curiosity while the popularity for silk continues to grow. Quilters and stitchers, who appreciate and understand the special qualities of silk, welcome this “queen of fibres” into their sewing rooms.



In the silk production process, cocoons are immersed in hot water to loosen the elusive filament, (a laborious process) which could be a mile in length! This miracle pays tribute to selective breeding of silkworms along with careful cocoon harvesting and generations of TLC.



The filaments are carded or reeled to form yarn, which starts out coarse and stiff due to the residual sericin—a gummy substance excreted by the silk worm during its spinning process.



The fibres are more limber when they're reeled and twisted into skeins of raw silk. At this particular stage it feels somewhat like “brittle hair” and, sorry to say, at all stages has an unpleasant scent.

Often the innermost portion of the cocoon contains the “Grade A” filament and is derived from only 23 to 28% of the raw cocoon. Several of these continuous fibres are twisted together to form premium filament silk Threads like the Superior Kimono™ Silk thread and Tiré™ Silk Thread lines*. The remainder of the cocoon is used in the production of lower grade “spun silk” threads and applied to various silk products. Silk is renowned for its strength, elasticity and natural luminescence—exclusive benefits of filament silk thread—definitely worth its weight! It is the strongest natural fibre for its weight with a greater tensile strength than steel. Who knew?

Filament silk thread is best known for its quality and versatility. Unfortunately, reading this article isn't as effective as

touching the velvety smooth texture of silk threads; however, here are some suggested USES. Notice the operative word is “Use”—please don't save good threads you may already have for someday or for someone else. I give you permission to indulge yourself today.

- #100, 2-ply tight Z twist for hand or machine sewing—exquisite for fine appliqué where stitches are concealed, perfect for curves, points, fine micro quilting and blends smoothly with a natural sheen as do the following silk threads...
- #50, 3-ply tight Z Twist means your machines will love it when threaded up. Great for general construction, piecing, decorative work, embroidery, quilting.
- #30, 3-ply tight Z twist—perfect for topstitching, embellishment, couching.
- #16, 3-ply medium Z twist—common name is Button Hole Twist—for dimensional handwork: Brazilian Embroidery, edge stitch, beadwork knots, stumpwork, and awesome bobbin use.
- Variegated Silk Floss 3-ply moderate twist/spun silk yarn, tone-on-tone colour gradations with 5-inch intervals—for exciting hand stitching projects or bobbin applications.
- Variegated #50 Tiara 3-ply tight Z twist—intense, yet subtle colour variations for quilting, thread play, embroidery. A variegated, filament silk thread is very special and rare indeed. How much is it? Don't ask—it's worth every dollar.

For your reference, I carry the full complement of these silk threads on my website. Also, visitors are welcome (by appointment) to visit my Thread Candy Shoppe on Vancouver Island for the full silky experience. My Thread Talks and workshops also provide a unique opportunity for hands-on comparison and discussion.

SILK Thread Comparison & Description

(from L to R)

Notice the higher the number the thinner the thread gauge

#100 Superior Kimono™ Silk

#50 Tire™ Silk

#30 Tire™ Silk

#16 Tire™ Silk

3-ply Variegated Silk Floss

#50 Variegated Tiara™ Silk



Amusing Silk Notes:

- The earliest dental floss was silk filament.
- Bicycle Tires*, bulletproof vests and parachutes were once made from silk.
- Medical sutures were stitched with silk in the early 1800's.
- Silk is a protein containing amino acids, which provide health benefits.
- Silk is an ingredient in some cosmetics, foods, candies, pharmaceuticals, etc.
- The silkworm has 2 dark egg sacs on its head; the eyes are actually near their mouth.
- Occasionally, 2 silkworms jointly spin a twin cocoon as the fibres become intertwined. These natural “bumps” formed or slubs appear in the weave of Dupioni Silks—thus the origin of its name, plus “doppio” is Italian for double as in espresso, mmmm.

There will always be more to learn about silk. If you have the opportunity to take in classes at the Houston Fall Festival, Maggie Backman, a passionate silk educator, offers a variety of hands-on and theory classes through her consortium of silk experts. Their specialties are detailed on their respective websites listed below. I was fortunate to study with six fabulous instructors on my excursion to the High Desert Silk Experience held at the Superior Threads expansive facility in Utah. Some of those workshop articles are archived on my website under “Cinderella’s Blog” for Feb. 2012. If you’re ready for the ultimate adventure, Maggie Backman is coordinating another Silk Study Tour to Japan in 2013.

Silk has earned the official status of: “The Queen of Fibres” for many reasons. Man made synthetic products strive to clone SILK’s attributes, which evidently only the modest silkworm can possess.

Happy Stitching Always—Especially with SILK!

—Cinderella (Cindy Scraba)

Sources:

www.silkcentralonline.com
www.shiborigirlstudios.com
www.celebratesilk.com
www.katrinawalker.com
www.norikoendo.com
www.junecolburn.com
www.homestitches.com
www.superiorthreads.com
www.cindysthreadworks.com

