

Tool Talk: Seam Rippers!

by Cindy Scraba

It's time to pay tribute to another tool that quilters love—the *Seam Ripper*! It should really be called a *Thread Remover*, although that phrase doesn't command nearly as much respect. Quilters have pet names for stitch removal: the frog stitch, reverse stitching, unpicking and some others not suitable for print! We all agree it's tedious and time consuming. Who can live without at least one, two or maybe more seam rippers in their toolbox?

TOOL SIZE AND DESIGN MATTER

Seam rippers are nifty tools with simple, yet clever, design features. The most common seam rippers share the familiar forked tips with a blade on one side to cut through threads. The sharp tip slipping under thread loops without “ripping” the fabric is the goal. The tiny, red “safety ball” on some rippers helps to limit accidental slips. A petite ripper with a finer blade profile is suited to smaller items and delicate threads. The regular-size ripper is more efficient with more leverage to zip through thicker threads on larger projects.

HANDLES AND BLADES

Comfort is a consideration when choosing hand-held tools—especially for those with hand or wrist mobility issues. Seam ripper handles are either round, flat or curved and mainly plastic or rubber. Other handles are curved, cushioned and ergonomically designed to help relieve stress created from squeezing, twisting and prying out threads buried within fabric. Blades eventually become dull. The good news is these little tools are inexpensive to replace, ranging from \$2.00 to \$15.00.

Common seam ripper brands

CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT
Dritz® (mauve/purple), Prym® (dark purple/white), Fons & Porter® (turquoise/cream), the next four are Clover® brands. Clover's newest (aqua) model has an added safety feature: the retractable blade slides up and down inside the handle—clever! The two smallest seam rippers are “no-name” brands handy for their miniature blades.



SAFETY COVERS

Some manufacturers provide safety covers for their seam rippers. Unfortunately with some brands, the lids don't fit properly. If possible, test the seam ripper lid before buying. Some packages (the type you need an engineering degree to open) will not allow this option. Perhaps re-purpose a small scissor sheath. Does anyone ever *plan* to make mistakes? “Ribbit-Ribbit-Ribbit.”

SEAM RIPPER TRICKS

Seam rippers are more than a one-trick-pony. Choose the best maneuver depending on where the unwanted stitches are located on a project, the stitch length and density, the types of thread, the fabric weave and how many miles of track you're needing to lift.

1 The zipper trick is a personal favourite for removing stitches from seams. Gently slice through all the stitches while sliding the blade along the seam line pulling apart the seam to stretch the threads. Have a sticky roller or tape nearby to trap thread bits before they migrate.

2 The snip trick is a safe method to remove unwanted quilting stitches. Snip through every third or fourth **bobbin stitch** (not the top thread). The top thread (in theory) should release in longer pieces. If you rush and snip your bobbin threads too far apart, the top thread wins the tug-of-war and will break off in short pieces—darn it. Aim for efficiency rather than speed!

3 Piercing through button holes after satin stitching the edges is a fairly quick process with a seam ripper. Sometimes we forget about the tiny, convenient, sharp blade on a seam ripper.

4 Seam rippers are always ready to snip threads when you travel or anytime you need a quick snip and they eagerly attach to a magnetized needle nanny.

5 Seam rippers can always be relied upon to remove pesky shrink-wrapping from new thread spools. Ask me how I know this trick?

Who can live without at least one, two or maybe more seam rippers in their toolbox?

The traditional, handheld seam ripper is a glimpse of what is available in the bigger market picture. For more serious thread removal challenges there are also electric models capable of clearing a wider swath of stitches when called upon.

I love to talk about thread and tools—basically they're related! Please drop into Cindy's Threadworks booth for your thread needs (Superior®, Presencia®, Aurifil®) plus a selection of tools at *Quilt Canada*, Vancouver Convention Centre West, Vancouver, BC, May 31 to June 2, 2018. I look forward to speaking with you in person!

Happy drama-free quilting! ✨



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are the focus of my column, thread talks and workshops.
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