

# Pressing Fabrics & Garments





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# Introduction

Today's fabrics need far less pressing than those of the past, due to fiber blending and the application of crease-resistant finishes. A new finish now applied to cotton-polyester fabrics, and to 100 percent cotton promises to be nearer to a "never need pressing garment" than the past finishes. However, until the time comes that such a finish can be applied to all fibers and fabrics, you will need to continue some pressing of garments after laundering, dry cleaning, or during construction.

With the advent of "do it yourself dry cleaning," it becomes important to have equipment for home pressing if the garment is to look fresh. The dry-cleaning process does leave a garment with less wrinkles than the laundering procedure. However, most garments need some touch-up pressing.

The wrinkles that are in the garment due to wear will not disappear with dry cleaning. A garment usually shows "wear stretch" and needs to be restored to its original shape. Pressing with steam can do this to most garments.

Pressing is still important in clothing construction. Many a home-tailored garment has that home-made look merely because it was not skillfully pressed as it was constructed.

With a few simple devices, pressing can be most satisfactorily done at home. Even the knife-pleated skirt can be pressed without overpressing (See cover page). Those gabardine or corduroy trousers can be pressed without producing a "shiny" effect, and still have that desired sharp crease.

Pressing presents many problems. It is an entirely different process than ironing. Too often the same process is used without regard to the effect.

When you press, instead of gliding the iron, lift it and set it down. You use steam, and you may not press dry as in ironing. Too much pressing is as bad as too little on some fabrics. In fact, too much is worse as it may permanently damage the fibers.

Overpressing is caused by two factors: (1) Excess heat which may melt the fiber or scorch it; (2) Pressure exerted on the iron allowing it to remain on the fabric until the fabric is too dry. You may avoid both by making use of the right press cloth and temperature control.

The amount of heat, moisture, and pressure required is dependent upon the kind of fabric being used. Wool and some synthetics are **not** pressed dry; rayon, cotton, and silk are.



# Pressing Fabrics & Garments

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## Equipment Needed for Pressing

The equipment needed for pressing is: (1) Well padded ironing board and sleeve board; (2) Iron; (3) Press cloths; (4) Clapper or beater; (5) Sponge and water; (6) Press cushions; and (7) Press roll or seam board.

### Iron

A steam iron is not a "must" for doing a good job of pressing. It is convenient, but you have to be cautious in its use. Your ordinary iron and press cloth can do just as good a job as the steam iron.

When buying a steam iron, take a good look at the area of the plate that gives off steam. Some emit very little steam. The better iron will have at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the iron a steam area.

The steam iron, if used without a muslin press cloth, should always be used on the wrong side of most fabrics since there is an area of the iron that does not emit steam. This remaining area of the iron is likely to overpress.

When using the steam iron on wool or synthetics and wool blends, be cautious, glide it along lightly,

steaming the garment on the wrong side, with iron set at wool temperature. Be sure **not** to press wool dry.

Since many fabrics today are blends and contain several different fibers, it is necessary to read labels and know fiber content. Use the temperature that can be tolerated by all the fibers. For instance, a cotton and polyester (Kodel or Dacron) would be pressed at the lower temperature for polyesters, not the higher cotton temperature. (See PNW Bulletin 20, *Fabrics: Buying, Sewing, Laundering.*)

Many cotton finishes are resins that may scorch or become yellow due to the high temperature of the iron. Read the label for fiber and finish, then test before using the iron.

Some irons have a thermostat that controls iron temperatures, and have a calibrated dial showing temperatures. Others carry the fiber names. With the many blended fibers found in even one piece of fabric, you can not always depend upon the temperature control. Play safe and test the iron temperature by pressing on the back of the fabric in an inconspicuous place.

The following temperatures are the lowest temperatures producing satisfactorily ironed fabrics of various fibers recommended by Specialists from USDA Beltsville Laboratory. Temperatures are recommended as the starting point in ironing or pressing. If the temperature is found to be too low to produce desired results, raise the temperature slightly:

	Fahrenheit
Mod-a-crylics .....	225°
Acrylics—Dacron Polyester .....	250°
Tri Acetates .....	275°
Wool, Acetate, Nylon .....	300°
Kodel Polyester, rayon, silk .....	325°
Cotton and linen .....	350°

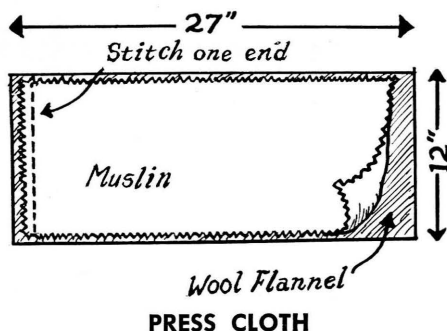
Source: "How Hot Should An Iron Be"—Agricultural Research Division, USDA. Research of Enid Sater Ross and Katherine Franke, Beltsville Lab., 1963.

## Press Cloth

A press cloth is used to protect fabric from heat and to supply moisture so that the heat of the iron may produce steam. The type of press cloth is dependent upon the fiber being pressed. When pressing lightweight fabrics—such as rayons, acetates, and many of the synthetics—a lightweight piece of muslin, organdy, or tissue paper—or one of the non-woven press cloths—does a good job.

Use a steam iron, or dampen fabric with a sponge or spray to produce moisture; then press from the wrong side. Most garments from the above-named fibers are pressed until dry. (See illustration above.)

If you are pressing wool, dacron, orlon, and wool mixtures, you will find the wool press cloth described above to be most efficient. The wool distributes the steam and moisture without making wet spots on the garment.



## How to Make a Press Cloth

To make a press cloth for tailoring wool or part-wool fabrics, secure a piece of wool, preferably of light color that will not fade. A woolen fabric such as flannel with nap keeps water from going through the wool and forming wet spots on the fabric. Attach the wool to a piece of medium-weight muslin or drill by sewing the two pieces together across one end. (See illustration of Press Cloth above.)

## Clapper

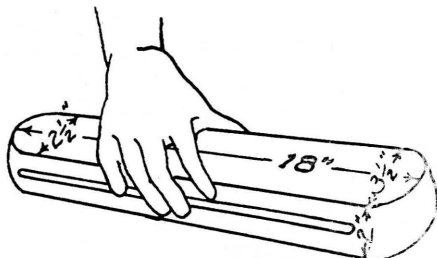
For pressing in pleats or creases, why not use the clapper or beater? Use the iron only to put in the steam, raise the press cloth immediately, and put the clapper down on the garment being pressed. This keeps the steam in and causes the crease to form without damage to the fabric.

## How to Make a Clapper

To make a clapper, use a piece of hardwood, 15 to 18 inches long, 3½ inches wide, and about 2 inches thick. Shape this piece of wood into an oval-shaped block if possible.

The dimensions could be  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches at one end and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  at the other.

A shallow groove worked into both sides will give a place to rest your fingers as you use it. Use sandpaper to round and smooth off all edges. (See the drawing below.)



**CLAPPER**

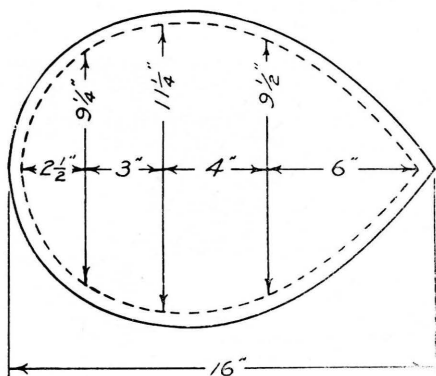
## PRESSING CUSHIONS

### Tailor's Ham

The tailor's ham is a "must" if you want to make your tailoring easy. It also is essential in pressing a fitted jacket.

#### How to Make a Tailor's Ham

To make a tailor's ham, cut two pieces of firm muslin or ticking



**TAILOR'S HAM**

according to measurements in the drawing below. If you use ordinary muslin, use double thickness to prevent sawdust from staining the garment or leaking. Be sure that you have removed all sizing from the muslin before making the cushion.

A piece of wool for one side is excellent for pressing wool or part-wool garments.

Stitch the pieces together with a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seam, leaving about 4 inches as an opening at the large end. Turn it right side out and stuff it firmly with sawdust or clean sand.

### Round Cushion

Another very handy cushion that you may wish to use is a round cushion. You will find it handy when you iron sleeves and necklines of your dresses and blouses. Its size allows you to slip it into place when tailoring pockets and pressing armhole seams.

#### How to Make a Round Cushion

Cut two circles 6 inches in diameter from duck, muslin, or canvas. Cut a strip of the same fabric 3 inches wide and 20 inches long.

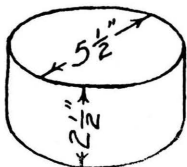
Remember, if you use ordinary muslin, use double thickness to prevent sawdust from staining the garment or leaking. Remove all sizing from the muslin.

Pin the straight edge of the long piece to one circle, placing pins perpendicular to the straight edge. Pin the other side to the second circle (note that the straight piece is slightly bigger than the circle. Let this extend over the end and leave open for stuffing).



Stitch by machine making  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seams. Clip the seam every 2 inches around the circles.

Turn it right side out and stuff it tightly with sawdust. The drawing below shows finished cushion with finished measurements.

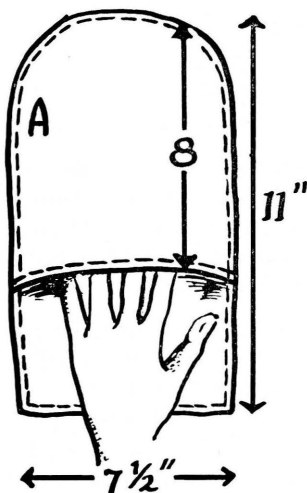


**ROUND CUSHION**

## Press Mitt

If sawdust isn't handy and you do have some cotton, possibly the press mitt will serve your purpose. It isn't as easily used as the little round cushion since you do not have a free hand to handle the fabric that you are pressing.

If the end of the ironing board is not too wide—you can slip the mitt over the end of the board.



**PRESS MITT**

## How to Make a Press Mitt

To make the mitt, cut two pieces 11 inches x  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches and one piece  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches x 8 inches as shown in "A" in illustration below. Hem the 8-inch piece, then stitch around the sides and curved edges of all three pieces. (See drawing left below.)

Trim the seam, then turn right side out and stuff the large section with cotton. Close the end by turning in the edge and stitching by machine.

## SEAM-PRESSING EQUIPMENT

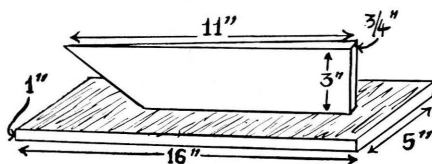
### Seam Board

Seams need to be pressed open. They should be as inconspicuous as possible. Often, in an effort to make them flat, you may overpress the edges of the seam making an imprint on the right side. To avoid this, you can make or buy a seam board.

### How to Make a Seam Board

To make a seam board, use a board 3 inches wide,  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch thick, and about 11 inches long. Bevel and make a point at one end. (See drawing below.)

Sandpaper the edges and fasten to a base, 16 inches x 5 inches. Do not cover this, as you will press on the board. Select hardwood if possible as the moisture will not cause it to splinter.



**SEAM BOARD**

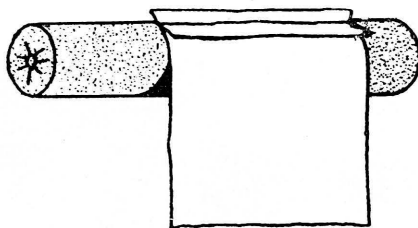
## Simple Seam Presser

Easier still is to use a rolling pin, cut in two pieces lengthwise so that it will lie flat on your board. This may be covered or left without a cover.

Your lumber yard may have some small dowels that can be used to get into small areas where you want to press the seam open, such as a collar—or any area where two seams cross at right angles.

Another easy solution to this problem is to roll a magazine tightly and tie it with sewing thread. Then wrap several thicknesses of muslin

around it. Be sure that the magazine, when rolled, is only about 2 inches in diameter. The narrow roll avoids making a seam edge imprint on the garment as you press down the middle of the seam.



**SIMPLE SEAM PRESSER**

## Using Pressing Equipment

### Press Cloth

When using the wool and muslin press cloth, wet the muslin then squeeze out enough water to keep it from dripping.

Place it over the wool, and steam press from the cotton side. To do this, lift the iron or glide it along the surface enough to produce steam.

Steam should be distributed through the wool evenly. When you lift the cloth, steam should rise from the garment that you are pressing.

If there is no steam, you are over pressing, and wool may become “shiny.” Possibly the top press cloth is not wet enough to produce steam. Temperature of the iron is not important, since the iron only comes in contact with the wet cotton cloth, producing steam.

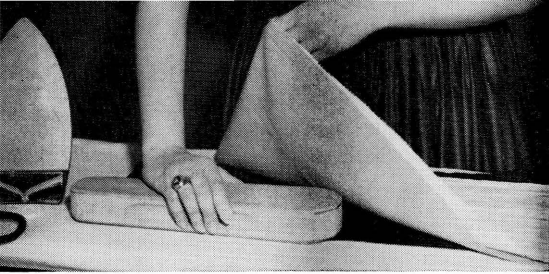


**PRESS CLOTH**

### Clapper

When you are pressing in pleats or creases, you may have the habit of allowing the iron to stand in one place adding your weight to it to add pressure. The iron is hot, the pressure plus the heat may dry and damage the wool.

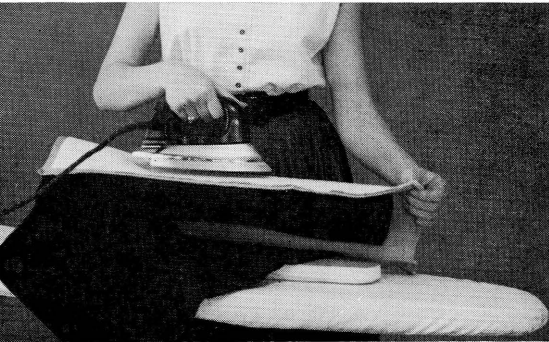
To avoid this, use a clapper to do the pressing. Put steam into fabric by placing the hot iron on the press cloth, then lifting the cloth quickly. Put the clapper down, holding the



**CLAPPER**

steam in the fabric with the weight of the clapper.

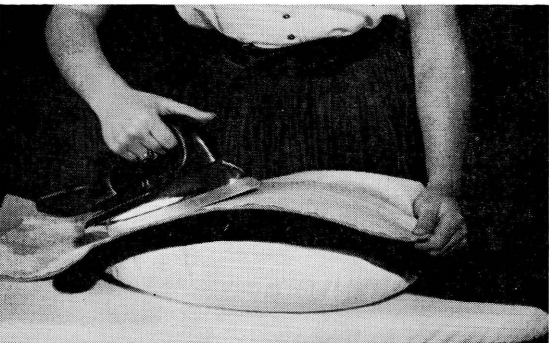
Allow to remain a few minutes. The entrapped steam will make a sharp crease. The material will be slightly damp and does not need to be dry.



**SLEEVE BOARD**

## **Sleeve Board**

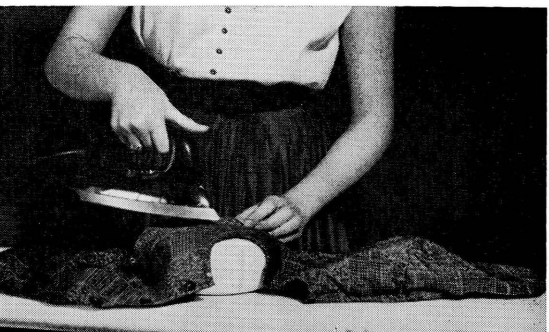
To avoid a crease in the sleeve of that jacket that you are pressing, use a sleeve board. In using a sleeve board, you may press from the right side safely since the press cloth is wool and is between the iron and your garment.



**TAILOR'S HAM**

## **Tailor's Ham**

The tailor's ham is used to press in the curved area of the jacket. This avoids shrinking out fullness that gives shape to the garment.



**ROUND CUSHION**

## **Round Cushion**

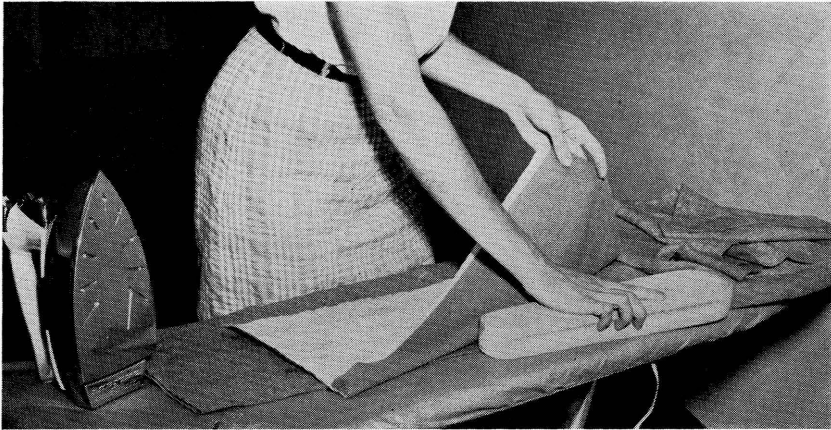
The small round cushion allows you to lift a part of a garment from the flat board in order to press curved and small areas without wrinkling the rest of the garment. (Illustration shows pressing around shoulder and neckline.)



## Pressing Trousers

When pressing trousers, lay them on the ironing board with one leg folded back; the outside and inside seams are matched and pinned to the board. Use a press cloth.

Make creases on the outside edges. The crease in front will extend into the pleat at the waistline. If there is no pleat, the crease should end about 3½ inches below the waist. The back crease will end about six inches above the crotch.



**PRESSING TROUSERS**

## Construction Pressing

The pressing equipment and your iron are as necessary as your sewing machine when you construct clothing. You are more apt to do good work if you arrange your pressing equipment in a "U" close to your machine, so that you can easily turn and press as you proceed. (See the illustration top of page 12.)

Application of fiber and fabric finishes have complicated pressing when constructing garments. Some finishes require temperature and steam that are not yet available from the home iron. The new durable press finishes are examples

of this problem. Your dry cleaner might give you some help with the finished garment since he can press with the "hot head" pressing equipment.

There are still many new fabrics that you can and will press when constructing garments.

### Stretch Fabrics

If stretch fabric is spandex fiber, be careful not to stretch as you press, since this will cause distortion of the garment. Always press



**"U" ARRANGEMENT OF PRESSING EQUIPMENT**

with fabric covered with a press cloth or paper. Press when possible in opposite direction of the stretch.

## **Textured Fabrics**

Crepes are difficult to press—very little steam will be used. Use a dry press cloth with slight dampening and press just until dry.

Surface texture can be destroyed by improper pressing on the right side, so work from the wrong side. If there is a decided texture, a turkish towel put over the ironing board will help to retain the texture while pressing from the wrong side. Use correct press cloth according to the fiber in the fabric.

Corduroy and velveteen are difficult to press. If you are sewing on these fabrics, and desire to press seams, try this. Lay the iron on its side, place a damp piece of muslin or press cloth on the wrong side of garment, then pass the area over the edge of the iron.

Another method is to use your steam iron, place right side of corduroy next to folded turkish towel, then allow the iron to emit steam without putting the iron on the material. Then use your fingers to press down the seam.

If you do much pressing, or make many garments of napped or pile materials, you can purchase a velvet board.

## Double Knitted Fabric

This usually is tubular and should be pressed open before cutting. The fold is not always the straight of the rib. Mark a rib, then cut.

## Bonded or Laminated Fabrics

You probably will be using the type of laminated fabric that has a tricot backing—usually an acetate. This means as you press (from the wrong side) the temperature of the iron is important.

Press seams open by using steam and the woolen press cloth if the laminate is acetate on wool—if cotton or blend use plain muslin or tissue paper. Top pressing is necessary for flaps placed on garments and for many trims. To avoid the imprint of the flap, use a press cloth on the right side with wrapping paper under the flap.

## Bias Sections Of Garments

When pressing as when ironing, go with the grain of the fabric. Bias-cut garments can be stretched easily unless you press in the direction of the straight of the grain. This is especially important in pressing fullness in sleeve, collar, and a bias skirt.

## Dart Pressing

The pressing of darts calls for the use of the tailor's ham. Place the dart onto the ham so that the full-

ness created by the dart comes over the curve. If the dart is **large** and is made on heavy fabric, it is advisable to split the dart to within one inch of the point, press the dart open and trim sides until about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch wide. (See the photo on top of page 14.)

If seams are not pressed open, then press both seams to one side. Vertical darts at waistline or from shoulders are pressed toward center front or center back.

Press horizontal darts at elbow and at bust down. To avoid seam edge imprint on the fabric, place brown paper under the edge of the dart. This also applies to pressing of pleats or pocket flaps.

Press the edge of the fold of the dart before stitching. Note the use of organdy and steam iron as you press on lightweight fabrics. (See the photo below.)







Using tailor's ham, place fullness caused by dart over the rounded area—split dart on heavy fabric to within one inch of the point. Press dart open, trim to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch width. (See photo at left.)

You can shape garments by pressing. An example is shaping the under-collar when tailoring. Note use of wool and muslin press cloth. (See below.)



Seams need to be pressed open on seam board or over magazine roll. (See the photo at left.)





