

Needles 101

It has been said in most of quilting classes and workshops how important is to change the sewing machine's needles often.. Have you heard about it?

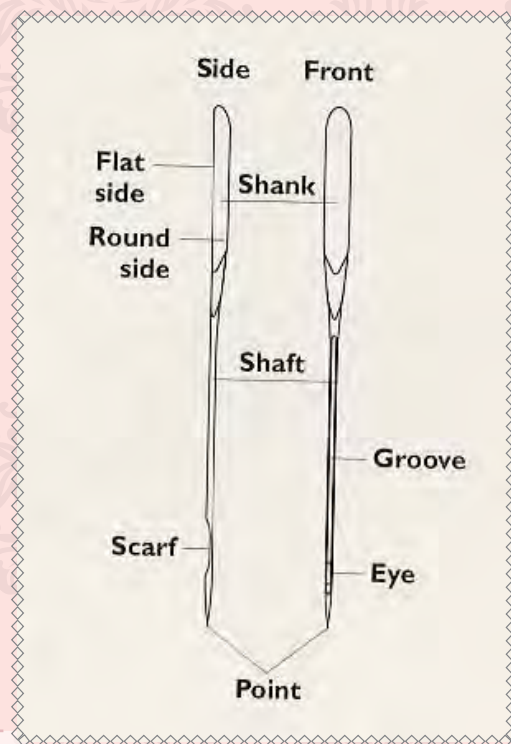
Something I have realized for quite some time (at least when I give classes) is what little attention quilters pay to that. And they don't realize that this small act can make all the difference between a good and a bad seam.

Some quilters think that if they leave more hours (or more days or even months!!) the same needle nothing is going to happen... But it really does!! Let me tell you a bit about the world of machine needles...

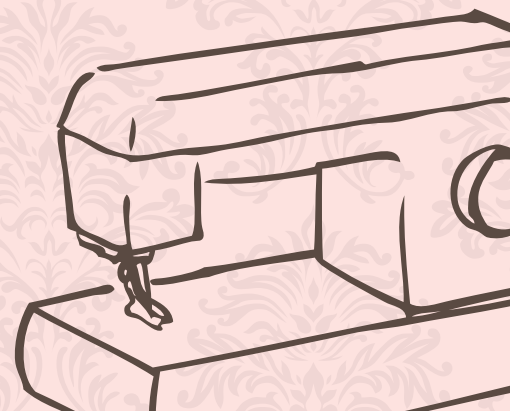
The needles of a sewing machine are one of the most important components in the sewing process. It can give you a smooth, soft seam, without tension and without bumps; it could give you a rough seam, with torn threads, lots of puckering, and irregular stitches...

If you don't change it often (about 8 hours of sewing), the point wears out with hours of use and high speed sewing. It becomes duller and cannot perforate the fabric on every stitch with the same precision. I always like to compare this with the tires in your car.

There is a big variety of needles available at craft, sewing and quilt shops. When we start sewing, many of us go to the shop and see so many types that we get confused, and we buy the universal one, thinking that it goes with everything. Just as with sewing needles, machine needles differ for two basic distinctions: the type of textile it is designed for, and the number.

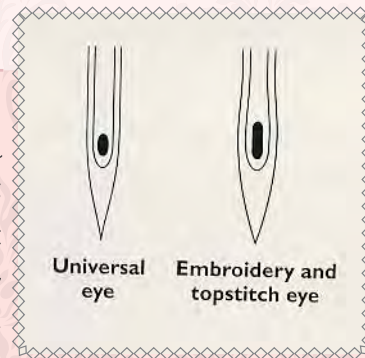


A machine needle.



Type of textile: There is one needle for almost every kind of fabric. Woven, knit, denim, leather, microtex, sharps, quilting, etc, are some of the most representative. The format of the eye, groove and point are going to be different for each type. The indentation of the groove -on the front of the needle- is very important because allows the thread to lay close to it as it comes toward the bobbin.

If you see the example on the right, you will notice a slight difference on the eyes of both needles. They are made like that because each one will accommodate different threads for that particular textile.



So, when you go shopping for needles, narrow your search to the type of textile you will work with. Most quilters and sewers will have cotton as the main fabric choice. Then, choose the type of stitching you will do: for example, quilting needles will be perfect for piecing; on the other hand, topstitch or sharp needles will do wonders with machine applique.



Number: Internationally, two different kinds of denominations are shown in each package: the European and the American. When you look at a box of needles you will see 2 numbers with a slash in between. The first number corresponds to the European denomination, and the second one to the American. The numbers go from the thinnest 60/8, up to the thickest 110/18. The bigger the number, the thicker the needle. This will give you the first idea about the numbers. You guessed it!! The thicker the needle, the thicker the fabric that is designed for, and the thicker the thread it can handle... exactly!!

When buying **'number or size'** in needles, keep it clear and simple:

- ◆ for piecing regular weight cotton, 75/11 or 80/12 will do a great job.
- ◆ for piecing flannel, 90/14 is a perfect size.
- ◆ for quilting, use 80/12 or 90/14.
- ◆ for binding, 90/14 will handle all the fabric layers.

Merging these 2 factors, if you have a good selection of machine needles in your stock, it will make your sewing experience a breeze! Remember that the correct needle can make all the difference...