

How to Buy, Layout, and Cut Knit Fabrics

People will often ask me where I buy my knit fabrics. My answer? Anywhere and everywhere! If I am making a classic black top (for example), I may decide to splurge on that Donna Karan rayon knit. But if I see a cute novelty knit in a bin at a discount store, I will buy that as well, knowing that it will probably be out of style within a season or two and doesn't have to last forever. I check for knit fabrics in every fabric store I enter - you just never know what you might find - and I buy at least $1\frac{1}{2}$ yards for my "collection". Buying online is an excellent way to buy knits that are current and stylish. A good online fabric store will let you return fabrics that don't meet your expectations. Remember that most fabric store owners, especially online fabric stores, are owned by people who sew - they will understand that you need to feel the goods!

To check for quality, I gauge my purchase on the principal, "Would I buy this in a ready-to-wear garment? The most important tip is to make sure the fabric will "recover" when it is stretched. Pull on the stretch of the fabric and make sure it snaps back to the original size and doesn't run. If it doesn't recover, DON'T USE IT! It's OK to throw fabric away that is not a good quality - go ahead, you have permission!

As far as fiber content, almost anything goes! I do stay away from acrylic fibers as they will pill, but there are now so many interesting combinations of fibers, that I love to try them all. The polyesters of today are gorgeous, and anything with rayon will be super soft. A little spandex (even as little as 3%) is wonderful and helps the fabric keep its shape. Prewash and dry knit fabrics twice, as many fabrics will shrink more than once. To keep your knit garments looking beautiful after the garment is made, wash the finished item on the gentle cycle and hang to dry. Then toss it in the dryer with a fabric softener sheet for no more than five minutes. Your knit garments will look good for years if you give them a little extra care!

Laying out your knits for cutting is a breeze. Don't spend a lot of time trying to get everything lined up and square, because often times the selvedge edges are not straight to begin with! The beauty of working with knits is that they are very "forgiving" and do not necessarily have to be laid out as accurately as woven fabrics. Just make sure that the greatest stretch will go around the body. Don't let knits fall off the edge of your cutting table as this will drag the fabric into a different shape. I always use weights and a rotary cutter to cut out my knits. It saves a lot of time and is much more accurate.

So lay out your knits, cut them out, and get on with your sewing!