

CHAPTER

I

Baby Steps

Perhaps the new baby in your life came as a complete surprise. Or maybe you’ve scheduled the beginning of your family down to the hour of arrival. The anticipation and joy of a new life beginning is the same, no matter the amount of planning that took place. With your sewing projects, however, a few pointers and a little forethought will help get you started.

This small chapter should answer some of the questions you may have as you head into each of the sewing projects. A chapter orientation, pattern making tips, sizing guides, basic tools, and fabric selection advice are all covered here, so take a few minutes to give this chapter at least a skim before beginning your sewing. And if you’re expecting, get a glass of milk and put your feet up while doing so, please.

Sewing for Mama, Baby, Family, and Nest

The four following sewing chapters, and the items found in each, are designed to include all that will welcome a baby home. The projects in each chapter are ordered from ideal for beginners to ideal for experienced sewers. So the first project in each chapter is generally the simplest to sew, and the last project generally requires more advanced skills. In some cases, the time involvement alone is what lends a given project to being ranked as more advanced. So if you’re a beginner, there are plenty of projects that you can take on with confidence, and within each chapter you might try working through them in sequence.

Mama Sewing

As the Mama of many, I personally like the idea of thinking of Mama first! But truly, welcoming a new baby should always begin by taking very good care of the one who will first “house” the little one. It’s a real treat for an expectant mom to receive gifts that are for her and her alone, long before the

baby even arrives. The Mama Sewing projects are designed to transition with a pregnant woman from the beginning all the way to becoming a nursing mom. The added beauty of each and every Mama project is that you don’t have to be pregnant or breastfeeding to make or use any of these stylish items. Each maternity garment project describes modifications that allow you to sew the same item into a non-maternity version. So have fun with them whether you’re an expectant mom, an auntie, a granny, an adoptive mommy, or you just love gorgeous handmade clothing and accessories.

The sizing guide below will be helpful when you are making garments for Mama. This guide gives actual body measurements, and each of the projects will give finished garment dimensions for each size. So between the two, you will be able to determine which size to make. The maternity items account for growth in just about all areas, so use pre-pregnancy measurements (or very early pregnancy measurements) to find the right size. When measuring the bust and hips, be sure to measure around at a level line at the fullest point of the bust and hips. When measuring the waistline, be sure to keep the measuring tape level around the belly button.

Mama Sizes			
Size	Bust	Natural Waist	Hips
Small (S)	34/35"	27/28"	36/37"
Medium (M)	36/37"	29/30"	38/39"
Large (L)	38/39"	31/32"	40/41"

If the finished garment dimensions listed with a given project seem way too big, it's likely that your bust and belly will grow into them in not too much time. Your desired length won't change too much for skirts, dresses, and tunics; however, the larger your belly grows, the shorter the front of these garments will become. So keep this in mind if they seem too long in the front when you're sewing early in your pregnancy.

Also, there are always some maternity items that won't last through the entire pregnancy, so don't worry if something you make suddenly doesn't fit when you're a few weeks away from delivering. I've designed these patterns so that favorite garments can be remade into non-maternity items after the baby.

Baby Sewing

Naturally, right after Mama, we must prepare for the precious little show stealer. The projects in the Baby Sewing chapter run the gamut from irresistibly cute to incredibly convenient. With the exception of the Pretty-as-a-Picture Dress, each Baby project is just as darling for a boy as it is for a girl, so a simple fabric switch is all you need to customize your sewing. These Baby sewing projects were inspired by years of clothing my children in basic pieces. Experienced moms know that most babies are happiest wearing nothing at all. However adorable that is, when practicality demands it, we also know that simple and sweet pieces (plus a zillion Onesies) go a long way to keeping baby stylish and comfortable. The baby garment sizes are offered from 0–3 months all the way up to 24 months, so you can make several versions of your favorite patterns ahead of time as you plan for changing seasons and a growing baby.

The Baby Sizing guide below will help you determine which sizes to make for your little one. There are also finished

dimensions listed with each of the baby projects. When sewing for someone else's baby, consider the season that it will be once the baby would be wearing that particular size. It's always a bummer if someone gives you a gorgeous handmade winter jacket, but it fits baby perfectly in the middle of hot and sunny July. Most babies, unless they were premature or otherwise petite, are wearing the next size grouping about a month or so ahead of time. So if you are sewing something for a 2½-month-old that is in season to wear now, you would want to make a 3–6 month size. And if you're making something for a season or two ahead and are not sure how big the baby will have grown by then, it's always best to err on the side of a larger size rather than a smaller size. You can always ask what size the baby is currently wearing, and there is definitely no harm in asking to drop by and measure the little munchkin, either.

Family Sewing

That baby didn't get here all by itself, and in addition to Dad, perhaps there are already one or more eager siblings at home waiting for the new baby to arrive. The Family Sewing chapter is written with the entire household in mind, whether this is your first baby or your tenth baby. Some of the more time-consuming projects are designed for longevity, and they will no doubt become special family heirlooms that mark these all-too-quick and beautiful days in your lives together. Some projects, such as the Patchwork Welcome Notes and Swaddled Baby Love, are wonderful ways to include your older children in all the baby fuss. When making gifts for an expectant family, it is always such a thoughtful gesture to remember the older siblings. And keeping them occupied is never a bad idea.

Baby Sizes						
Body Measurements	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	12 Months	18 Months	24 Months
Chest	18"	19"	19½"	20"	20½"	21"
Hip	19"	20"	20½"	21"	21½"	22"
Head to Heel	23"	26"	27½"	29"	30½"	32"
Side Waist to Foot	11¼"	13½"	14⅝"	15¾"	16⅞"	18"

Nest Sewing

Settling your baby into the family nest might mean setting up a corner in the master bedroom, carving some space out of an older sibling's room, or creating a little universe that belongs completely to the baby. In any case, sewing and decorating for your new addition is one of the most rewarding ways to spend those seemingly endless days of waiting for the big arrival. The projects in the Nest Sewing chapter are designed to both comfort and delight the little one, but are not so shortsighted that they won't also grow beautifully with your baby into a bigger kid room.

How to Use the Patterns

Many sewing projects in this book have corresponding patterns on one or more of the seven fold-in pattern pages that are included in the book's envelope pocket. If a project has a corresponding pattern, it will list the pattern page in the materials list at the beginning of the project.

In order to provide several full-size original patterns all in one book, the pattern pieces overlap one another and therefore will first need to be traced using tracing paper. If a project has several sizes, the line styles that each size is drawn with will vary and will be labeled to help you follow the correct size as you trace. Some pattern pieces will have a common line that all of the sizes will follow. And further, the pattern pages are printed in two colors to help differentiate pattern pieces from one another. Once the pattern lines are traced, you'll need to also trace any of the markings, such as button placement, notches, and so on from the pattern onto your pattern tracing. The traced pattern can then be cut out

with craft scissors and used to cut the fabric and begin your sewing.

Just a few of the pattern pieces have "continued" in their titles, meaning the project instructions will ask you to first join two pattern pieces together with tape (or trace together on the tracing paper) to create the full pattern piece before beginning the fabric cutting.

Many of the projects have no need for patterns and just describe the more simplistic pattern pieces in dimension only. You can either cut directly from the fabric when making these items, or choose to go ahead and make some labeled tracing paper patterns as you go so that you can easily make the item again in the future.

All patterns provided on the pattern pages and those patterns that are described in dimension have seam allowances included, so there is no need to add any. Seam allowance depths will vary from one project to another and will also vary within each project, so pay special attention as you read project instructions.

Yardage requirements mentioned in the materials list generally are considered for 44/45-inch wide fabrics. Therefore, wider fabrics might require less yardage.

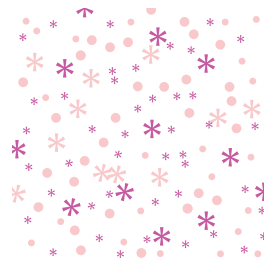
As with every sewing pattern, it's always a good idea to read through the entire set of instructions, also paying attention to the illustrations, before you even begin to cut the pattern pieces out of fabric. Often a step will seem confusing until you read a little further through the next few steps, and then suddenly it'll click. Below is a key to the figure illustrations denoting fabric right side, wrong side, and interfacings/fusibles.



Right side



Wrong side



Interfacing

Sewing Tools

Because so many of the projects will require the same basic tools, the following section is an overview of those tools. These basic go-to tools will therefore not be listed at the beginning of every project, but the materials list for each project will generally include the actual materials that will compose the item you are making.

Tracing Paper or Semi-Translucent Craft Paper

A 24-inch-wide roll of tracing paper is really useful in conjunction with the patterns in this book, as well as many of your other craft projects. These rolls are generally available at most large art supply stores and online. A quality craft paper or vellum that you can see through enough for tracing also works well and will be more durable for those patterns that you'd like to save and sew with several times. Try Plaza Artist Materials & Picture Framing to order online at www.plazaart.com, or look for a location in your neighborhood.

Making Notes to Yourself

In addition to using simple pens, pencils, and erasers to perfect your paper patterns, you'll want to have a healthy supply of water-soluble fabric pens and fabric chalk pencils for marking pattern notes, such as button placement and so on, directly onto the fabric. Particularly with the embroidery projects, having a water-soluble fabric pen that you've tested and are comfortable with is very helpful. Once I'm finished with a project and want to fade out the pen lines, I use a small, clean paintbrush with a little water on it to gently brush away the marks. This way, I don't have to immerse or wash the item completely. While you could also use the mist of a water bottle, a paintbrush is more precise. All of these items are readily available at your local craft/fabric store.

Template Plastic

Quilt template plastic for tracing patterns is a very useful item to have for small pattern shapes that you will cut repeatedly and want to save. It cuts easily with scissors or a craft knife and won't curl like most types of paper will once they are cut

into smaller shapes. I recommend using template plastic to create the pattern pieces for both the Center of Attention Quilt and the Scrappy Nap Pillow. This is also easily found at your local quilt shop.

Cotton Muslin

Having a bolt or two of inexpensive muslin in your sewing studio makes you a clever crafter. Usually just a couple of dollars per yard, this versatile fabric is an ideal way to test a garment's size, or to perfect your quilt piecing style without cutting into your favorite, more expensive fabrics. Because most varieties of muslin are somewhat sheer, you could also trace a pattern right onto the muslin to test-fit a size before you even create a paper pattern. Several of the projects in the book, particularly the embroidery projects, use muslin as a background fabric, so get at least a few yards to begin with anyway.

Cutting and Measuring Tools

Without a doubt, having at least three types of scissors at your side is extremely helpful. Craft scissors are useful for cutting out the patterns from tracing paper and template plastic. Dressmaking scissors are suitable for all large fabric cutting. And some small scissors or thread snips are great to clip threads, both at the sewing machine and as you sit with hand sewing in your lap.

A rotary blade combined with a clear quilt ruler and cutting mat creates a perfect set of tools for measuring and cutting basic squares and rectangles. A cutting mat and a large, clear, plastic quilt ruler can also help in marking off lines, and trimming fabrics to get the edges clean and "square."

I boast an unhealthy number of clear, plastic quilt rulers in almost every size and shape; however, I continue to reach for these three quite frequently:

- 8-x-24-inch grid
- 3½-x-18½-inch grid
- 60-degree triangular ruler (used in the Sixth Time's the Charm Crib Quilt project on page 151)

With one or more of these and a large cutting mat, you'll seldom have any use for a standard ruler or yardstick.

Ironing Tools

A steam iron and ironing board are imperative for almost every project in this book. It's also good to have a pressing cloth around to protect fine fabrics, and any laminated fabrics you may choose to sew with. Pressing hams are helpful, but I find a rolled-up hand towel more versatile. I have even appropriated a hair straightener to press the tiniest of the Nesting Cubes in order to fuse the interfacing into areas that I can't reach with the iron. Always follow the manufacturer's directions for both fabrics and fusibles for the appropriate heat setting, and test a corner first.

Needle and Thread Assortment

For the machine-sewing projects, all of the recommended fabrics are woven, so a universal needle type in a small range of sizes, from 11 to 16 or so, will be all you need to complete your sewing. I recommend Coats Dual Duty XP thread for all projects except for the quilting projects, where I would recommend 100-percent Coats Cotton thread for the machine piecing. The thread recommendations for all hand-sewing steps are the same, and some simple hand-sewing needles, or “sharps,” will suffice.

For embroidery and hand quilting, I keep several sizes of embroidery needles on hand because they are nice and sharp and have a large eye that makes threading thicker threads easier. For embroidery and hand-quilting stitches, I personally go back and forth between several types of six-strand cotton floss and quilting thread, such as DMC's embroidery floss and DMC's Perle Cottons. In general, I choose them based on a specific texture that I'm looking for to enhance the feel of a given project; therefore, use your own best judgment when choosing floss and threads. Having a full spectrum of colors inspires your work a lot more than just a handful, so I do recommend splurging on your color range!

Fabrics

Fabrics for Mama

Choosing fabric for your maternity items is really no different than choosing fabric for any garment sewing, but you may

want to keep just a few things in mind to make the most of your time with thread and needle. When you are pregnant, your wardrobe typically shrinks considerably in numbers of outfits. Because of this, you'll want each piece that you sew to be as versatile as possible. You may therefore choose colors and prints that are easily mixed in with the rest of your wearable wardrobe so that you can really get some mileage out of a few pieces. For instance, make at least a few items in basic black, charcoal, or some other interesting solids. Let further interest come in by way of accessories, sweaters, scarves, textured tights, and boots—none of which have to be maternity for you to wear. Then, of course, for other maternity pieces, you'll have a bit of fun playing with colors and prints, keeping in mind the hues that flatter your coloring and a scale of print that flatters your blossoming figure.

As far as fabric types go, unless you are specifically sewing for a special occasion, it might be a good idea to keep the fabric content versatile in terms of dressiness. How many times will you be able to wear a silk chiffon tunic over the next 6–9 months? Exactly. Just like sewing for baby, consider the months during which you'll be pregnant and which seasons they will cover in order to choose appropriate fabric weights. More important than perhaps anything is to choose fabrics that feel good to wear. This is no time to willingly add discomfort to your list of emotions.

Whether garments, quilts, or soft toys, as long as the item you are making will continue to be washed after use, it's a good idea to gently wash all fabric in cold water with a mild detergent and drip dry or lightly machine dry before you cut the material into pattern pieces. This will preshrink the fabric so that your sewing in a specific size will remain accurate after the first wear. Prewashing also helps to remove the sizing, or fabric finish, that might have been applied to the material during the manufacturing process. Also press your materials well before beginning your sewing projects.

Fabrics for Baby

I don't think that I'm alone in the comfort that I take knowing my baby is dressed or wrapped in something incredibly soft and comfortable. Breathable fabrics, such as cotton, are ideal

for babies, because of their softness and their easy care. When you need to make items that are pretty sturdy and intended for warmth, such as booties and jackets, lining them with 100-percent cotton flannel is a great choice. When making dresses and blouses for your baby girl with a lot of tucks and gathers, nothing beats butter-soft cotton voile to make sweet little details even sweeter. If the fabric is slightly sheer, simply layer the garment over a body suit and tights. You can also temporarily baste two layers of lightweight fabrics together and treat them as one when you follow the sewing pattern instructions, and then remove the basting stitches after the sewing is complete.

Choosing colors for baby isn't too different than choosing colors for anyone based on their coloring and skin tone. There are many baby-style prints out there, but don't lock yourself into juvenile style prints just because you are sewing for a little one. Keeping the palette sophisticated and the print styles top shelf has some really charming results when making baby's wardrobe. So just because a print looks grown up, or is large in scale, don't underestimate the interesting and playful effect of combining those features with a miniature garment. On the opposite end of advice for baby fabrics, keep a sense of humor with you as you combine colors and prints. Don't only choose completely harmonious groups of prints. Have fun. It goes together if you say so—a phrase you're likely to repeat now that you're a parent.

Growing and Sewing

Read even a few paragraphs about newborn development and you'll learn that high-contrast colors and graphic prints help a newborn baby to develop their vision, learn focus, and captivate their attention. Even at 3 months and beyond, exciting colors and prints can entertain a baby for a long while and set their little arms and legs into perpetual motion. Once they begin to feel around for other clues about the world, also at around 3 months old, giving them several different textures to feel and grasp helps to develop their tactile senses. Planning for this stage of baby development is so enjoyable when choosing fabrics for a play quilt, toys, and other nursery accessories, so have fun.

Safety Considerations

In every instance possible, always opt for the safest materials to sew on to your baby's clothing. Little items, such as buttons and trims, should be sewn on to clothing with extra care to ensure safety. Loops and dangling strings or ribbons should be secure and very short in length, no more than a few inches. Drawstrings are not a great feature for baby clothing, nor is any feature or trim that can come undone easily as baby plays in bed before sleeping. Buttons and all such trims should be checked each time you do the wash to be sure they are sewn on securely. Always better safe than sorry, so avoid putting baby to bed or out of your sight wearing clothing that has any of these types of details that can come loose, especially those that are close to the baby's face.

