

Sewing 101: Top Five Cutting Tools For Sewing

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You've all heard the famous advice: "Measure twice, Cut once!" I think it should be expanded to: "Measure twice, Cut once... but only with a really good pair of scissors or rotary cutter!" The most expensive ingredient in most home décor projects is your fabric, and you'll end up wasting it if you don't have good quality cutting tools. Don't skimp on these important members of your sewing basket. It really is worth it to buy the very best you can afford. Here are the Five Essential Cutting Tools that will help you get the best results.

Shears



Did your grandma have a pair of scissors that were completely off-limits to you? Those were probably her good sewing shears. Shears look like scissors but have blades more than 6" long and different handle loops for your fingers and thumb. A good pair of shears will glide through fabric like butter and last you a lifetime. All you need to do is sharpen them occasionally, oil the pivot screw, and never use them to cut anything but fabric (see grandma).

Scissors



In sewing jargon, scissors have blades under 6" and identical handle loops for your fingers and thumb. Use your scissors for cutting patterns, stray threads, tape, etc. But don't use them to cut fabric.

Snips



These small scissors with pointy blades are perfect for reaching in and snipping stray threads. Keep a pair by your sewing machine.

Rotary Cutter & Cutting Mat



These look like pizza cutters and were originally designed for quilt making. Their razor-sharp edge allows you to cut the fabric as it rolls over it. You never have to lift the blade, so your fabric doesn't move and you make fewer cutting errors. As you might have guessed, your rotary cutter needs a special cutting surface. These "cutting mats" come in various sizes, have handy grid lines on them, and are self-healing (unlike your hand should you accidentally run over it with a rotary cutter). Get the biggest mat you can fit on your sewing table, because the larger your cutting mat, the less you'll have to move your fabric. For even more detail about this tool, read our [rotary cutter product review](#).

Seam Ripper



If you want your projects to look professional, you have to be willing to re-do seams that don't look quite right. A nice, sharp seam ripper will help you undo seams without damaging your fabric. It doesn't actually rip the seam but neatly slices the sewing thread, allowing you to try, try again. Here's [more information on ripping out seams](#)

Tips For Cutting Tools

- When cutting fabric, keep the bottom blade of your shears on the cutting surface. This will allow them to glide smoothly through the fabric.
- The less you move your fabric when cutting, the fewer errors you'll have. Use clamps to hold your fabric when measuring and cutting (see our article about [Measuring & Marking Tools](#)).

- When it's time to sharpen the blades on your best shears, have it done professionally. You'll see a big difference.
- Use your rotary cutter when you need to cut through two or more layers at once.
- Rotary cutters can cut you too. When not in use, or even when you simply set it down between cuts, always retract the blade or put on the cover.

Buying Guide

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