

General Dollmaking Hints and Help

Judi's Dolls - ©1978-2002

<http://JudisDolls.com>

Choosing Fabrics... My favorite fabrics for detailed dollmaking are Craft Velour and Doesuede/Deersuede. The company that makes those fabrics went bankrupt in 2001. But other companies are making Craft Velour now and also some suede type fabrics, the newest of which is Deersuede. These are not leather, they are fabric and make great dolls.

Windsor Ponte and Visa Doeskin are 2 polyester knits that also work very well for the bigger dolls.

100% cotton woven works well for most dolls, but there are many drawbacks when it comes to needle sculpture and details. You have to be very careful with your trimming and little Vs need to be cut from the seam allowance at all outer curves to prevent buckling. Stuffing has to be very meticulous to prevent lumps, and many pattern pieces work better if placed on the Bias, if give is needed for needle sculpture.

Woven cotton does have some "give" in one direction, and for my dolls, the "give" should be placed up and down, if you aren't going to do the parts on the Bias.

Paints... Acrylic paints are best. They are available in every color and work well on fabrics. Always shake them VERY WELL.

Gesso... I like to put a Gesso coat on the eye and mouth shapes before painting with acrylics. It seals the surface and prevents any bleed.

Sealing the surface... You can also seal the surface of your fabric with Clear Acrylic Spray; It is in the paint dept. of any hardware store. Nothing special just the kind you might spray on a table or wood plaque. (test on your fabric first)

Paint brushes... Use the smallest paintbrush you can find. A pointed, #10 is great. These are sometimes called "spotters".

Embroidery... If painting is not your thing, you can make beautiful doll faces with embroidery. Do the embroidery AFTER the doll is stuffed. Use ordinary sewing thread, a single or double strand. If this is done very neatly, one can hardly tell that the face is embroidered! Put a coat of clear fingernail polish, Crystal Lacquers, or Mod Podge over the embroidery to seal it and make it look like paint. You will be amazed at how wonderful embroidery looks when done with sewing thread, rather than embroidery thread.

Yarn for Doll Hair... Use very fine yarn for most doll hair. (some dolls benefit from a thicker yarn though) One VERY fine yarn is Machine Knitting yarn. It comes on cones and is available where knitting machines are sold. You can get it for as little as \$5.00 a cone. There are hundreds of yards on a cone. Of course, those fun fluffy, multi yarns beg to be doll hair too.

Stuffing... Doing it right is an art and it takes practice. Your stuffing makes a difference too. Look for stuffing that has NO little un-fluffed bits in it. I use a stuffing that is slightly "wiry" and not at all slippery. When you are checking a stuffing out, do the "stream test". Pull on a little and see if it streams out of the bag or comes apart in a little chunk. You want stuffing that streams, not chunks. For most dolls you will have the best results with stuffing like this. If all else fails use wool stuffing. It is GREAT!

Stuffing Tools... The best stuffing tool you will ever use is a plain old flat bladed screwdriver. Mine has a blade about 1/4" wide and 6" long. With a screwdriver you can "slide" stuffing down the sides of a wire or chenille stem armature. You can "stream" LARGE pieces of stuffing into an area and then do a little "twist and push" move right in the middle to pack the stuffing down in layers. Most dollmakers who are having trouble stuffing are trying to do it with a stick, or hemostats, or even a knitting needle! Try a screwdriver! The handle let's you really push and the flat blade will also let you slide it down between the doll's "skin" and the stuffing to flatten a lump next to the skin, from the inside. You can "spread" a lump like spreading P-Nut butter!

Jointing Needle... Lots of dolls are jointed. The needle for doing this is an upholstery needle, at least 8" long.

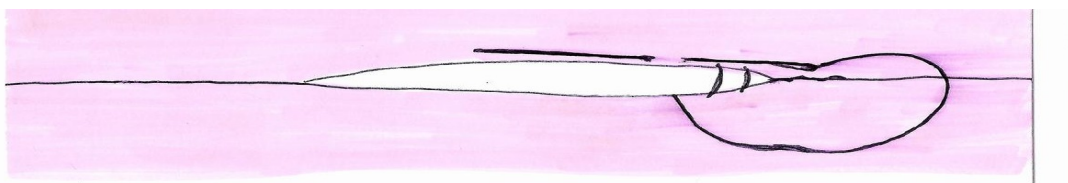
Stuffing Needle... This is also an upholstery needle. Mine is 12" long. Part of the eye is cut off and the long shank is wrapped part way with masking tape. This lets you hook a bent chenille stem in the "fork" and guide it down into a finger effortlessly. The "fork" should be no more than 1/8" long. There are commercially made Stuffing Forks, too but I like my "Stuffing Needle" better. Mine is way over 20 years old!

Jointing Buttons... I use, and have used for over 20 years, the metal buttons that you get to cover with fabric. I don't cover them. Be sure they are the kind with "teeth" in the cap. Push the button together before use. They go inside the upper limbs, not outside.

Jointing Cord... I use a very strong Nylon cord. It is used for jewelry making and shoe repair. You can also use multiple strands of nylon dental floss too.

Fingernails and Toenails... Detailed dolls benefit from fingernails and toenails. You can use any clear coating to paint on the area where the fingernails and toenails go. Test on a piece of fabric with stuffing under it before applying to your doll. Some things will bleed. I usually put a coat of Gesso where the nails go, and then apply color if desired and then the clear coating. This eliminates the "bleed" problem. Crystal Lacquer and Mod Podge are 2 good choices for a clear coating.

Closing Openings... Close openings with a ladder stitch. This stitch takes a time or 2 to conquer, but is worth the practice. Once you can do it, you can close anything, even curves and points almost invisibly! EVERY stitch ENTERS and EXITS on the RIGHT side of the fabric. You NEVER put the needle in the fabric from the wrong side! (except for the first stitch with the knot in the thread) When you do the ladder stitch, the edges of the opening turn to the inside and the thread disappears! Take 3-4 stitches across from each other, progressing along the seam, then Pinch the sides of the opening, Poke the edges to the inside, and Pull the thread tight. Repeat to the end of the opening. Sew in place with very small stitches and lose the ends of the thread.



Every stitch enters and exits on the RIGHT SIDE. Take a few stitches and then pull tight.

The thread will disappear as the opening closes. A little nudge with your finger makes sure the seam allowance goes inside.