

CREWEL

WHAT IS CREWEL?

Crewel (crewell, crewle, cruel, croole, croull) is a type of embroidery using either single or double ply wool yarn. Crewel stitch is stem stitch worked in wool. The design motif for crewel, work is typically an outline of flowers, vines, and leaves, in one or many colors.

Many crewel fabrics are made in India in cottage industries where the manufacturing skill is passed from generation to generation. The designs are hand-stitched onto cotton "Dosootei." Other fabrics, including cotton duck, linen, jute and silk, are sometimes used. There is a large selection of ground colors from naturals to earthen to bright, though white or cream color, are also popular.

While many crewel fabrics are hand-stitched, there are others that are machine made. The fabric shown on this page is a machine-made crewel incorporating a dozen different colors in the embroidered pattern.



GROUND CLOTH

The ground cloth used to manufacture crewel fabrics is generally relatively durable. The cloth used in the fabric shown on this page, typical of crewel fabrics, is called a *basket weave*. In a basket weave, two or more warp yarns are interlaced as a unit with one or more filling yarns. Looking closely at the fabric, one can see that two warp yarns cross over two filling yarns. This is referred to as a 2 x 2 basket weave.

While not as strong as a tightly woven plain weave, this basket weave is considered fairly durable.



WOOL YARNS

The crewel fabric designs, as mentioned previously, are created using loosely twisted, wool yarns. Because the yarns are embroidered in a large chain stitch, there is a good deal of yarn laying or "floating" on top of the fabric. This yarn is very easily snagged and damaged. For this reason,

crewel fabrics are not considered suitable for heavy-use situations.

WATCH FOR “PENCIL LINES”

Another issue that has been observed on crewel fabrics involves marks or lines that can be seen on the base fabric. In many cases a pattern is drawn on the base fabric onto which, the wool yarns are sewn. Uncovered, they resemble a grayish pencil line.

Sometimes the lines are not followed correctly during manufacturing and the exposed marks go unnoticed. Cleaning can sometimes cause the wool to shrink slightly, uncovering the marks as well.

When possible, any visible marks should be pointed out to a client before cleaning or protection is done. Removing the marks can be difficult, if not impossible, without causing damage so all caution should be used.

CLEANABILITY

Crewel fabrics are most often wet-cleanable, as long as proper pre-testing is done. As with any fabric, all colors must be tested. Special attention should be paid to the darker colors often found in these fabrics, especially deep reds and black.

In the cleaning process, brushing and extraction using typical hand tools must be done very carefully in order to respect the fragility of the wool surface yarns.

SPOT CLEANING

Crewel fabrics can be spot cleaned (assuming very careful pre-testing) using both water-based cleaners such as pHnominal and dry cleaning solvents such as Kleen-Tec.

Chlorine bleach and strong alkaline chemicals, such as many pre-sprays, should be avoided when working on crewel or any other fabrics containing protein.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

With proper care, crewel fabrics can last for years. Routine maintenance should include light vacuuming, as well as rotating and flipping cushions (where applicable).

The Fiber-Seal Fabric Care System can benefit crewel fabrics by reducing absorbency, helping to resist permanent staining, and ultimately increasing the useful life of the fabric.

ALWAYS TEST CHEMICALS AND/OR PROCEDURES FIRST IN AN INCONSPICUOUS AREA OF THE FABRIC.