

Janome Life

From beginner to artisan; sharing what we love about Janome sewing machines for sewing, creating and quilting.

Monthly Mini Sewing tips from Sew4Home: How to Mix + Match Colours & Prints

Posted on [June 3, 2020](#) by [lizafrica](#)



Does this look good with that? What about color? Too much, too little?

Mastering the proper mixology of color and motif is something designers spend years perfecting. But there *are* basics everyone can use to create a fabulous look. Color and pattern blending is art and science and just plain fun! At Sew4Home, we're known for our gorgeous fabric selections. Below are our Top 10 Secrets!

1. Choose a style



The examples above show similar color schemes, but dissimilar styles.

Traditional? Modern? Eclectic? It's easiest to work with prints that come from within the same style category. Mixing formal with whimsical is likely to have uncomfortable results.

2. Define the basic color scheme



Colors come in families, such as warm, cool, and neutrals.

Keeping things “in the family” is always a good bet for blending success. Once you have your basic color direction in mind, consider tone: vivid and energetic brights, pale and serene pastels, or dark and intense jewels are just a

few of the possibilities.

3. Create a color balance

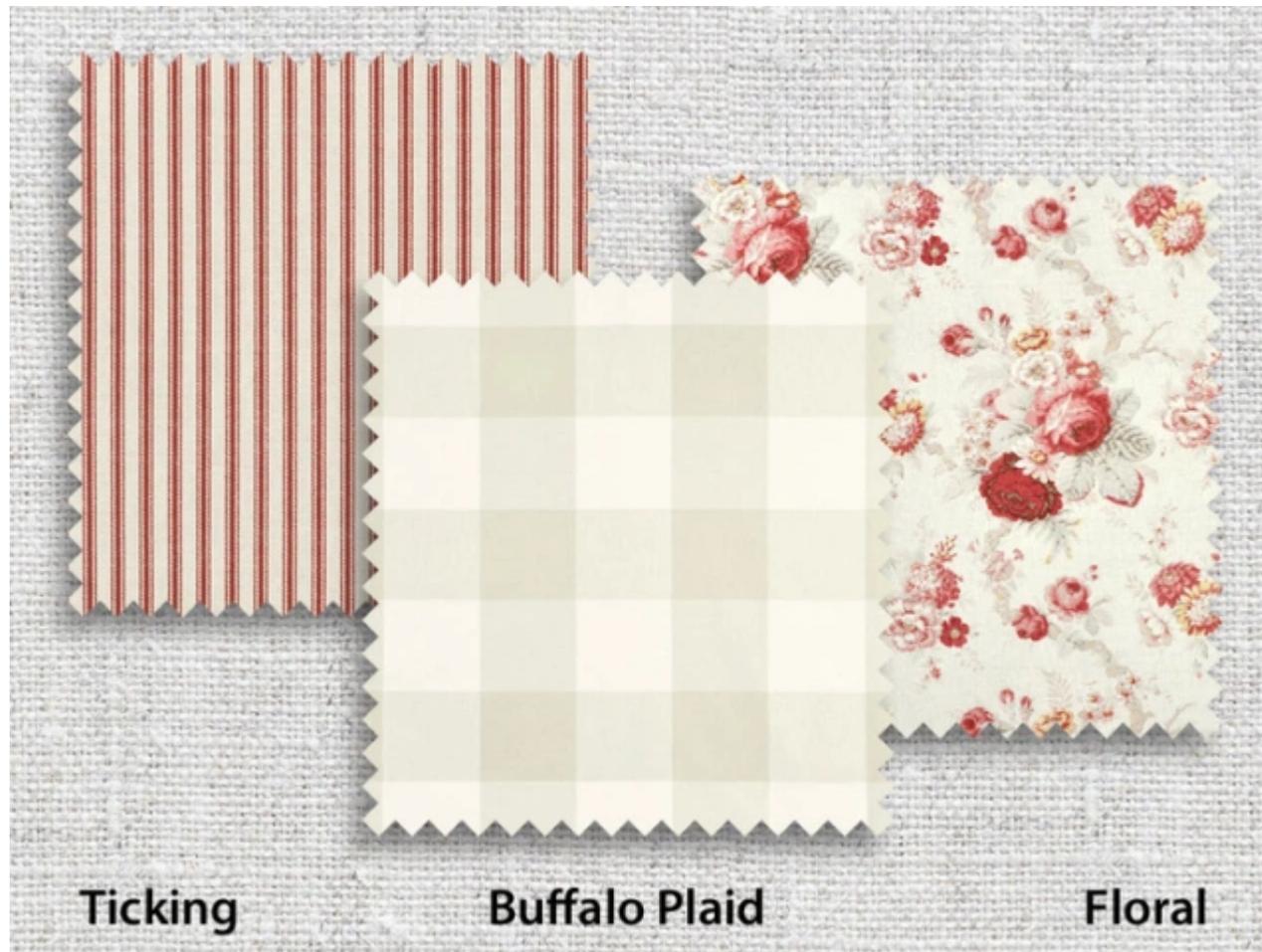


The primary and secondary fabrics are cotton décor fabric, and the accent, a plum faux suede, picks up the tiny bit of plum in the birds.

Choose a primary color, secondary color, and accent color. To achieve the most visually pleasing composition, keep the balance of color at roughly 60% primary, 25-30% secondary and 10-15% accent. This balance should also

take into account placement -- what's next to what. Flow from your anchor color, then begin to introduce the secondary color. The accent should be a little "color surprise" and shouldn't be used much or its impact will be lost.

4. Match colors rather than prints



Rather than mixing three florals, for example, look at the colors in the floral swatch then choose a large motif like a plaid and a smaller accent like a ticking that picks up the red color in the floral.

There's an old maxim about never matching plaids and stripes (it's the chapter right before, "Never wear white after Labor Day."). But you need to close the rule book on those outdated ideas. When colors look good together, chances are prints in those colors will look good together as well.

As you blend, don't forget about complimentary colors. On the designer's color wheel, each color has a complimentary color exactly opposite it. True complimentary hues are also the same distance from the *center* of the wheel, but it can be very striking to combine a color from nearer the center, like a pale yellow green, with its complimentary color from the outside edge, like a deep mauve.



5. Size matters; vary scale and proportion



The large print above shows several motifs within the design repeat. Pay attention to size and repeat, especially when ordering online.

Before we strike out into size, let's get a few definitions out of way. A *motif* is a dominant element within a fabric's overall design. One design can have several unique motifs, and each can be a single image or a repeated pattern. This leads us to definition #2: *design repeat*, which is the how much area is covered, height and width, before a design repeats itself on the fabric.

As you plan, stir things up with some large prints, some medium prints, and some smaller prints. Scale creates drama and interest in your finished piece. If all of the patterns are the same scale, the result can be lifeless.

6. Odd versus even; an interesting mix is better than a perfect match



In good design, exactly even amounts of everything tends to become boring and repetitive. Three equal size pieces of fabric are not as appealing as a dominant or primary fabric combined with a smaller cut of a secondary fabric

and then just a small accent amount of the third. Even if you only use two different fabrics, avoid using the same amount of each.

7. If a little is good, a lot is NOT necessarily better



Notice how the simple prints use color from the main novelty print but support it rather than fight it.

In general, it's best to err on the side of simplicity – especially when you're just getting started with design. Mix and mingle your patterns. Florals, stripes, plaids, polka dots – they can all be blended together beautifully. The

key is variety. For example, don't use three same-size polka dot patterns and expect a winning result.

The key is to know when to stop. Pick a focal motif and blend from there, spreading out prints across a project. Once you get a balanced look, step away. If you continue to layer on fabric after fabric or start to introduce trims, ruffles, and bling; pretty soon you just have a hot mess.

8. Don't forget solids to give the eye a place to rest



One of the ways to bring everything together, and to avoid going overboard as mentioned above in Tip #7, is to introduce a solid. A coordinating solid calms things down, grounds your look, and gives the eye somewhere to rest as it takes in your beautifully blended fabrics.

9. Add a bit of texture



Don't forget you can bring some texture into the mix. Adding textures is not difficult, but use restraint. A texture is most appreciated when it's not competing with too many other textures (see #7 above). As with everything,

understated is the best option for the most professional look.

10. Try it until you like it

The final step is the least scientific: gather up your fabric swatches, toss them on the table (or digitally on your computer) and start moving them around, trying different combinations until you have something that works. Plan to play with at least three to five times as many swatches as you want to end up with. In other words, if you're thinking about having five prints in your final mix, start with between fifteen to twenty-five options to begin. You want enough prints to be able to easily let go of the ones that don't serve the situation. You may even need to go back for more swatches.

If you're working with *online* swatches, *look* for accurate size information, don't assume. Otherwise, you won't know if a swatch is six inches or a foot. That can really throw your scale planning into a tailspin. You need to do your mixing and matching with swatches at the correct scale.

Many designers use a "design board" like the one shown below to work out the final details.



By: Liz Johnson, Senior Editor, Sew4Home – a Janome Exclusive Studio

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About lizafrica

I am the National Education Manager for Janome & Elna Canada (including Artistic Creative products) and I LOVE to sew! I have been employed full time in the sewing and quilting industry for almost 30 years so I bring a wealth of sewing knowledge & expertise to this blog. I enjoy all forms of sewing from quilting to sewing garments to machine embroidery and software. Pretty much everything in my life is seen through the eyes of a passionate sewer! I am constantly on the look out for fun, innovative and inspiring ideas to share with you all on this blog. I also love to sew, read, knit , crochet, travel and spend time with my family and friends.

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4 Responses to *Monthly Mini Sewing tips from Sew4Home: How to Mix + Match Colours & Prints*



Mary Frances Ballard says:

June 3, 2020 at 8:19 am

This is some of the best advice I have ever seen in choosing fabrics. I especially like #8 as your eyes do need a place to rest in every project. This is especially true in making scrap quilts. Thanks for a great article!.

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[lizafrica](#) says:

June 4, 2020 at 1:51 pm

Hi Mary

Thank you for your positive feedback. So glad you liked the info. I have passed your comments to S4H and they appreciate the feedback.

We will have these Mini Sewing tips every month in the first week of the month so do be sure to FOLLOW Janome Life and you won't miss any good info!

Liz

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Candy Gill says:

June 3, 2020 at 4:33 am

I find this article very helpful! Thank you.

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[lizafrica](#) says:

June 3, 2020 at 7:06 am

Hi Candy,

So glad you liked it and found it helpful. Our new partnership with Sew4Home is going to be bringing good things

to our Janome fans.

Liz

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