

# Best Sewing Machine Buying Guide

Find the perfect  
sewing machine for you!

*The Fabric*  
**NINJA** 

# So you want to buy a sewing machine...

Buying your first sewing machine can seem like a huge step. With so many machines out there it's easy to get overwhelmed. I'm here to help push away the unnecessary marketing hype and dial you into the functions, features, and differences that matter.

## Did you know that most are nearly identical?

Most sewing machine are 95% the same. It's just all the bits and bobs that make them different. Sewing machine companies throw around all these "number of stitches" and "accessory packages" that can make any machine look good. Those are just distractions from what really matters, the base machine operation, and how it will work for you and your preferences.

## All machines have the following features\*...

*\*Budget models under \$ 100 often remove one or more of these.*

### Machine Features

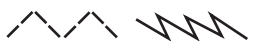
- Multiple stitches
- Straight stitch
- Zig-zag stitch
- Stitch length adjustment
- Stitch width adjustment
- Moveable needle
- Secondary spool pin for twin needles


### Accessory Package Containing:

- A few presser feet
- Extra needle
- Extra bobbin
- Cleaning tool
- A small amount of oil






## Stitches

Every machine is going to have a straight-stitch, a zig-zag, and reverse capabilities. Which is all you will use 99% of the time. Machines can have several hundred utility and decorative stitches. The more stitches the more expensive the sewing machine.

**Going to sew knit?** A three-step zig-zag or lightning bolt stitch are great additions 

**My Favorite Stitches:** Faux serged edge, blind hem stitch, and automatic/4-step buttonhole (which many people think is more bother than it's worth). 

## Circle The Extra Stitches You Want

Three-step zig-zag 	Lightning bolt stitch 	4-step buttonhole 
Faux serged edge 	Blind-hem stitch 	Automatic buttonhole

## Notes:

## Inferior “budget machines”

Plastic sewing machines that cost under \$100 are often classified as disposable. Sometimes they don't work right out of the box. Features are removed to make them less expensive and quicker to make. They don't come with any support or training and warranties are short and often have lots of exceptions.

I don't suggest you buy one of these, not even for a little kid learning. Especially for a kid learning! Kids and beginners are hard on machines. An inferior plastic budget machine will be more frustration than it's worth.

## Can't spend over \$ 100?

Don't worry! You are not out of luck. Buy a second-hand machine at a sewing machine dealer or repair shop with “abandoned machines” or trade-ins are freshly serviced and ready to go.

Look on Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist, or Goodwill. Make sure you are familiar with the machine you are going to buy and see it working before you exchange money. Second hand sewing machines from non-repair/dealerships need to be serviced or at least oiled before use.

What is your budget? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

### *Are you starting to feel overwhelmed?*

*Stop reading and go to a sewing dealership. Or take a sewing class where the sewing machines are provided. Or watch YouTube sewing videos. Even ask a friend to tell you about their sewing machine. These will help you start to understand how a sewing machine works and what you like best.*

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# Threading

If you're not familiar with how a sewing machine works, the top thread goes from the spool through a path and down to the needle. The thread in the needle goes down into the bobbin (bottom) as you sew. The needle thread loops around the bottom bobbin thread and a stitch is formed.

## The Needle Thread

The upper part of most machines thread almost identically, so that's not really a major consideration when it comes to a standard sewing machine. Newer machines will have arrows and numbers to help you know what order to thread it in. Vintage machines may have both, but it is less common.

## The Bobbin (bottom)

Bobbins come in two styles. Drop-In (also called top loading) and the Front-Loading bobbin (also called bottom loading).

**Drop-In Bobbin:** The filled bobbin is placed into the machine from the top of the sewing area. Your machine will have a little clear window or panel that you remove from in front of the needle area. Then you slide the tail into the proper place. Some modern machines, particularly those made by Brother, have a little maze with arrows that gets the thread into the perfect position.

**Pros:** Beginner Friendly - Removes the desire to tinker

**Cons:** Tricky for thick thread - Harder to open for cleaning

**Front-Loading Bobbin:** The filled bobbin is placed into a metal bobbin case, and you pull the thread through a small groove. That case goes into the front of the sewing machine through a small door. When you put the bobbin case back into the machine it must be properly aligned

**Pros:** Easier to adjust the tension on - Easier to open for cleaning

**Cons:** Harder for Beginners - Requires coordination to insert

## Circle The Bobbin Style You Want

Drop-In Bobbin	Front-Load Bobbin	No Preference
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## Notes:



# Mechanical Vs. Computer

## Mechanical Sewing Machines

Mechanical sewing machines have dials and knobs that change the stitch type, length, and width. If you have any sort of technology phobia, I suggest that you get a mechanical sewing machine. You don't need any more reasons or fears that will keep you from taking it out of the box.

**Pros:** No tech barrier - Quick learning curve - Fewer things to break - No software - Less expensive

**Con:** No convenience features

**Favorite:** EverSewn Sparrow 15 - No computer buttons or screens with a Front-Loading Bobbin

## Computerized Sewing Machines

Computerized sewing machines come with computers, LCD screens, and buttons that are used to select the stitch type, width, and length. A computerized machine has convenience features like: needle up/down button, speed control, and automatic tie-off. (See computer feature section to learn what these are)

**Pros:** Great convenience features

**Con:** More expensive - Tech barrier - Learning curve - More things to break

**Favorite:** EverSewn Sparrow 25 - All the convenience features with a Drop-In Bobbin

## Hybrid Sewing Machines

Some sewing machines are a weird hybrid. They start to incorporate computers, but only in minor ways. They have a tiny LCD screen just for selecting the stitch and have one or two convenience features. My two favorites are needle up/down and speed control. (See computer feature section to learn what these are)

**Pros:** Great convenience features - Less expensive than fully computerized - Low tech barrier

**Con:** More expensive than mechanical - Tech barrier - More things to break

**Favorite:** EverSewn Sparrow 20 - Many convenience features with a Drop-In Bobbin

## Circle The Machine Type You Want

Mechanical	Computer	Hybrid
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**Notes:**

**Don't want to have to make a decision?**

Get an EverSewn Sparrow 20 or 25. I'm pretty sure you will love it.

# For All Sewing Machine Types

Find images of all these features: <https://fabricninja.com/sewing-machine-buying-guide/>

## Free-Arm

A free-arm is great for sewing small circles, like cuffs, necklines, and pant hems. It allows for small items to be sewn in a loop. If you sew a lot of clothes, this may be a feature you like.

## Automatic Needle Threader

Should really be called assisted needle threader. Aftermarket models are inexpensive if your machine is lacking.

## Weight

Consider how heavy a machine is if you are going to be lugging it to classes. Rolling totes and covers are available that fit many machines. Be aware the very light machines can also be a bit bouncy as they sew.

## Dual Feed

Dual feed machines have a little extra bit near the needle that helps pull the top layer of fabric at the same speed as the bottom layer of fabric. Great for thick projects and quilting. You can add a walking foot to any sewing machine to get the same results as a dual-feed system.

Sewing machine brands with a dual feed: Pfaff (IDT), Janome (AcuFeed).

## Knee Lift

A knee lift operates the presser foot with the leg, so that both of your hands can be focused on the fabric. This is very common in industrial machines and also in domestic machines designed for quilting.

## High-Speed

Sewing machines measure their speed in Stitches Per Minute (SPM). High speed machines are designed for production or quilting. Not all machines list their speed. A speed of 750 SPM is good for a beginner, but slow for a well practiced stitcher.

# Circle The Features You Want

Free-Arm	Automatic Needle Threader	Light Weight
Dual Feed	Knee Lift	High-Speed

## Notes:

# Computer Only Features

## Variable Speed Control

Many beginners love the variable speed control function. It is a “governor” that doesn’t allow you to go any faster no matter how hard you press the pedal. You can work up to sewing faster with time.

## Needle Up/Down

It’s seriously my favorite computerized feature. The needle up/needle down button eliminates the need to move your needle with the hand wheel when removing your fabric or pivoting. You touch one button and the needle will always stop up or down.

## Automatic Tie-Off

Press this button and the sewing machine will take a few small stitches forward and backward to keep the line from unraveling.

## Start/Stop Button

Once only for embroidery machine, this feature makes it so you can sew without using a foot pedal.



## Dual Purpose Machines

Some sewing machines can also do embroidery. Until you get to very high-end sewing machines, I do not suggest getting a model that does both sewing and embroidery. They are generally not great at either thing.

## Circle The Features You Want

Variable Speed Control	Needle Up/Down	Automatic Tie-Off
Start/Stop Button	Dual Purpose Machine	

## Notes:



## Collect All Your Choices

It's okay to make changes to your original choices.

What is your budget? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### Extra Stitches

Three-step zig-zag	Lightning bolt stitch	4-step buttonhole
Faux serged edge	Blind-hem stitch	Automatic buttonhole

### The Bobbin Style

Drop-In Bobbin	Front-Load Bobbin	No Preference
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### Machine Type

Mechanical	Computer	Hybrid
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### For All Sewing Machine Types

Free-Arm	Automatic Needle Threader	Light Weight
Dual Feed	Knee Lift	High-Speed

### Computer Features

Variable Speed Control	Needle Up/Down	Automatic Tie-Off
Start/Stop Button	Dual Purpose Machine	





# Beginner Sewing Machines

Entry-level sewing machines are not just for beginners. Mid and high-end sewing machines have additional computer features or features specific to your fabric craft such as high-speed for drapes or bigger “throat” area for quilting. There are many other entry-level machines on the market, these are just a sample.

Use the blank rows to record additional sewing machines while shopping.

Model	Type	Speed Control	Needle Up/Down	Start/Stop	Stitches	Free Arm	Bobbin: Front-Load or Drop-In	Approx. Price Nov 2019	Dealer / Retail
Husqvarna Viking Emerald 118	Hybrid	Yes	Yes	No	18	Yes	Drop-In	\$399 w/ lesson and support	Dealer Only
Janome Magnolia 7318	Mechanical	No	No	No	18	Yes	Drop-In	\$299	Amazon
Janome JW8100	Computer	Yes	Yes	Yes	100	Yes	Drop-In	\$210	Amazon
EverSewn Sparrow 15	Mechanical	No	No	No	32	Yes	Front-Load	\$149	Amazon
EverSewn Sparrow 20	Hybrid	Yes	Yes	Yes	80	Yes	Drop-In	\$279	Amazon
EverSewn Sparrow 25	Computer	Yes	Yes	Yes	197	Yes	Drop-In	\$329	Amazon
Brother CS6000i	Computer	Yes	Yes	Yes	60	Yes	Drop-In	\$149	Amazon
Brother Designio DZ3000	Computer	Yes	Yes	Yes	240	Yes	Drop-In	\$310	Amazon
Singer Heavy Duty	Mechanical	No	No	No	32	Yes	Drop-In	\$165	Amazon
Singer Quantum Stylist 9960	Computer	Yes	Yes	Yes	600	Yes	Drop-In	\$299	Amazon

