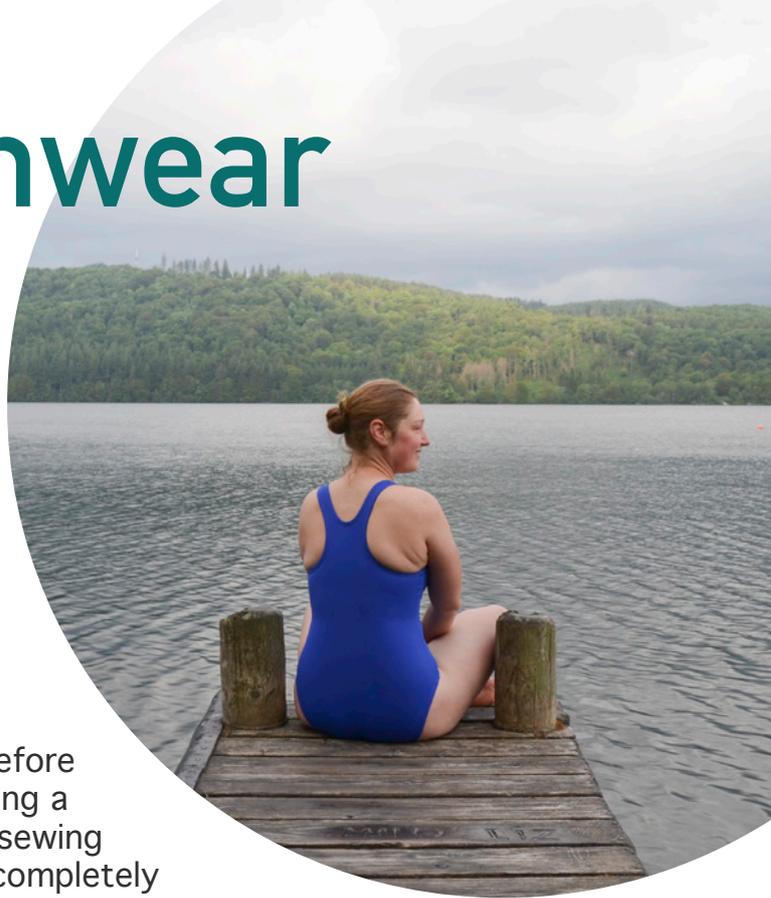


Sewing swimwear

Tips, tricks and techniques

There's something really satisfying about making an item of clothing which fits you perfectly and you'll use over and over again. For me, that's often a swimming costume. Although it might sound a bit scary to begin with, sewing swimwear can be surprisingly straightforward. If you've done some sewing before – you'll need to know how to make clothing using a pattern and have learnt your way around your sewing machine settings – making your own cossie is completely achievable. This is a short guide to the supplies you'll need, where to get hold of them, and some tips and tricks to get you started. Happy sewing!



What do I need to get started?

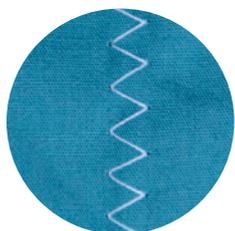
To make a swimming costume, you'll need the following:

- a sewing machine
- sewing machine accessories
- a pattern
- fabric
- elastic
- thread

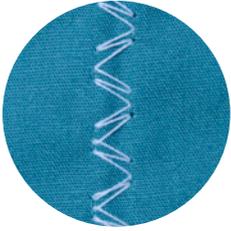
We'll cover each one in more detail below.

Sewing machine

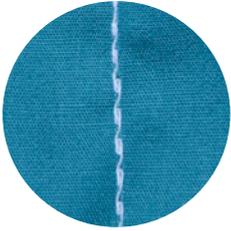
All you need to sew swimwear is a sewing machine with a zigzag stitch setting. Without the zigzag, your stitching won't be able to stretch with the fabric and the seams will pop open. Depending on the machine, there are also some other stitches which you may find useful.



Single zigzag stitch (the bare minimum) – a triangular stitch which can be made wider or narrower, and longer or shorter using your machine settings. Wide zigzag is used for attaching elastic, narrow zigzag is used for sewing seams.



Stretch zigzag stitch (optional) – a version of single zigzag where the machine doubles back on itself to lock each stitch and to reinforce the seam. You might decide to use a narrow stretch zigzag to sew seams to make them more secure.



Stretch straight stitch (optional) – a version of straight stitch where the machine doubles back on itself to lock each stitch and to reinforce the seam. You would use this stitch to sew seams and gives a neater finish than a narrow zigzag. This stitch can't be used for attaching elastic.

Sewing machine accessories

Needles

You'll need to use stretch or super stretch machine needles to sew swimwear fabric. If you don't, you'll end up with broken thread and skipped stitches. Although you might be able to use universal needles on other types of fabric, you won't get away with it here.

If you're using a stretch needle and you're still getting skipped stitches, you can try:

- replacing the needle
- re-threading the machine
- checking the machine for trapped thread or fabric (you may want to open the bobbin compartment to do this)
- adjusting the machine tension

If that fails, it might be time to get your machine serviced.

Walking foot

A walking foot is used when working with slippery fabric. It makes sure both layers of fabric are gripped properly by the machine and pulled through the feed dogs at the same rate. A walking foot isn't essential, but I promise it will make sewing swimwear an awful lot easier!

Sewing patterns

For your first swimming costume, I recommend the Cottesloe pattern by Megan Nielsen, a basic scoop-back one-piece or bikini with various design options.

In addition to the instructions that come with the pattern, the designer has



put together a series of sewalong posts on her blog with photographs of every step, detailed instructions and explanations of the particularly tricky bits.

The pattern is available in US sizes 0–20 and a ‘curve’ version in sizes 14–30. You can buy a printed pattern or downloadable PDF direct from the Megan Nielsen website (www.megannielsen.com), and the printed pattern is available to buy from other international stockists. Try www.thefoldline.com or www.dragonflyfabrics.co.uk in the UK.

Making swimwear is getting more and more popular, so a quick Google will throw up plenty of other options. My favourites are:

- Jalie (www.jalie.com) – a Canadian company specialising in sportswear, particularly gymnastics, skating and swimming. All patterns are available on hard copy or as print-at-home PDFs, and each pattern includes a huge range of sizes, from child to adult.
- Peek-a-boo Pattern Shop (www.peakaboopatternshop.com) – A small range of patterns, including the must-have for winter swimming – a zip-front long-sleeved surfsuit.

For a 20% discount on the Cottesloe at megannielsen.com use code: `OSS_COTTESLOE_SEW`

Fabric

Main fabric

Swimwear fabric can be difficult to find. Unless you live near a really good fabric shop, you’re likely to need to shop online. All of the suppliers suggested below ship internationally unless it says otherwise – payment currency is shown next to each one.

- Abakhan (£, no swimwear fabric in online shop) – a chain of bricks-and-mortar shops who sell swim fabric pices by the kilo. Excellent value, but you won’t find the same stock twice.
- Fabric Land (£) (www.fabricland.co.uk) – look under their ‘lycra fabric’ section. They sell a beautiful leopard-print fabric.
- Fashion Formula (£) (www.fashion-formula.com) – a fabric printing company who also sell a huge range of designs created by members of their community. Their swimwear base is called ‘active lycra’.
- Fabric Fairy (\$) (www.thefabricfairy.com) – a good range of prints and plain colours.
- Funkifabrics (£) (www.funkifabrics.com) – a sportswear fabric specialist. There are hundreds of patterned fabrics available, plus plain matte and shiny lycra. For those interested in sustainable fashion, they do an ever-expanding range of recycled lycra.
- Spoonflower (£/\$) (www.spoonflower.co.uk) – similar to Fashion Formula. Use their ‘sport lycra’ base for swimwear. The company is based in the US but have a printing

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patterns



facility in Germany so there are no customs charges for UK/EU customers.

- Tia Knight Fabrics (£) (www.tiaknightfabrics.co.uk) – a much cheaper option than any of the above. They only sell plain colours but their matt lycra is excellent quality.

Lining

You can line your swimsuit with lycra, or you can use a lighter-weight lining. For this try Fit2Sew (£) (www.fit2sew.co.uk), the Fabric Fairy (\$) or ‘soft touch lycra’ from Tia Knight Fabrics (£).

Elastic

There are two types of elastic available – regular or swimwear elastic.

Swimwear elastic is relatively expensive but is designed to withstand chlorine whereas regular elastic is much cheaper and widely available but less resistant to chlorine.

For regular pool swimming, specialist elastic would be best, but for open water regular elastic will be fine. Remember, you can always replace the elastic if it wears out.

Thread

You should use good-quality 100% polyester thread for making swimwear because cotton thread will rot when wet. Gütermann Sew-All polyester thread is a good choice.

Other sources of information

- FehrTrade (www.shop.fehrtrade.com) – Melissa Fehr is an independent pattern designer specialising in activewear. Her website is full of useful resources, including a global fabric supplier list.
- Curvy Sewing Collective (www.curvysewingcollective.com) – an online sewing community. Search ‘swimwear’ on their website and you’ll get plenty of results.
- Abakhan ‘Sew your own swimwear’ course (£) (www.abakhan.co.uk/workshops-and-courses.html) – a one-day workshop covering the basics of sewing swimwear. Most people come away with a finished swimming costume.
- Cashmerette (\$) (<https://workshops.cashmerette.com/>) – a range of online courses, including ‘Swimsuit making for curves’. The price of this course includes a copy of their Ipswich swimsuit pattern.

