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# What to Look For in a Serger

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Not long ago, sergers were only available for commercial use. The machines were huge, heavy and impractical for home sewers. Fortunately, the market has changed and there are wonderful assortments of industrial-quality sergers, at a variety of price points, designed specifically for home sewers.

## What is a Serger?

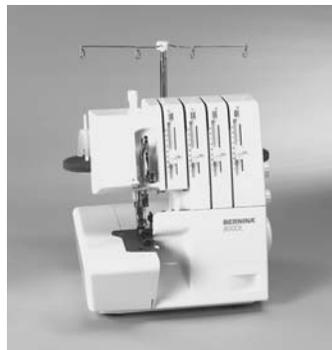
A serger is a special-purpose machine that produces professionally finished seams, like those found on ready-to-wear garments. It uses between two and nearly a dozen threads to encase the raw edge of the fabric with an overcast stitch, while trimming away the seam allowance—all at speeds of up to 1,700 stitches per minute. Instead of a bobbin and single needle, the serger has a cutting blade, “loopers” and multiple needles.

Sergers are used to clean-finish the seam allowances although today’s models can do far more than that, and they have become increasingly easy to operate, creatively diverse in their stitch capability and more economical than ever.

## What Does a Serger Do?

A serger does not replace a sewing machine. Its primary function is to clean-finish a raw edge, giving the project a professional appearance. Many serger stitches have built-in stretch, making them the perfect tool for seaming knit fabrics.

Additionally, the eyes of the loopers are larger than the eyes of sewing needles and can therefore accommodate thicker decorative threads.



Bernina 800D

## What Sergers Do

- Finish seams and edges
- Sew stretch seams
- Embellish with decorative thread
- Embellish with flatlock, chainstitch or coverstitch
- Reduce puckering and rippling on hard-to-sew fabrics
- Apply elastic and other trims
- Hem sheer and lightweight fabrics without puckering
- Hem garments with coverstitch
- Edge-finish reversible items
- Execute beautiful rolled hems
- Finish with decorative edgings
- Gather fabric (differential-feed adjustment)
- Speed up construction time

## What Sergers Don't Do

- Baste
- Sew in reverse
- Install zippers
- Make buttonholes
- Embroider
- Topstitch (unless the machine is capable of coverstitching)

## About Serger Stitches

As the number of needles and loopers increases, so does the diversity of the stitches; and as the stitch diversity increases, so does the price. Once you understand the stitches, you can ask a serger dealer which machine best suits your needs. For information on types of serger stitches and what they're used for, see Guideline 2.220.

## Features to Look For

Everyone has different serger needs; however, most agree that the following key features are worth investigating.

**Threading Ease:** Nothing is more frustrating than a machine that is too difficult to use. Thread and rethread any machine you're considering buying. Be sure you know how to thread the lower looper; it's usually the most challenging thread path. Most sergers have color-coded thread paths and lay-in threading.

**Differential Feed:** This adjusts the movement of the feed dogs, and therefore how the fabric feeds, to eliminate puckers, stretching and ripples in seams. It can also be adjusted to gather the fabric.

**Included Accessory Feet:** The more accessories that are included with the machine, the better. They're quite expensive to buy separately.

**Instructional Classes and On-Site Repair:** If possible, take classes to learn all the functions of the machine. Hands-on experience will help you get the most mileage from your purchase. Ask if classes and/or an instructional video are included in the cost of the machine.

**LCD Screen:** Found on more-expensive machines, the display panel indicates machine adjustment information for all the various stitches.

**Conversion Ease:** Be sure to ask how the machine converts from a standard serger stitch to a rolled hem or chainstitch. Sometimes it's a button/dial; sometimes it involves disengaging a thread path or adding a conversion plate. How do you disengage the blades/knives?

## Do You Need or Want a Serger?

Do you need a serger? Probably no. Do you want a serger? Most certainly yes!

Both beginning and experienced sewers benefit from tools that simplify sewing and make professional results easier. Most sewing machines have an overlock or overcast stitch in their library of stitches, so why do you need a serger? You don't really need one, but they're nice to have, and, while a sewing machine can certainly perform an overcast stitch, it can't cut the fabric as it stitches, and it can't use the thicker, decorative threads that are so popular. And most sewing machines don't sew anywhere near as fast as sergers.

## Ask yourself:

- Will you use the machine for more than edge finishes?
- Will you seam knits? Wovens?
- Will you experiment with decorative threads?
- Will you embellish fabric with the flatlock stitch?
- Will you be sewing curtains, drapes and other large items that require clean seams?



*Pfaff Hobbylock 4842*

Determine how much you think you will use a serger, familiarize yourself with the various stitches and then take time to visit at least two serger dealers. Have the dealer demonstrate the machine and explain its stitch capability. Practice threading several different models before making a purchase. If possible, purchase your serger from a dealer so you have the opportunity to take classes, ask follow-up questions and utilize convenient repair and maintenance service. 🖨️