

A Zippy Guide to Zippers

National Zipper Day is April 29, but everyday is a great day to celebrate the zipper. Imagine a world without zippers! They are easy to insert into your sewing skill set with just a little know-how.

ZIPPER SIZES

Zipper length is measured from zipper stop to zipper stop along the teeth and not the length of the zipper tape. Some information about the zipper may be available on the back of the zipper pull. A number will indicate the zipper size and letters will indicate the type of zipper. Zipper sizes are measured in millimeters across the elements (teeth or coil) of the zipper:

- Zippers from size 1-4 mm are small zippers suitable for items that don't receive a lot of heavy use or strain.
- Zippers from size 5-7 mm are medium zippers and are suitable for purses, backpacks, upholstery cushions, lightweight luggage or coats and jackets.
- Zippers from size 8-10 mm are heavyweight zippers and are used on items that receive heavy use or strain such as tents, vehicle covers and other industrial type uses.

ZIPPER TYPES

- Nylon coil zippers are lightweight and flexible. They are ideal for clothing and small items such as zipper bags. The coils are easily sewn over with a sewing machine or serger. Consider buying a longer zipper than required to make insertion simple. Maximum iron temperature is 160 degrees.
- Molded zippers have teeth that are molded into the zipper tape directly. They are not as flexible as the nylon coil zippers and add a little weight. They are generally much more reliable than the nylon coil in high use items such as a purse or coat. They can be sewn over with a sewing machine if care is taken to hand walk the needle and avoid the zipper teeth. They are not recommended for use with a serger. A trademark name for this zipper is Vislon. Maximum iron temperature is 130 degrees.
- Metal zippers are very reliable, long lasting and weigh a LOT more than other zippers. They can be sewn over with a sewing machine if care is taken to hand walk the needle and avoid the zipper teeth. They are absolutely not recommended for use with a serger.
- Specialty zippers are available for an amazing variety of applications. Water resistant, extra strong, puncture resistant and marine are just a short list of the many types available. Decorative zippers can come in an incredible variety of fancy teeth and zipper tapes including printed and fancy edges. Consider how the decorative parts

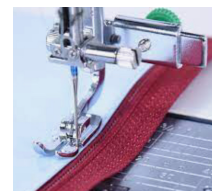
are fashioned when using these fancy zippers. The zippers with fancy teeth generally have a higher profile than standard zippers.

- Invisible zippers are generally nylon coil with the “teeth” in the back of the zipper. They are a good choice when any zipper or zipper stitching would detract from the item, such as in dresses and formal wear. They are applied by stitching very close to the teeth after the teeth are opened. An invisible zipper foot makes this job easier by placing the zipper precisely and gently opening the teeth just before the needle completes the stitch. Consider pressing the zipper teeth flat with a low to medium iron just before sewing. These zippers are not recommended for very close fitting or high stress items with a great deal of sideways pull.
- Separating zippers are used when the two sides of the garment need to open completely as in a jacket or coat. The insert pin of one side of the zipper fits into the retaining box at the bottom of the zipper tape to re-connect the two halves. The zipper tape doesn’t extend past this end of the zipper. Separating zippers can be found with two pulls to open from the top and bottom for use in long coats. A separating zipper can be converted to a closed zipper by adding a stop a short distance from the terminal end.
- Double pull zippers are closed at both ends and have two pulls that face either towards or away from each other. This zipper is very useful for purses and luggage. A double slider zipper can be converted to a single pull by simply cutting the zipper in half at the desired length. Make sure that the pull is in the correct half before you cut.
- The length of a zipper is measured from the top stop to the bottom stop. Zippers are available with a wide variety of pulls and can be dressed up with a fancy extended zipper pull.

ZIPPER FEET

Zipper feet are necessary when sewing on a zipper to allow the machine to stitch past the high profile zipper pull. By using a longer zipper than needed, the pull can sometimes be moved above or below the foot to avoid using a zipper foot. There are three common types of zipper feet:

- The adjustable zipper foot looks a lot like a ski and this narrow foot can be adjusted side to side. This foot is ideal for sewing next to bulky zippers, cording and trims, but because of the narrow footprint of the foot there is very little contact with the machine making control sometimes challenging. Make certain to secure the zipper or trim securely before sewing. A wash away sticky tape such as Wonder tape works well in these difficult to pin items.
- The non-adjustable zipper foot may have two places for attachment to the machine to allow for sewing on either side of the foot or the needle is adjusted to the correct position. This makes it possible to sew the mirror image halves of the zipper in the same direction, such as top to bottom. This helps eliminate misalignment of the finished zipper.

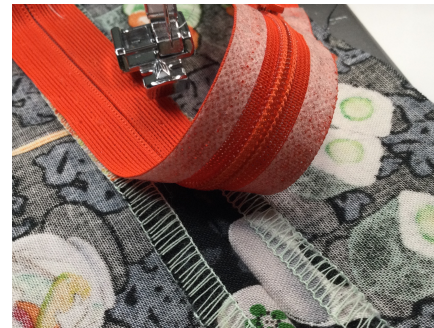


- Invisible zipper foot has special grooves on the bottom of the foot to open the zipper coils to allow stitching very close to the coils. This foot may have a slider or two attachment points for sewing on either side of the zipper. Use a straight stitch and check the position of the needle to hit the sweet spot when stitching.

ZIPPER APPLICATIONS

Traditional zippers are generally sewn with a centered or concealed (lapped) application. Stitching is visible on both sides of a centered zipper and only on one side of a lapped zipper. The seam above and below the zipper is sewn before the zipper is inserted. Place the zipper so the zipper stop is located in the correct position when placing prior to sewing. This is especially important for separating zippers. Secure and sew one half of the zipper. Close the zipper and place the second half. Pins and clips are awkward and difficult to use on a zipper. Wash away Wonder tape works very well to place the zipper as it is reposition-able and can be sewn through directly.

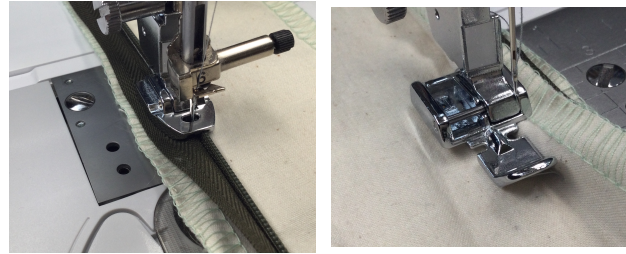
Centered zippers are sewn with the fabric on either side lapped and just touching in the middle to cover the zipper. Sew the seam before inserting the zipper. In the part of the seam where the zipper will be stitched, increase the stitch length to the max for a basting stitch. This will be removed after the zipper is installed. Put Wonder tape on both sides of the zipper tape on the right/top side of the zipper. Press the seam open and position the zipper with the right side of the zipper directly under the seam on the underside of the item. Use pressure to secure the zipper well. On the right side, top stitch the zipper in place on both sides and across the bottom. Be careful and hand walk the needle when stitching across the bottom if using a molded or metal zipper so as to not strike the teeth with the needle. Remove the basting.



Concealed or lapped zippers are easily sewn with some simple adjustments. Increase the seam allowance to 1" in the zipper location on the side that will be the overlap and allow 5/8" on the side that will be underlaid. If the raw edges need to be finished, do that now on each piece. Sew the seam that the zipper will be inserted into. Sew the half of the zipper that will be concealed. Align the edge of the zipper tape to the raw edge of the seam. Sew close to the zipper teeth for the length of the zipper. Fold open on the right side and top stitch the zipper down. Position the lapped half of the seam and press. Use Wonder tape on the zipper tape to hold the position. Using a zipper foot, stitch across the bottom and the side of the overlap making sure to catch all layers in the top stitching. Be careful and hand walk the needle when stitching across the bottom if using a molded or metal zipper so as to not strike the teeth with the needle.

Invisible zippers are sewn in before the rest of the seam is completed. If the raw edges of the fabric need to be finished, do that now to each separate piece. Sew one side of the zipper using the side of the invisible zipper foot that matches that half of the zipper.

Close the zipper, align the remaining half and switch the foot to the opposite side either by sliding the foot or re-attaching it. Sew the second half of the zipper. Switch to a traditional zipper foot. Complete the seam by closing the zipper, folding two fabric pieces right sides together and sewing very close to the zipper stitching and overlapping the end by about 1/2" inch. Try to stitch as close as possible to the previous seams on both halves of the zipper.



Serged zippers are sewn with a 4 thread overlock or three thread wide serger stitch. When sewing a polyester or nylon zipper with a serger, use a 5mm Cording foot to hold the zipper in position while sewing. A serger cording foot has a groove on the underside of the foot for the teeth of the zipper to ride in as the zipper is sewn. When purchasing a cording foot for your Babylock serger, make sure to select the foot that fits your 4 thread or 8 thread serger.

A serger can not sew next to the zipper pull. Select a zipper that is longer than the finished zipper so the zipper pull can be placed away from the active stitching area. After inserting the zipper with the serger, the zipper can be finished off as a lapped or concealed zipper by pressing folds in the fabric and top stitching with the sewing machine.



Never sew across a molded or metal zipper with a serger as the blade could be damaged. When sewing a seam on both ends of the inserted zipper, make sure that the zipper pull has been moved to the center of the zipper before stitching across the ends or you will have a zipper with no pull.

