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Embroidering on Organza

At a recent wedding, I found myself admiring the colorful dresses of the guests and, of course, the bride's beautiful wedding gown. From the silvery sheen of the garments, I knew that much of the lovely fabric was organza.

A thin, sheer fabric, organza is a fantastic way to infuse the home and wardrobe with a sense of luxury. Used in the fashion world for formal gowns and dresses, organza has also made its way into the realm of home decor.

Traditionally made from made from silk, the continuous filament of silkworms, today's organza is created using nylon, polyester, or silk, or a blend of any of the three. Polyester, in particular, has taken over the role that silk organza once played as it is less expensive and easier to care for. However, designers still prefer to use silk organza when cost and practicality are not an issue.

The organza woven in China remains almost completely made from silk filaments, while both deluxe silk and nylon silk blends come from Italy and France. The most versatile organza comes from India and the United States, and uses a blend of nylon and polyester, creating a version that is smooth to the touch.

If you are looking to add organza to your wardrobe, it lends itself well to formal evening gowns, exquisite bridal wear, and structured blouses. My niece chose a fabulous organza prom dress in magenta and was the belle of the ball! Light-weight organza is a great choice to use as the underlining in garments. It helps prevent seams from showing through, gives support to the fabric, and reduces wrinkling.

In the home, organza can add a flowing touch to windows when used as sheer curtains, or a romantic look when suspended above a bed or looped through a bed frame. A swatch of organza over a light will beautifully diffuse and soften lighting (although keep it away from the actual light bulb!). Table scarves, like the one displayed above and below, make charming accents to table settings.

I have found that when embroidering on organza, a 75/11 sharp sewing needle works well. A sharp needle has a finer point than other needle types (embroidery, ballpoint, universal, stretch) and that will make the smallest holes in the organza. When stitching on silk organza, use the finest smallest gauge needle available to you.

The best choice of stabilizer to use with polyester or nylon organza, is heavy-weight, water-soluble stabilizer (WSS). Permanent stabilizers, such as cutaway or tear-away,



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will be easily seen through the sheer fabric, while water-soluble will be instantly washed away. I used Sulky Ultra Solvy stabilizer for the table scarf project above and was pleased with the results. If I had used a pure silk organza, I probably would have used a fibrous water-soluble (like Vilene) and blotted with a barely-damp sponge.

Organza can handle a variety of embroidery designs, but I generally opt for smaller, open designs. Lighter designs allow the fabric to drape better, and the organza can also be reversible when stitching designs with matching thread in the top and bobbin. Conversely, complex designs can weigh the fabric down and look a little messy on the back side.

I had heard that organza loses its sheen when machine washed. To test how the embroidered organza stood up to laundering, I washed it on a gentle cycle with mild detergent. Then I tumble dried it (which took about a minute on a low temperature setting). I was pleased to see that the organza looked as good as new. It was a little wrinkled, so I ironed the table scarf with a pressing cloth on a low setting.