

Using the wrong lubricating product or oil for your sewing machine can be a slippery slope to problems for your sewing machine or serger. Don't risk damaging your machine or make things more difficult for yourself, get the correct tool and product for the job.

As far as where to oil, refer to your user's manual for that information. If your manual doesn't have any oiling instructions, then it is the manufacturer's intent that any lubricating that is required is to be done by the technician when you take the machine in for service and not the owner/ user. If this doesn't sit well with you, then you should consider getting a quality, classic, vintage machine which you can clean and oil yourself. The instructions will be right in the manual. For generic cleaning and oiling instructions, try [This Sewing Machine Maintenance Guide](#) from the New Mexico State Cooperative Extension Service.

Let's start by covering what oils you shouldn't use and then give some good product options for oiling your sewing machine.



First, do not use 3-in-1 oil. The solvents it contains which give it its cleaning properties will evaporate over time and the remaining product will "varnish up", becoming a sticky gumming residue and binding up your machine.



Do not use WD-40. It can interfere with the lubricating properties of the graphite deposits in sintered bearings on newer machines, and will not provide sufficient, long term lubricating properties on any machine.

If it smells like gasoline just don't use it.

Don't use motor oil. That's for your car.

Don't use olive oil or vegetable oil. That's for your salad.



Sewing Machine oil with precision applicator tip

Guess what you should use? SEWING MACHINE OIL! See, this isn't complicated at all!

Make your sewing machine happy and your life simpler by using a good, clear sewing machine oil. These are sold at Joann's, Target, Wal-Mart, any sewing machine shop and other fabric stores. It's cheap (less than a few dollars per bottle) won't harm your machine when used according to the directions in your manual, and works fine.



If you feel like using the BEST oil for sewing machines (IMHO), you can get yourself some [Tri-flow oil](#). It comes in an aerosol spray can and a drip bottle. I like the drip bottle (shown here). It's easier to control (has a little straw that fits in the tip) and far less messy than the aerosol spray. Tri-flow has PTFE (Teflon) suspended into the mix, so be sure to shake it up well. It's slightly more expensive than standard sewing machine oil and it's nice to use, but not an absolutely necessary expense.

If you find an old bottle of sewing machine oil and it isn't clear and colorless, don't use it. The oil breaks down over time and just won't do the job like fresh oil.

What about grease?



Grease is used on some sewing machine gears. Oil would just fly off as the gears spin, so it is not a substitute for grease in this case. Also, many of the vintage Singer motors require grease. The grease is used in the tubes and pots that hold the wicks which transfer the lubrication required to the motor bearings.

On machines with metal gears, I REALLY like the [Tri-flow grease](#). It's sticky and doesn't fling off as the gears spin. I **do NOT recommend using lithium grease**. Why? Because I have personally chiseled & chipped it off of one to many sets of metal gears. It apparently turns into an opaque, concrete like substance over time.

For plastic gears, please proceed with caution. On many models, the manufacturer specifies no lubricant is to be applied to the synthetic/ plastic/ nylon/ non-metal gears. Using a lubricant in this case is not advised. For many other machines, the manufacturer recommends a product such as Molykote EM-40M or similar. In such an instance, it is safe to use Tri-Flow grease or Di-electric grease. Neither will harm the plastic gears, and they will provide the lubricating properties required. Many other types of grease are not safe on plastics or nylon, so be very careful about what you use on non-metal gears.

For Singer motors with grease pots, I no longer suggest the Singer grease. The new formula (2013) no longer has a low enough melting point to have the needed capillary action to travel through the wick and lubricate the motor bearings. I suggest petroleum jelly for this particular application at this time.

If you like to use something not mentioned here or that I've cautioned against, that's your prerogative, but please don't expect me to endorse it. I've developed a repertoire of safe, effective products, and I'm stickin' to 'em.

You can find the Tri-Flow oil and grease for sewing machines [right HERE](#).