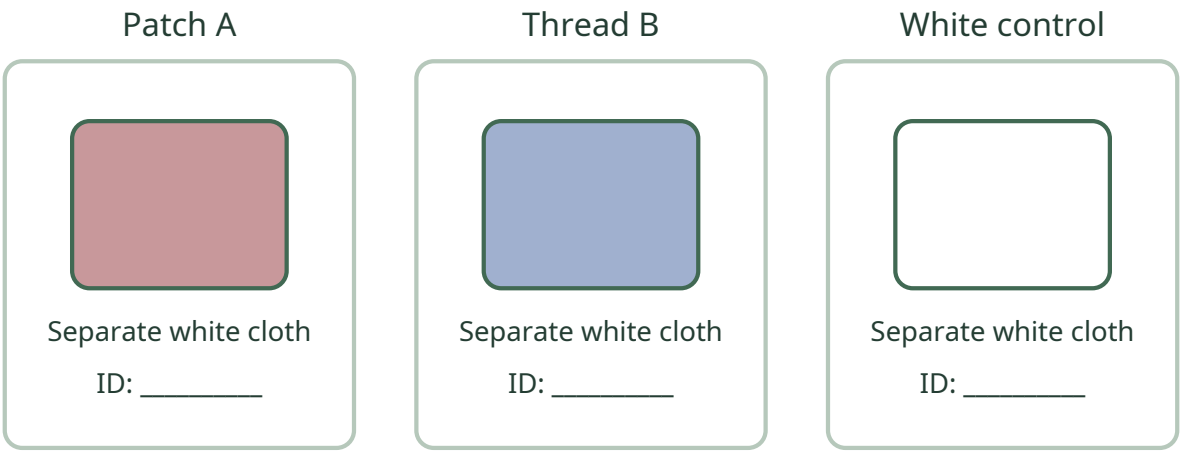
Prevent Color Bleed When Adding a Patch

Use expendable swatches to identify obvious dye transfer risks before patching an everyday textile.



Keep untouched dry references separately.

Never use the actual garment as a test specimen.

What is inside

14 numbered practical steps, two original diagrams and two printable observation records.

Scope boundary

Do not make a colourfastness guarantee or perform an experimental wash on the original garment. Treat every swatch result as condition-specific.

Before you start

Suitable items and exclusions

For ordinary washable adult garments and non-technical household fabrics with a small suitable patch location, where the care of the original, candidate patch and thread is known. Only test expendable candidate material or genuinely spare matching scraps; never wet-test a valuable, dry-clean-only, delicate, antique, unstable or unknown-care garment. A negative swatch observation does not guarantee colourfastness.

Materials and tools

Expendable pieces of candidate patch fabric and thread, separate clean undyed white cotton swatches of known care, a white tray, clean water, the intended compatible detergent if permitted, labelled containers, ruler, pencil, paper and a suitable drying surface. No bleach, solvents or stain removers.

Plan the repair

Work from the actual item

Choose candidate patch and thread that are compatible with the intended care route. Label separate dry baseline and damp-contact swatches. Observe candidate fabric and thread independently, then consider a small stitched sample of the candidate materials only. Any visible transfer, uncertainty, incompatible care or unstable material is a reason to reject or seek advice; absence of transfer is only an observation under the chosen conditions.

Before committing

Do not make a colourfastness guarantee or perform an experimental wash on the original garment. Treat every swatch result as condition-specific.

Steps 01–02

1. Identify a suitable everyday item

Read the original care instructions, identify the patch area and inspect the surrounding cloth. If the item is delicate, historic, dry-clean-only, water-sensitive or has an unknown label, stop and ask a qualified textile professional.

2. Select compatible patch candidates

Choose cloth of similar weight, flexibility, grain and care. A similar colour is not evidence of matching dye behaviour. Keep a second candidate available so that rejecting a risky material does not force an unsuitable repair.

Steps 03–04

3. Check thread separately

Record the fibre, colour and care instructions of each proposed thread. Contrast thread can transfer colour just as patch fabric can. Set aside unidentified thread if you cannot establish suitable care.

4. Create labelled control samples

Cut only expendable scraps. Assign IDs to patch candidates, thread and separate undyed white contact cloths. Retain dry untouched samples and label a white control cloth treated without candidate dye to distinguish changes in the white material itself.

Steps 05–06

5. Record baseline appearance

Lay the dry samples under consistent light and note the colour and any previous marks. Use the same background and optional camera framing later. Do not photograph a wet sample as though it were comparable with a dry baseline.

6. Choose permitted conditions

Use only water, temperature and detergent conditions allowed for the candidate material and compatible with the intended garment care. If the shared care conditions cannot be established, do not improvise a wet contact observation.

Steps 07–08

7. Observe patch fabric on a spare swatch

On a clean tray, moisten a separate candidate scrap under the selected permitted conditions, then place it against its labelled white contact cloth. Avoid rubbing or adding pressure to exaggerate a result. Keep each colour separate.

8. Observe thread on a separate swatch

Use a short spare length of candidate thread against its own white contact cloth under the same chosen conditions. Do not stitch into the garment. Keep the thread and fabric sample records separate.

Steps 09–10

9. Check for obvious transfer

Separate the samples without dragging one over the other. Note visible marks on the white cloth, changes in the candidate and the actual contact duration. If colour appears, reject the candidate for this repair; do not attempt to fix the dye with household chemicals.

10. Compare fully dried samples

Dry the expendable pieces as their care allows. Compare them with the original dry references and the separately treated white control under the same light. Record uncertain results as uncertain instead of calling them a pass.

Steps 11–12

11. Consider the combined sample

If the individual observations reveal no obvious transfer and care is compatible, stitch candidate cloth and thread together on spare fabric only. Observe a permitted care cycle if appropriate; a combined sample may behave differently from isolated components.

12. Choose or reject the materials

Reject visibly transferring, unstable or incompatible candidates. Consider an alternative colour or fabric with known care. If no suitable choice is available, defer the repair or consult a repairer; do not patch merely because a sample looks dry and clean.

Steps 13–14

13. Document the conditions

Record the actual materials, care settings, contact duration, lighting and observations, including the control. A result such as no visible transfer on this swatch is not a certification for other detergents, temperatures or repeated washing.

14. Preserve the original care route

After choosing a suitable patch, follow the original item’s repair and care limitations. Inform a professional cleaner about the added materials when appropriate. If transfer is seen during ordinary care, separate the item and seek fabric-specific advice.

Fix, care and reassess

White cloth changes without dye

The control itself may have changed. Treat the observation as inconclusive and reassess materials and conditions.

Only the thread leaves a mark

Reject that thread even if the patch cloth appears unchanged. Choose a compatible alternative.

Transfer appears only when wet

Record that observation and reject the material rather than waiting for the mark to disappear.

The original is not washable

Do not use a home wet observation to justify washing or wetting the original. Ask the maker or cleaner.

Originality and evidence boundary

What the publisher provides

Original Steadleaf English prose, vector artwork, diagrams and records. Follow the actual item, material and tool instructions. No physical repair, washing, strength, load, durability, colourfastness, storage or compatibility trial was performed by the publisher. Ordinary adult non-technical textiles only; no safety or performance certification.

What the guide does not establish

Do not make a colourfastness guarantee or perform an experimental wash on the original garment. Treat every swatch result as condition-specific.

Further reading

Canadian Conservation Institute, Testing for Colourfastness (professional conservation context; confirms limited predictive value of a test, not a home garment protocol): https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes/testing-colourfastness.html

Separate swatch and control map

Keep candidate cloth and candidate thread on distinct labelled contact cloths; include untreated baselines and a treated white-only control.

Patch A	Thread B	White control
		
Separate white cloth	Separate white cloth	Separate white cloth
ID: _____	ID: _____	ID: _____

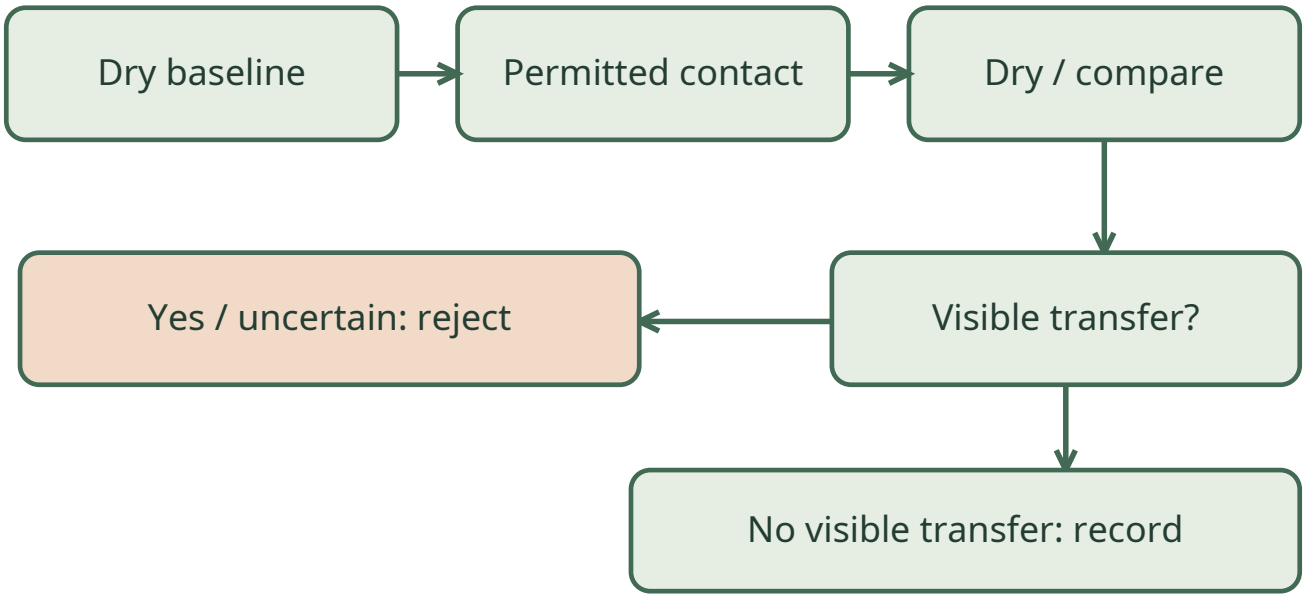
Keep untouched dry references separately.

Never use the actual garment as a test specimen.

Your notes

Compare before and after drying

Compare the same sample IDs under similar light; visible transfer or uncertainty routes to rejection or referral.



No guarantee for other conditions or future washing.

Your notes

Swatch inventory and conditions

Record actual observations only. Mark unknown items UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED.

Original item / care

Patch A / fibre / care

Thread B / fibre / care

White contact cloth / care

Control and dry reference IDs

Water / detergent / temperature

Contact duration / drying method

Light / photo setup / date

Colour-transfer observation log

Record actual observations only. Mark unknown items UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED.

Patch contact cloth: dry observation

Thread contact cloth: dry observation

White-only control: dry observation

Candidate appearance / texture change

Combined scrap observation

Unknowns / limits

Reject / reconsider / refer

Actual material choice / date