

Project: Back to Basics

Refer to these tips and techniques when you need quilting how-to information, from cutting pieces to binding and finishing your quilt.

CHOOSE FABRICS

The best fabric for quilting is 100% cotton because it minimizes seam distortion, presses crisply, and is easy to quilt. Unless otherwise noted, quantities in materials lists are for fabrics with 42" of usable width. We call for a little extra yardage to allow for minor cutting errors and slight shrinkage.

PREPARE FABRICS

There are conflicting opinions about the need to prewash fabric. The debate is a modern one because most antique quilts were made with unwashed fabric. However, today's dyes and sizing are unlike those used a century ago.

Prewashing fabric offers certainty as its main advantage. Today's fabrics resist bleeding and shrinkage, but some of both can occur in some fabrics. Some quilters find prewashed fabric easier to quilt. If you choose to prewash your fabric, press it well before cutting.

Others prefer the crispness of unwashed fabric for machine piecing. If you use fabrics with the same fiber content throughout the quilt, then any shrinkage that occurs in its first washing should be uniform. Some quilters find this small amount of shrinkage desirable, because it gives the quilt a slightly puckered, antique look.

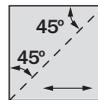
CUT BIAS STRIPS

Strips for curved appliqué pieces and for binding curved edges should be cut on the bias (diagonally across the grain of a woven fabric), which runs at a 45° angle to the selvage and has the most stretch.

To cut bias strips, begin with a fabric square or rectangle; use an acrylic ruler to square up the left edge if necessary.

Make a cut at a 45° angle to the left edge (**Bias Strip Diagram**). Handle the diagonal edges carefully to avoid distorting the bias. To cut a strip, measure the desired width from the 45° cut edge;

cut parallel to the edge. Cut enough strips to total the length needed.



Bias Strip Diagram

MAKE AND USE TEMPLATES

MAKE TEMPLATES

A template is a pattern made from extra-sturdy material so you can trace around it many times without wearing away the edges. Acrylic templates for many common shapes are available at quilt shops. Or make your own by duplicating printed patterns on template plastic.

To make permanent templates, purchase easy-to-cut template plastic, available at quilt shops and crafts supply stores. Lay the plastic over a printed pattern. Trace the pattern onto the plastic using a ruler and a permanent marker to ensure straight lines, accurate corners, and permanency.

For hand piecing and appliqué, make templates the exact size finished pieces will be (without seam allowances). For piecing, this means tracing the patterns' dashed lines.

For machine piecing, make templates that include seam allowances by tracing the patterns' solid and dashed lines onto the template plastic.

For easy reference, mark each template with its letter designation, grain line (if noted on the pattern), and block or quilt name. Also mark the matching point of each corner on the seam line (these may be indicated with dots on the printed pattern). Cut out the traced shapes on their outside lines. Using a pushpin, make a hole in the template at each corner matching point. The hole must be large enough for the point of a pencil or marking pen to mark through.

Verify each template's shape and size by placing it over its printed pattern. Templates must be accurate because errors, however small, compound many times as you assemble a quilt. To check templates' accuracy, make a test block before cutting the fabric pieces for an entire quilt.

USE TEMPLATES

To trace a template on fabric, use a pencil, a white dressmaker's pencil, chalk, or a special fabric marker that makes a thin, accurate line. Do not use a ballpoint or ink pen; the lines may bleed if washed. Test all marking tools on a fabric scrap before using them.

To make pieces for hand piecing, place a template facedown on the wrong side of the fabric and trace. If desired, mark the matching points on the corners of the seam lines. Reposition the template at least 1/2" away from the previous tracing, trace again, and repeat (**Diagram 1**). To make pieces for hand appliqué, place a template faceup on the right side of the fabric and trace. The lines you trace on the fabric are the sewing lines. Mark cutting lines 1/4" away from the sewing lines, or estimate the distance by eye when cutting out the pieces with scissors. For hand piecing, add a 1/4" seam allowance; for hand appliqué, add a 3/16" seam allowance.

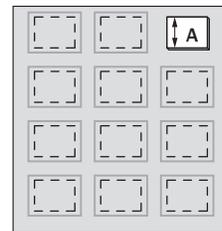


Diagram 1

Because templates used to make pieces for machine piecing have seam allowances included, you can use common tracing lines for efficient cutting. Place a template facedown on the wrong side of the fabric and trace.

Project: Back to Basics

Mark the corner matching points through the holes in the template; they should each be right on the seam line. Reposition the template without leaving a space between it and the previous tracing, trace again, and repeat (**Diagram 2**). Using a rotary cutter and ruler, cut out pieces, cutting precisely on the drawn lines.

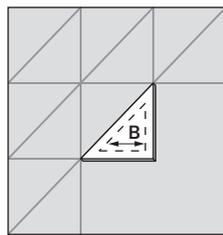


Diagram 2

PLAN FOR CUTTING

Our project instructions list pieces in the order they should be cut to make the best use of your fabrics.

Always consider the fabric grain before cutting. The arrow on a pattern piece indicates which direction the grain should run. One or more straight edges of a pattern piece should follow the fabric's lengthwise or crosswise grain.

The lengthwise grain, parallel to the selvages (the tightly finished edges), has the least amount of stretch. The crosswise grain, perpendicular to the selvages, has a little more give. The edge of any pattern piece that will be on the outside of a block or quilt should be cut on the lengthwise grain. Do not use the selvage of a woven fabric in a quilt. When washed, it may shrink more than the rest of the fabric.

In projects larger than 42" in length or width, we usually specify that the border strips be cut the width (crosswise grain) of the fabric and pieced to use the least amount of fabric. If you'd prefer to cut the border strips on the lengthwise grain and not piece them, you'll need to refigure the yardage.

SET IN SEAMS

The key to sewing angled pieces together (setting in seams) is carefully aligning marked matching points. Here, we use diamonds and a square—a common type of set-in seam—to illustrate the process. Whether you're stitching by machine or hand, start and stop sewing precisely at the matching points (dots on **Diagram 3**); be sure to backstitch to secure seam ends.

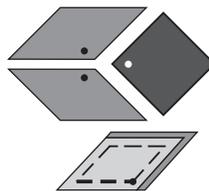


Diagram 3

BY MACHINE

First make an angled unit by sewing two diamonds together between matching points along a pair of edges (**Diagram 3**). Then, with right sides together, pin one edge of the angled unit to one edge of the square (**Diagram 4**). Align matching points at each end, pushing a pin through both fabric layers to check alignment. Machine-stitch precisely between matching points, backstitching at seam ends. Remove unit from sewing machine.

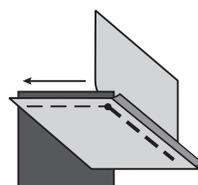


Diagram 4

Bring adjacent edge of angled unit up and align it with the next edge of the square (**Diagram 5**). Insert a pin in each corner to align matching points as before. Machine-stitch between matching points. Press seams away from set-in piece (the square).

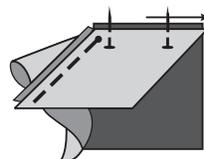


Diagram 5

BY HAND

First make an angled unit by sewing two diamonds together between matching points along a pair of edges (**Diagram 3**).

Then, with right sides together, pin one edge of the angled unit to an edge of the square (**Diagram 6**). Use pins to align matching points.

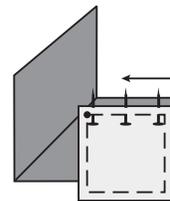


Diagram 6

Hand-sew the seam from the open end of the angled unit to the matching point in the corner. Remove pins as you sew and backstitch at the corner to secure stitches. Do not sew into the $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance and do not cut your thread.

Bring the adjacent edge of the square up and align it with the next edge of the angled unit. Insert a pin in each corner to align matching points as before, then pin remainder of the seam (**Diagram 7**). Hand-sew seam from inside corner to open end of the angle, removing pins as you sew. Press seams away from set-in piece (the square).

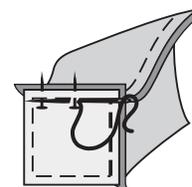


Diagram 7

MITER BORDERS

To add a border with mitered corners, first pin a border strip to one edge of the quilt top, matching centers. Sew together, beginning and ending seam $\frac{1}{4}$ " from quilt top corners (**Diagram 8**). Allow excess border fabric to extend beyond edges of quilt top. Repeat with remaining border strips. Press seams toward border strips.

Project: Back to Basics



Diagram 8

At a corner, lap one border strip over the other (**Diagram 9**). Align the edge of a 90° triangle with the raw edge of the top strip so that the long edge of the triangle intersects the border seam in the corner. With a pencil, draw along edge of triangle from seam out to the raw edge. Place bottom border strip on top and repeat the marking process.

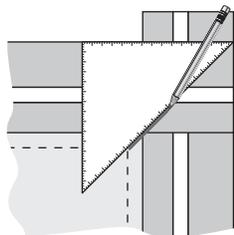


Diagram 9

With right sides together, match marked seam lines and pin (**Diagram 10**). Beginning with a backstitch at the inside corner, sew together strips, stitching exactly on marked lines. Check the right side to make sure corner lies flat. Trim excess fabric, leaving a ¼" seam allowance. Press seam open. Mark and sew remaining corners in same manner.

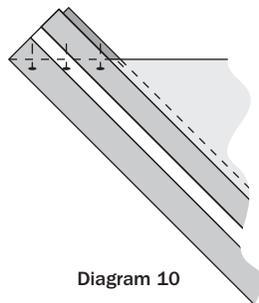


Diagram 10

SELECT BATTING

For a small beginner project, a thin cotton batting is a good choice. It has a tendency to stick to fabric, so it requires less basting. Also, it's easy to stitch. It's wise to follow the stitch density

recommendation printed on the packaging; this indicates the maximum distance between rows of stitching required to keep the batting from shifting and wadding up inside the quilt.

Polyester batting is lightweight and readily available. In general, it springs back to its original height when it is compressed, adding a puffiness to quilts. It tends to "beard" (work out between the weave of the fabric) more than natural fibers. Polyester fleece is denser than polyester batting and works well for pillow tops and place mats.

Wool batting has good loft retention and absorbs moisture, making it ideal for cool, damp climates. Read the label carefully before purchasing a wool batting; it may require special handling.

COMPLETE QUILT

Cut and piece backing fabric to measure at least 4" bigger on all sides than the quilt top. Press seams open. With wrong sides together, layer quilt top and backing fabric with batting in between; baste. Quilt as desired.

Binding for most quilts is cut on the straight grain of the fabric. If your quilt has curved edges, cut binding strips on the bias. Cutting instructions for the projects in this issue specify the number of binding strips or a total length needed to finish the quilt. Instructions also specify enough width for a French-fold, or double-layer, binding because it's easier to apply and adds durability.

Join strips with diagonal seams to make one continuous binding strip (**Diagram 11**). Trim excess fabric, leaving ¼" seam allowances. Press seams open. Fold one end of the binding strip under 1" (**Diagram 12**); press. With wrong side inside, fold strip in half lengthwise and press (**Diagram 13**).

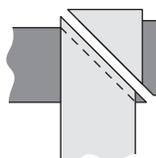


Diagram 11



Diagram 12



Diagram 13

Beginning in center of one edge, place binding strip against right side of quilt top, aligning binding strip's raw edges with quilt top's raw edge (**Diagram 14**). Sew through all layers, stopping ¼" (or a distance equal to the seam allowance you're using) from the corner. Backstitch, then clip threads. Remove quilt from under the sewing-machine presser foot.

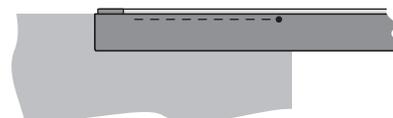


Diagram 14

Fold binding strip upward, creating a diagonal fold, and finger-press (**Diagram 15**).

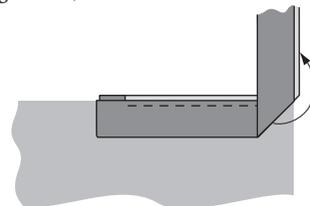


Diagram 15

Holding diagonal fold in place with your finger, bring binding strip down in line with next edge of quilt top, making a horizontal fold that aligns with the quilt edge (**Diagram 16**).

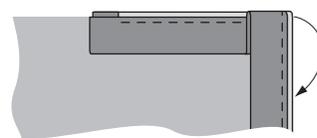


Diagram 16

Start sewing again at top of horizontal fold, stitching through all layers. Sew around quilt, turning each corner in same manner.

Project: Back to Basics

When you return to the starting point, encase binding strip's raw edge inside the folded end (**Diagram 17**). Finish sewing to the starting point (**Diagram 18**). Trim batting and backing fabric even with the quilt top edges.

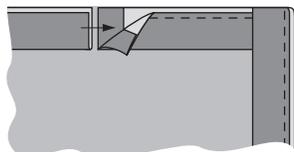


Diagram 17

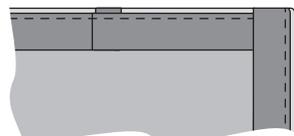


Diagram 18

Turn binding over each edge to the back. Hand-stitch binding to backing fabric, making sure to cover all machine stitching.

To make mitered corners on the back, hand-stitch up to a corner; fold a miter in the binding. Take a stitch or two in the fold to secure it. Then stitch the binding in place up to the next corner. Finish each corner in same manner.