

## Project: Back to Basics

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

### Tools

Before you begin any quilting project, collect the tools and materials you'll need in one easy-to-access place. Below is a list of general supplies.

### For Cutting

**Acrylic ruler:** This thick, clear-plastic ruler helps you make perfectly straight cuts with a rotary cutter. Many sizes are available.

**Marking tools:** Use special fabric markers, as the marks they make are easy to remove after sewing and quilting.

**Rotary cutter and mat:** These tools have revolutionized quilting because you can cut strips, squares, triangles, and diamonds more quickly, efficiently, and accurately with a rotary cutter and mat than with scissors. Always use a rotary cutter with a mat designed specifically for it to protect your work surface and to keep fabric from shifting while you cut.

**Scissors:** You'll need two pairs—one for fabric and another for paper and plastic.

**Template plastic:** This slightly frosted plastic comes in sheets about  $\frac{1}{16}$ " thick.

### For Piecing

**Iron and ironing board:** Use an iron and ironing board to press seams, which ensures accurate piecing.

**Sewing machine:** A machine with well-adjusted tension will produce pucker-free patchwork.

**Thread:** There are conflicting opinions about the best thread content. The traditional choice for

piecing cotton quilts is 100% cotton thread. However, with today's thread technology, another option is fine-weight polyester. Quilters must decide for themselves which kind to use.

### For Appliqué

**Fusible web:** Use this iron-on adhesive to secure appliqué shapes to a foundation instead of basting with needle and thread.

**Needles:** For hand appliqué, try a fine sharps or milliner's needle.

### For Hand Quilting

**Frame or hoop:** You'll get smaller, more even stitches if you keep your quilt stretched as you stitch. A frame supports the quilt's weight, ensures even tension, and frees both your hands for stitching. Once set up, however, it cannot be disassembled until quilting is complete. Hoops are more portable and less expensive. Quilting hoops are deeper than embroidery hoops to accommodate the thickness of quilt layers.

**Needles:** A "between" or quilting needle is short with a small eye. Common sizes are 8, 9, and 10; size 8 is best for beginners.

**Thimble:** This finger cover relieves the pressure required to push a needle through several layers of fabric and batting.

**Thread:** Quilting thread, including the preferred 100% cotton variety, is stronger than sewing thread.

### For Machine Quilting

**Darning, free-motion quilting, or hopper foot:** This sewing machine attachment is used for free-motion quilting. You may find one in your machine's accessory kit. If not, know the model and brand name of your machine when you go to purchase one.

**Safety pins:** Use these pins to hold together a quilt's layers during quilting.

**Table or other large work surface that's level with your machine bed:** Your quilt will need the support.

**Thread:** Look for quilting thread made of either 100% cotton or a cotton-polyester blend. For quilting that blends into the background, use fine nylon or polyester monofilament thread.

**Walking or even-feed foot:** This sewing machine attachment helps keep long, straight quilting lines smooth and pucker-free.

### Choose Fabrics

The best fabric for quiltmaking 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

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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.

### 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 ½" 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 ¼" away from the sewing lines, or estimate the distance by eye when cutting out the pieces with scissors. For hand piecing, add a ¼" seam allowance; for hand appliqué, add a ⅜" seam allowance.

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. 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.

### 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.

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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.

### 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 3**). Trim excess fabric, leaving  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowances. Press seams open. Fold one end of the binding strip under 1" (**Diagram 4**); press. With wrong side inside, fold strip in half lengthwise and press (**Diagram 5**).

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 6**). Sew through all layers, stopping  $\frac{1}{4}$ " (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.

Fold binding strip upward, creating a diagonal fold, and finger-press (**Diagram 7**).

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 8**).

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

When you return to the starting point, encase binding strip's raw edge inside the folded end (**Diagram 9**). Finish sewing to the starting point (**Diagram 10**). Trim batting and backing fabric even with the quilt top edges.

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.

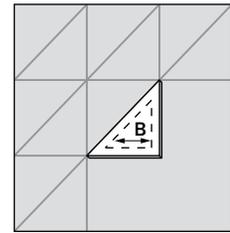


Diagram 2

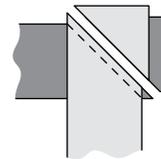


Diagram 3



Diagram 4



Diagram 5



Diagram 6

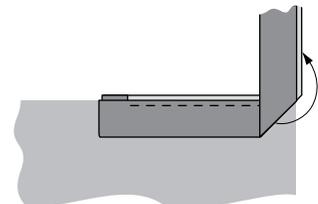


Diagram 7

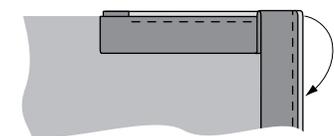


Diagram 8

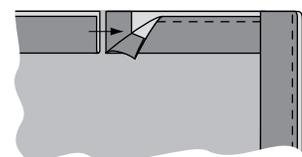


Diagram 9

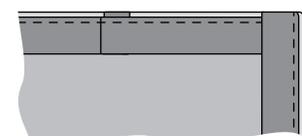
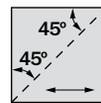


Diagram 10



Bias Strip Diagram

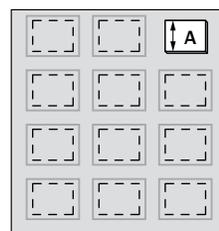


Diagram 1