

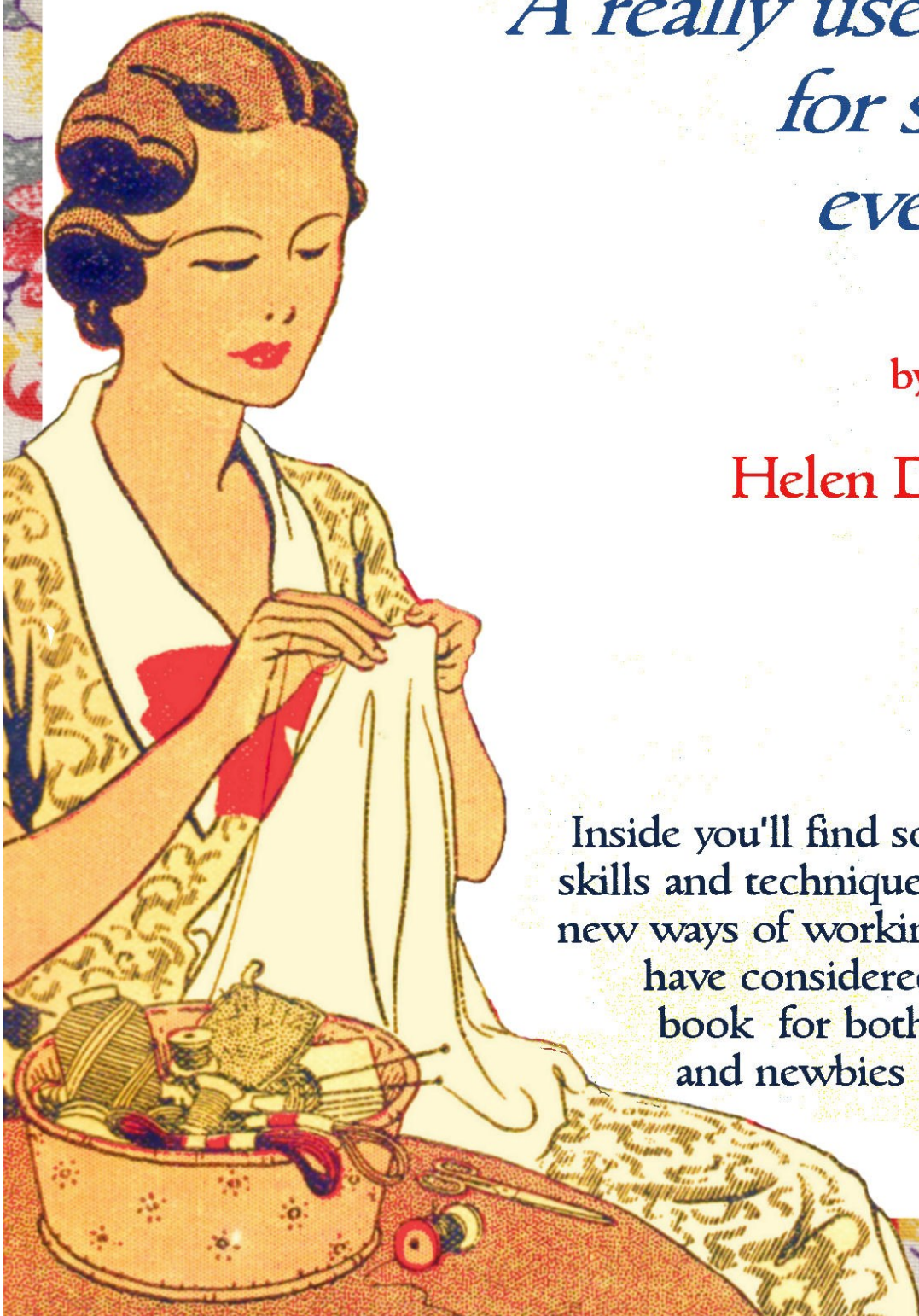
The Stitcher's Companion

*A really useful book
for stitchers
everywhere*

by

Helen Dickson

Inside you'll find some essential stitching skills and techniques, secrets revealed and new ways of working you may never even have considered before. A great little book for both experienced stitchers and newbies that will entertain and inform the reader.



The Stitcher's Companion

A really useful book for stitchers everywhere

Helen Dickson



Bustle & Sew



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www.bustleandsew.com

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FOREWORD

I'm Helen and I live in an old farmhouse near the sea in the beautiful South Hams area of Devon with my Newfoundland dog, Ben

I'm just an ordinary stitcher, with a passion for my craft - I don't have any formal textile training, but come from a long line of very skilled needlewomen, learning from my mother and grandmother from a very young age. I love to create with fabric and thread – embroidery and applique are my favourite techniques. Even more than stitching projects for myself however, I love to share with others, both experienced stitchers and newbies, and hope that, through my patterns, I can introduce new people to the pleasure and satisfaction that can be gained from making something beautiful for themselves.

I love to create designs for patterns that are lively, interesting and fresh, that inspire others to pick up fabric and thread to produce their own piece of work, with all the sense of achievement and satisfaction that brings. I started my Bustle & Sew Blog in 2009 as a way to share my love of stitching with other like-minded folk across the globe. Over the last two-and-a-half-years I've found it so much fun, and so rewarding to exchange ideas with others, to explore and be inspired by their ideas and expertise.

It's wonderful that the growth of the internet and the increasing popularity of blogging has opened up a whole

new world of connecting and exchanging ideas on a truly worldwide scale. There are many stitchers across the globe, and blogging allows us to meet up, united by our common interest in floss, fabric and thread and the seemingly infinite variety of designs we can create using just a few simple tools.

Inspired by the generosity and friendliness of the online stitching community, I was able, through my blog, Bustle & Sew, to ask my readers if they would be kind enough to share some of their favourite hints and tips with other stitchers. I was amazed by their willingness to share, as contributions came in from all over the world.

You'll find a whole chapter devoted to these tips – which cover everything from threading your needle and the best way to organise your floss, to stitching hair onto soft toys.

And these tips, so kindly shared with me, were the inspiration for this little book. I've also included some of my own knowledge and experiences that I hope you'll find useful and entertaining.

Happy stitching!!

Helen xx

PS do come and say "hello" online – I'd love to meet you there ...



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Introduction

**“THE ONLY PLACE HOUSEWORK COMES BEFORE
NEEDLEWORK IS IN THE DICTIONARY”**

Mary Kurtz



If you are reading this then you're probably already aware that stitching is fun! No, more than that, it's stress-relieving, calm-inducing, what-to-give-as-a-gift-problem-solving creativity! In short, it's totally life

enhancing for the stitcher as well as for the totally lucky recipient of our stichy endeavours.

Now, how to stitch is, at first sight, a very simple skill to master and so many people (non-stitchers of course) simply don't understand how easy it is to become obsessive about floss, thread and fabric. They don't know how complicated and totally absorbing the simple act of pushing a pointy stick attached to some string through a piece of fabric can become. Who has time for cleaning, laundry and weeding the borders when there is the elusive bullion stitch to master, that tapestry or cross-stitch chart to complete and perhaps a top to quilt?

Non-stitchers don't understand that although pushing a pointy stick through fabric might at first sight seem very simple and boringly repetitive, actually there is much more to it than that. Consider the world of creative possibilities that is revealed once you open your eyes to the possibilities ... there's applique, quilting, tapestry and dressmaking... Not to mention Hardanger, blackwork, stumpwork and cross stitch. The world of stitching will take more than a lifetime to explore.

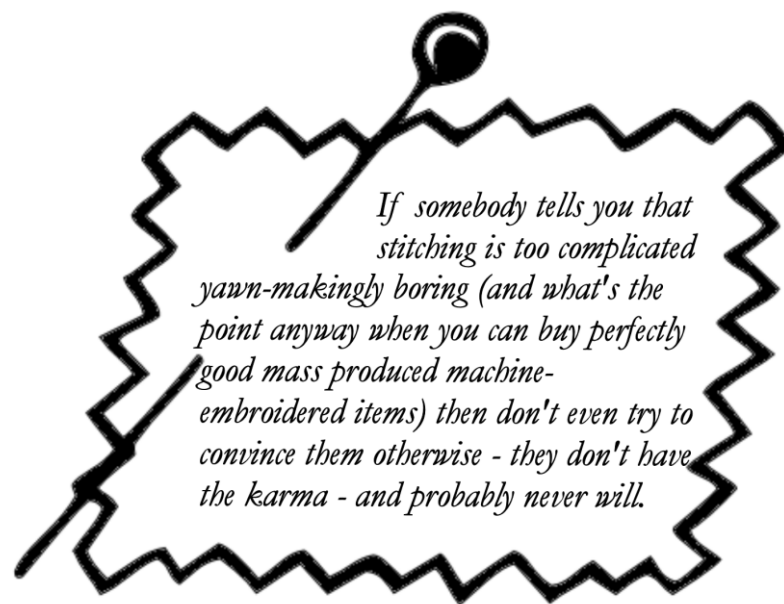
I suppose that if you consider stitching in its simplest terms, it might seem rather strange that a perfectly sane adult human being is happy to spend hours and hours playing with bits of string and pieces of fabric without ever becoming bored with it.

But that's because the finer points of stitching are only apparent to the initiated. Those unlucky enough to be non-stitchers have never experienced the thrill of completing a piece of work to your own, and your peer

group's (especially if you're in an embroidery club or society) total satisfaction

But remember, as you try to debate the merits of DMC versus Anchor, Perle and stranded, hoop or frame – or neither – non-stitchers just don't understand that there's always another fascinating tip or technique to discover. They weren't interested to start with and their eyes are definitely glazing over now.

The initiated, on the other hand, understand that it all begins with pushing your needle through the fabric and

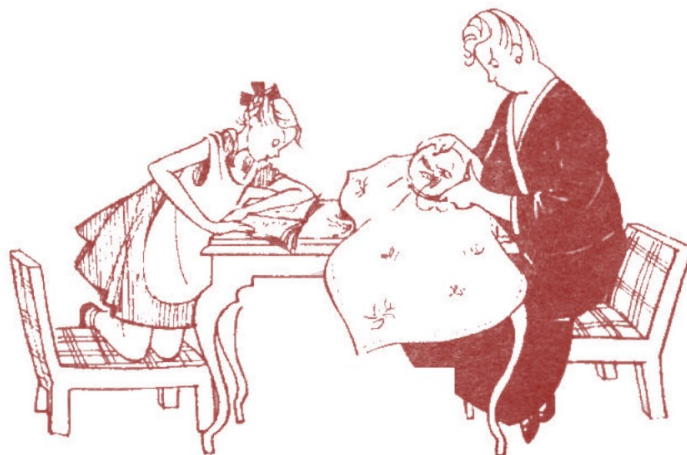


back again – and to do that neatly, evenly and attractively really isn't that easy. We know that there's the detail of getting the stitches all exactly the same size, lying flat on the fabric just so, or completing your quilt top without the dreaded "wavy-edge effect." We gasp in awe at the wonders of stumpwork, the beauties of perfectly pieced patchwork and the historical significance of crewel embroidery.

The floss ... ahhh the floss – perle, stranded, pure silk, cotton, DMC, Anchor, hand dyed, tapestry wool in the richest of colours and the pale invisible thread for the back of your quilt. And should we stitch on canvas, paper, linen or cotton – on patterned or plain fabric, choose Liberty

prints or Japanese Zakka for our quilts – embroider our blocks or enhance them with applique? The ingredients of our stichy obsession are poetry in themselves ... no matter who you are, there will be something to appeal to your personal tastes.

And of course, there are the end results – how will you use your work? Beautiful hand stitched quilts become family heirlooms, whilst a lovingly-crafted soft toy is a wonderful personal gift for a favourite child. Applying some stichy decoration makes mundane items interesting – sheets, pillowcases, tea towels, napkins and tablecloths have all been enhanced by embroidery over centuries past. Women have learned stitching skills from their mothers, aunts and grandmothers down through the generations and we are the lucky inheritors of this amazing mass of knowledge.



passed down through the generations...

Of course the art of sewing has been around for a very long time – that is, the art of using a needle and thread to attach various kinds of materials to each other – and has been dated to at least 20,000 years ago! And certainly embroidery is one of the oldest of all the crafts.

I can imagine Mrs Caveman saying to Mr Caveman “Wouldn’t Baby’s mammoth fur quilt look so much nicer if I stitched him a little woolly rhino in the corner?”

Sewing is a universal discovery and its actual beginnings are hidden in the mists of time. It was used for thousands of years before we discovered how to weave cloth – thongs would have been used to stitch together hides, furs and bark for clothes and other uses.

Early sewing needles were crafted from bone, wood or natural needles taken from plants, and thimbles arrived very early on as they would have been needed to help early needlewomen push needles through thick hides and furs.

Thimbles made from bone, wood and leather have been discovered, and later they were made from glass, porcelain and metal. Did you know that before the 18th century the dimples in a thimble had to be pushed into it by hand?

The first thread was made from plant fibres and animal sinew, which was used to sew together hides and furs for clothing, blankets and shelter. A later discovery was that plant fibres and animal fibres could be spun to make thread – think wool, linen, cotton, flax and silk – all fibres we still use today.

Most of the history of sewing is of work stitched by hand – from the simplest stitches to wonderful decorative work – until the first functioning sewing machine appeared – patented by Barthelemy Thimonnier in France in 1830. But the sewing machine as we know (and love) it today



The ascent of the stitcher ...

didn't appear until the 1850s when Isaac Singer built the first truly successful sewing machine.

It's great to know that stitching is validated by history. There's a certain something about creating a beautiful piece of work using the same tools that people used centuries ago. I love the idea of this connectivity with the generations who came before me.

I'd like to thank once again the readers of my [Bustle & Sew Blog](#) who so generously contributed the hints and tips in Chapter Four.

If you want to learn more about these lovely people you'll find links to their websites or blogs at the end of each of their tips.



Facts and Figures ...
and Fabric!

ONLY A FOOL SAYS “IT’S JUST FABRIC”
Unknown



Stitching isn't simply about achieving a great end result. As I'm sure all our loved ones would agree, a true stitchaholic often has multiple obsessions with not only fabric and floss, but also the tools we use. There are needles, hoops, frames ... thimbles, rotary cutters and a seemingly infinite number of scissors in various sizes ... seam rippers, wadding and fabric Well ... just don't mention my stash!

Well actually, yes, let's talk about my stash for a little while. I love to talk about it whenever I get the chance and these days I don't get so many chances. The family seem to find extremely urgent tasks to accomplish or appointments to meet whenever I try to tell them about my latest wonderful purchase and how exactly it fitted into the grander plan for my hoard.

In younger days I used to feel a little embarrassed about the sheer quantity of fabric I possessed. I tried to disguise the full extent of my addiction by storing it in bags, cupboards and boxes – just about anywhere I could find to hide it away. This had two difficulties though – firstly I could never find the fabric I wanted to use for any particular project, and secondly – every time a family member opened a cupboard door they ran the risk of serious injury caused by large amounts of fabric falling upon their defenseless bodies. I have cotton, linen and wool – vintage and new, felted blanket, felted cashmere and felted “that-was-my-favourite-jumper-how-did-it-get-in-the-hot-wash!?” I have Liberty prints, Japanese Zakka, quilting weight, upholstery weight, cotton duck, mangle cloths and old jeans (for that faded denim moment).

Now most of the world – ie the non-stitchers – won't understand why you have just so much fabric stored in your home. Indeed they may well comment if for some reason they realise the full extent of your collection. You could try responding as follows:

- Wow, I'm so glad you've noticed – building this stash took forever, but I think I'm finally beginning to glimpse the result I've been aiming for
- Yees, it is a lot, but I can't stop until I have some of the extremely rare Heeney Weeney Atomic Print – that's the original 1954, not the repro version.
- I need to keep this much spare in case a virus hits cotton production and I can't get any more before the year 2032.

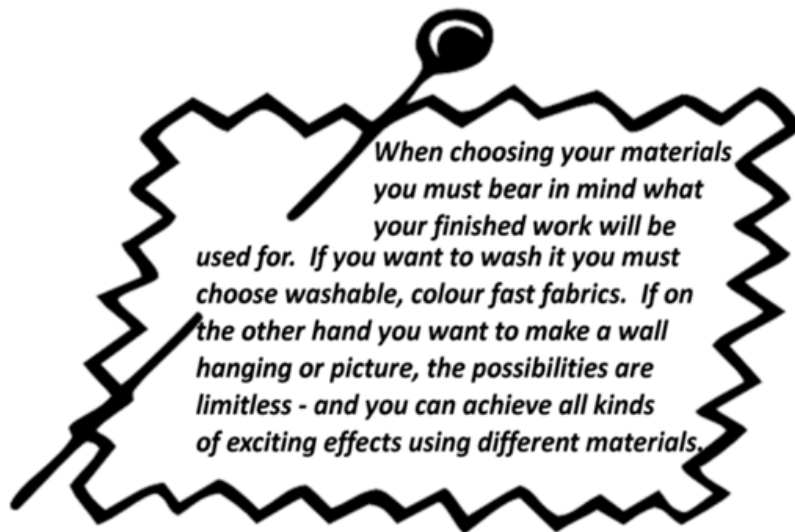
Of course not all the fabrics in your stash are going to be delightfully coloured, wonderfully patterned and generally aesthetically pleasing. There will be the odd unfortunate purchase that took place when you had an overwhelming need to add to your stash, but couldn't find anything half-way decent to spend your hard earned pennies on. So you had to make do. If questioned about these items, I offer you the following explanations

- Well, I thought it would make nice dungarees for a boy (not mine) but the family emigrated before I had time to make them.
- It didn't look so bad under the shop's fluorescent lights.
- I had to support the local fabric shop – and this was all I could grab in a hurry
- It was reduced (this happens a lot!)
- Lilac and lime is the new uber-cool colour combination in quilting so I had to snap this up before anyone else.

But remember ... there's nothing intrinsically wrong with buying fabric. Never feel you have to apologise for the size of your stash. Lots of stitchers feel guilty about the quantity of fabric they own and apologise for it all the

time. But think on Stamp collectors – thousands of those little itchy bitsy scraps of paper – to what purpose? Model railway enthusiasts will acquire miles and miles of track – which can never be up-cycled into something both useful and beautiful ... etc etc. Providing that your compulsion to purchase fabric does not exceed your available funds to pay for it, then you don't really have a problem. If you find yourself selling the family heirlooms to get it, then it might possibly be time to seek help.

Of course you don't have to limit yourself to fabric – if your chosen vice is embroidery you'll find you can stitch on almost anything. I've seen some lovely creations stitched onto old maps, pages from vintage books and even patterns formed by threading twine through holes in stones. If you can push fibre through it then you can embroider it!



Mostly though, we tend to embroider onto fabric as arguably that is the most useful and easiest to handle base for our creations. The choice is vast and somewhat bewildering, particularly if you're a newbie to the stitching world.

Let's Get Serious: Fabric Types



Fabrics are generally either woven or knitted. The way in which the fabric is made, together with the yarn and finish, determines the quality of the fabric.

Knitted fabrics are made up of a series of interlocking loops which create a flexible fabric. They are not generally used for hand embroidery – though you can use a fabric stabiliser if you really do want to stitch onto knitted fabric. This is usual for machine embroidery on knitted garments. Depending on their fibre content (if there's no label and you're not sure how to tell, then read on ..) they can be felted to produce a firm non-stretchy fabric, ideal for applique or crewel work.

Woven fabrics are made by crossing vertical and horizontal threads over and under each other. The vertical threads, parallel to the selvedge are called the warp, and the horizontal threads, at right-angles to the selvedge are the weft.

Woven fabrics generally have little stretch, so are easier to work with than knitted fabrics and are usually the stitcher's fabric of choice. Slippery fabrics like satin, or napped fabrics such as velvet can be tricky to handle.

There are three basic weaves, plain, twill and satin and most other weaves are a variation of these.

Plain weave is clearly visible as criss-cross threads in loose or rough weaves like muslin and linen. This is the simplest weave and is most usually found in printed fabrics.





Satin weave has lengthways warp threads exposed on the surface which gives the characteristic shine. These fabrics are delicate as it's easy to snag or pull the exposed warp threads.

Twill weaves like denim typically have a fine diagonal rib across the fabric which makes them more hardwearing than plain weaves.



Pile weave has an extra warp thread added to either plain or twill weave. The extra thread is formed into loops on the surface of the fabric. These loops are trimmed to make velvet, or can be left as loops for towelling.

As well as purchasing new fabric, it's fun to visit thrift and charity shops, as there are often great finds to be had, and as well as recycling old fabric, by taking this route you can be sure that your creations will be unique to you.

Be sure to wash, or have dry-cleaned, your thrifted fabric before using to eliminate any musty odours and also to shift any nasties, such as clothes-moths that may be lurking in its folds.

It's important that you are able to identify the fibres used if you do go down this route as it may not be immediately obvious. You'll particularly need this information if there's any chance that your finished project will need to be washed at some time.

Understanding your Fibres

Every fabric is comprised of either man-made or natural fibres – or a blend of the two. It is these fibres that give your fabric its individual characteristics that determine the best way to use it and the right way to care for it.

Natural Fibres

There are four most commonly used natural fibres:

Cotton is processed from the seeds pods of the cotton plant. It's used to create many different kinds of fabric, varying in weight from the sheerest voiles to heavy damasks.

Wool is from the fleece of sheep (although the coats of other animals, such as alpaca are also used, only sheep produce wool) and retains many of its natural warm and waterproof qualities.

Linen is one of the oldest fibres known to man. It comes from the stem of the flax plant. The fibres are of varying widths, producing slubby fabrics with varying textures.

Silk is fibre unwound from the cocoons of the silkworm.

Advantages of natural fibres

- They take dyes well
- They are porous and absorbent, responding well to changes in temperature and humidity, making them comfortable to wear.
- Their natural irregularities add to their beauty and charm.

Disadvantages of natural fibres

- They have limited elasticity so are prone to creasing easily.
- They are inclined to shrink unless carefully washed or specially treated

- They are prone to attack from insects, mildew or sunlight.

Man-made Fibres

Artificial or man-made fibres are usually strong, fine and pliable, and are used to create fabrics such as polyester, acrylic and nylon. (These are manufactured from oil by-products).

Advantages of man-made fibres

- They are elastic and crease resistant
- They are easy to care for, dry quickly and don't need much ironing.
- Resistant to attack from moths, insects or sunlight.

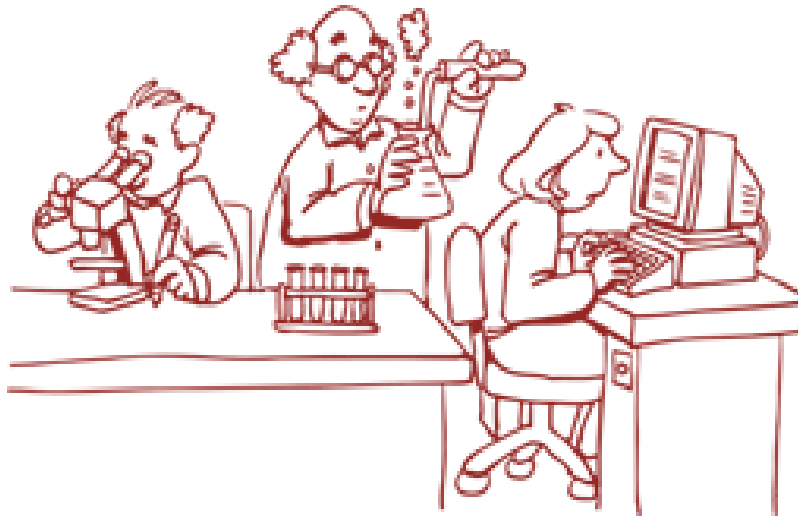
Disadvantages of man-made fibres

- They are not porous, so they are non-absorbent and uncomfortable to wear in hot or humid weather.
- They are not so nice to work with as natural fibres
- They can cause a build-up of static electricity and cling to the wearer.

Natural and artificial fibres are often spun together to improve the appearance, care and cost of the fabric. Polyester-cotton is a very common mix which combines some of the elastic, easy-care properties of polyester with the comfort and look of cotton. Blending cotton and linen makes a softer, lighter fabric than pure linen.

New fabric is always clearly labelled with its constituent fibres, but if you're purchasing from a thrift shop, then you'll want to know what your bargain buy is made from:

Identifying your Fibres



.....where exactly did grandma purchase this fabric?

The Flame Test

If you've purchased vintage fabric – whether in the form of clothing, or as a bolt of cloth – that doesn't have a label identifying the fibres it contains, then the easiest way to find out is through a simple flame test.

Cut a small piece about an inch (2.5cm) square from your fabric and hold it with tweezers (not plastic ones!). Ignite the fabric over a non-flammable surface in a well-ventilated room, or outside if your smoke alarm is quite sensitive. The way that your fabric reacts when you set fire to it will help you to identify its fibre content.

Wool and Cashmere will smolder rather than burn brightly. You will experience a strong smell of burning hair or feathers and the flame will go out by itself. The ash is blackish and turns to powder when crushed.

Silk is another natural fibre so also burns slowly with a pungent smell of hair or feathers. Again, the flame will go out by itself. The ash is greyish and turns to powder when crushed.

Linen and Cotton both smell of burning paper and produce a grey ash filament. They burn slowly and linen takes longer than cotton to ignite.

Rayon burns in a similar way to linen and cotton, but will continue to burn after the flame is removed. Unlike cotton it does not have an afterglow.

Polyester has a sweetish smell when burning. It produces black smoke and rolls up into a hard, shiny black ball.

Acrylic gives off a pungent, acrid smell. It continues to burn even after the source of the flame has been removed and it melts to a hard black lump.

Additional test: If you unravel a clump of threads from a small piece of linen or cotton fabric and slowly move a flame towards them you will see that they ignite as the flames draw near. Synthetic fibres will curl back from the heat and tend to melt rather than ignite and burn.

The Bleach Test

If you still aren't certain after the flame test, then you can always try the bleach test....

Put a small piece of your fabric into a dish of standard chlorine bleach and leave it 7-8 hours, or even overnight. Cotton and acrylic will stay put (though the colours may bleach to white, yellow or sometimes even purple ... no idea why?), but wool, silk, cashmere and other animal proteins will dissolve entirely in the bleach.

The bleach test's effect on fibres of animal origin is important to remember next time you're trying to get a nasty stain out of a really nice cushion that took you months to stitch!

Of course, all you are achieving here is a "best guess" at the fibre content of your fabric. Sometimes this will simply have to do as there isn't any test that I'm aware of (unless

you happen to possess a BSc and a powerful microscope) that will enable you to distinguish between different fibres with 100% accuracy.

Purchasing New Fabric

Fabrics are sold by the metre or yard, usually in standard widths of 90 cm (36") or 115 cm (45"). In stores, you'll find most fabric on rolls or wrapped on bolts. Look at the end of the bolt of fabric to find out such facts as fabric width, fibre content, fabric care and cost per metre or yard. You may also notice smaller pieces of fabric in "remnant" bins.

A remnant is the leftover fabric from bolt or roll ends that is generally sold at a lower price than regular fabric. If you purchase fabric for a project that will need washing, you should preshrink the fabric before cutting out. Just wash the fabric as you would the finished piece of work, following the care instructions.



Considerations before Purchase

1. Will your fabric withstand multiple washings and dryings? Also, how is the fabric woven? Generally, a firm, closely woven fabric will give longer wear; hold its shape and pleats better than a fabric of looser construction, though here you may need to strike a balance between close weave and suitability for embroidering. Look at the label to determine fibre content.
2. What finishes have been applied? Special finishes are applied to many fabrics to change appearance and improve service qualities. Beware of sizing. Sizing just gives a temporary finish and will be completely removed in the first few washing. To determine if a fabric has been sized, rub it. If white flakes come tumbling down like snow, chances are the fabric has been sized.
3. Will it shrink? The label may indicate the amount of possible shrinkage. "Preshrunk" fabrics will still shrink a little in the first wash, but not nearly as much as shrink-prone fabric that has not been preshrunk.

The Bleed Test

As well as shrinkage you need to consider colour-fastness of your new fabric. I don't think I can be the only person in the entire universe who has tried to persuade a (male) loved one that pink underwear is actually extremely masculine. (Having accidentally put a new red blouse in with the whites wash!). So it's a good idea to check your fabric for bleeding, particularly if you're going to use it in patchwork or quilting where many months' work could be ruined if the colour of one area decides to migrate across the quilt.

- Submerge a small piece of a fabric in soapy water; a 2" (5 cm) square is fine. Use the same soap and water as normal

2. Soak the fabric in your soapy water for about 30 minutes, then check to see if the water is discolored. If it is, the fabric bleeds and the dyes could potentially damage other fabrics.

3. If the water is clear, there's one further test you can try to make sure the dyes won't transfer onto adjacent fabrics when wet. Remove the patch and, without rinsing, place it on a white paper towel. Wait a bit and check to see if dye has transferred onto the paper. If it did, chances are good that it will transfer dye onto adjacent patches when your quilt is washed.

4. Rinse out the soap and dry your test patch, then perform the test again. If bleeding continues, consider very carefully what you are about to do before you even consider using the fabric in your project.

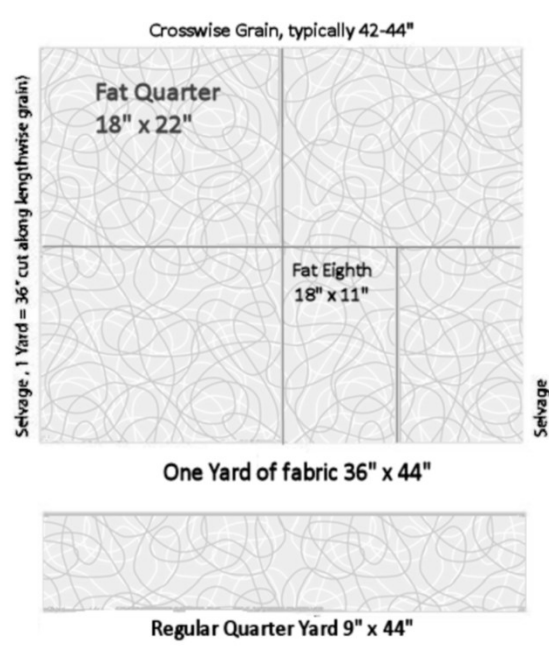
If you absolutely have to use a fabric that bleeds or transfers, purchase a commercial dye fixative, such as to help make the dyes more permanent. Treat a snip of fabric, following the instructions carefully, and then try the bleed test again. Most fabrics produced by companies that cater to quilters do not bleed, but it's a good idea to do a bleed test on all vivid fabrics unless you're certain yours is safe.

As well as buying fabric by the metre or yard, you can also purchase fat eighths or fat quarters of fabric – particularly if it's designed for quilting or patchwork purposes. It's sold this way as it's possible to cut larger shapes from a fat quarter than from a regular quarter yard of fabric, so it's more versatile and there will be less wastage. Quilting shops know how popular fat quarters are so normally offer a wide range of pre-cut and ready to go.



The Anatomy of Fabric

A fat eighth is half of a fat quarter and can be cut as shown or in the other direction, parallel to the fat quarter's longest edge. (See diagram on the next page). You may also hear the term "fabric grain" being used. This simply refers to the way the threads are arranged in a piece of fabric.

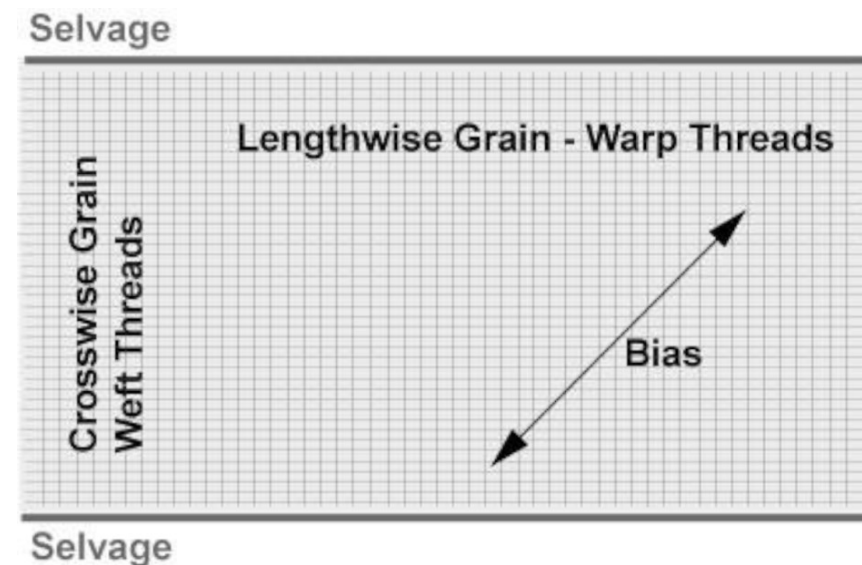


Long threads, called warp threads, are stretched on the loom and secured. They become the fabric's lengthwise grain, the threads that are continuous along the length of your yardage as it comes off the bolt or roll.

More threads, called weft threads, are woven back and forth, perpendicular to the warp threads and along their entire length. These weft threads make up the fabric's crosswise grain.

Straight Grain

The lengthwise grain and crosswise grain are both regarded as straight grain, sometimes called straight-of-



grain.

Selvages are the bound edges that run along the outermost lengthwise grain. They are formed when the weft threads turn to change direction as the weaving process travels down the warp.

Fabrics are very tightly woven for a half-inch or so from the selvages inward, keeping the edges stable while fabric is on the bolt.

You may often hear the term **BIAS CUT**. True bias is defined as the direction at a 45-degree angle to the straight grains, but in quilting any cut that doesn't run along a straight grain is referred to as a bias cut.

Straight grain cuts produce a nice firm piece of fabric that has very little stretch either horizontally or vertically. Bias cuts produce a much more fluid piece of fabric that's very

stretchy – hence its use for bias binding – good to bind around curves. (This cut is also very popular in creating



slinky evening wear as bias cut fabric will cling to the body's curves).

If you're unsure about the fabric's grain lines, then simply look at the reverse. The print will be fainter and you should be able to see which way the threads are woven.

Fabric Stabilisers

If you want to use a stretchy or very lightweight fabric, or if you're planning to heavily machine-embroider a piece of work then fabric stabilisers are invaluable. The choice can seem a little overwhelming and it's best to study the manufacturer's instructions to help you make the right choice for your project.



Threads and Flosses

Or ... it's all very well having created a fabric stash you can be proud of, but if you want to play with it – or even make something with it – then you'll need something to join pieces of fabric together, or to create pretty patterns on its surface. This is where threads and flosses come in handy.

Threads and flosses are available in a rainbow of colours and a wide variety of weights and textures, each suitable for a different task. You can choose from cotton, silk, wool, metallic, hand-dyed, variegated and invisible ... it's can all be a little overwhelming.

If you are a sensible, well-organised stitcher, you will organise your floss (and thread), keep it handy and know which is best for the task in hand. If, on the other hand you are untidy, disorganised and generally muddled (that'll be me), when you have a project in hand, you'll rummage around, make do with what you can find that's not irretrievably tangled and still enjoy yourself.

Part of the stitching adventure is realising that your project may well not turn out how you had originally intended (which can be a wonderful surprise or a bitter disappointment). But understanding the materials you're working with is a great way to increase your chances of getting a good result.

Flosses and Threads for Hand Stitching

Most embroidery patterns will suggest colours to you – identified by the number on the thread band or the label. There isn't room here to describe all the different kinds you can obtain so I've just included the most commonly used.

The two most widely available brands are DMC and Anchor. You can substitute one for the other when

selecting flosses for a project, but be very careful as the substitution will not be exact.

Stranded Cotton

This is a twisted, slightly glossy cotton yarn that has six strands loosely twisted together. It untwists easily so you can use as few or as many strands as you require for your project. This floss is suitable for most types of embroidery and is washable at 95 degrees.

Cotton Perle

This is a twisted thread with a lovely sheen. It cannot be divided and must be used as a single thread. It is available in skeins or balls in up to four weights – 3, 5, 8 and 12. The higher the number the finer the thread.

Metallic Threads

These can be really tricky to work with (at least I find them so!) – and when you are using them always stitch slowly and carefully to avoid damaging the delicate filaments. Use shorter lengths to avoid tangling as well as the breaking and splitting caused by pulling the thread through the fabric many times.

Remember to always stitch with a “stabbing” motion when using metallic thread – up through the underside and down through the top in two separate movements. Pushing the needle into the fabric and out again – all in one movement – as if you were sewing – can damage metallic threads.

Crewel Wool

This fine, single-stranded wool is used for crewel embroidery. Appletons is the most commonly available brand today.

Silk Ribbons

These are available in a variety of widths, usually in silk or silk-organza and are generally used to create floral motifs.

Threads to use with your sewing machine

Cotton Thread

Created by spinning cotton fibres together – pure cotton threads are often considered to be the best choice for piecing quilting weight fabric. By choosing a thread of the same strength as the fabric you can avoid excess wear at the seams – a cotton/polyester mix thread, whilst stronger, can sometimes even cut through cotton fabric over time.

Invisible Thread

A continuous single nylon/plastic filament that's invisible when stitched (and horrible to try to thread through your sewing machine). Used in the bobbin.

Thread can be spun or core – that's where cotton or polyester fibres are wrapped around a single polyester core fibre. This is particularly strong.

I can't hope to cover all the different varieties and weights of threads and flosses here – there's a whole world of fibre waiting to be discovered! It's true to say that I've never met a fibre that I didn't like – for something!! Like tying floppy plants to canes in the garden, for example. So do beware.

Cheap is definitely something to be wary of. You can pick up the odd great bargain here and there, but on the whole cheap threads break and cheap flosses knot and tangle, making your whole project into an exercise in dealing with frustration.

Most of us, given rubbish fibres and/or fabric will create a rubbish project – and that's no sort of return for all our hours of dedicated work.



Needles

The type of needle you'll want to use will depend on the type of work you are doing (this is called a self-evident truth!).

One of the many wonderful things about hand stitching is that it can be done with very little. However, needles are essential for every kind of stitching – without them we'd be left with even more random piles of fabric littering our homes.

The steel needles we use today were first introduced in the 16th century and have become finer as technological advances have been made in their manufacture. There are a range of types, sizes and gauges available to us today – these have all been developed for specific uses.

Sharp, pointy needles are used for techniques that pierce the fabric and blunt-tipped tapestry needles for counted techniques, in order to avoid splitting the threads of the fabric.

Types of hand sewing needles

These come in 10 sizes from No.1 (very heavy) to No.12 (very fine).

Sharps are used for general sewing. They have a sharp point, a round eye and are of medium length. The difference between sharps and other sewing needles can mainly be seen in their length.

Embroidery needles, also known as Crewel needles, are identical to sharps but have a longer eye to make it easier to thread multiple strands of floss and thicker fibres.

Between or Quilting needles are shorter, with a small rounded eye and are for making fine stitches on heavy fabrics such as in tailoring, quilt making and other detailed handwork.



Milliners' needles are longer than sharps. They are useful for basting and pleating, and (as I am sure you have guessed) are used in millinery.

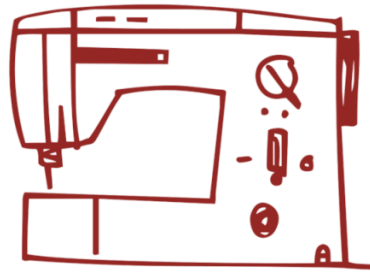
Ballpoints have a rounded point and are used for knitted fabrics (sizes 5-10)

Beading needles are very fine, with a narrow eye to enable them to pass through the often tiny holes in the centres of beads and sequins. They are usually long so that a number of beads can be threaded at one time. (Sizes 10-15).

Tapestry needles have a large eye and a blunt tip. They are used for working on embroidery canvas, even-weave material and other loosely woven fabrics. Sizes from 13 (heaviest) to 28 (finest).

As with floss, it pays to choose the best quality needles you can find. The eyes of cheap needles are often imperfectly drilled; the hole may be rough or incomplete which will fray your floss – or maybe it won't go through at all. If your needle bends (though it shouldn't if it's a good one), discard it immediately as you can't stitch neatly with a crooked needle.

Remember always to use the right needle for your work. – both for floss and fabric. If you choose a needle whose eye is too small it will roughen and fray your floss and be hard to pull through your work. On the other hand, it's nearly as bad to have too large a needle as your stitches will look horrible if the needle makes holes in the fabric larger than your floss can fill.



Types of Machine Needles

When you machine stitch with a particular brand of thread, the thread creates a groove in the eye of your needle that is unique to that brand. If you change thread you must change your needle as well since otherwise the groove won't match the thread and your thread may well snap or fray – leading to extreme tension and stress!

Machine needles are classified into three types of point:

Regular – this is finest point, for piercing the threads of woven fabrics

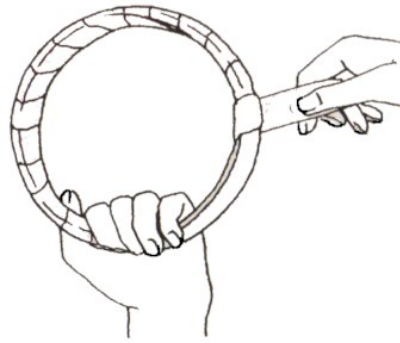
Chisel point – these are for stitching leather

Ball point – used for knitted or stretchy fabrics. This type of needle reduces cut threads by pushing them out of the way rather than piercing them.

Most major brands of needle are colour coded to show the type of point and they come in sizes 9 (thinnest) to 18 (thickest).

For machine embroidery you should use a universal needle in a larger size to minimise wear and tear on the thread. For metallic threads use an extra-large eye to avoid fraying. You can also purchase spring needles to work machine embroidery without a foot – or you can use a darning foot which allows you to see your work as you stitch.

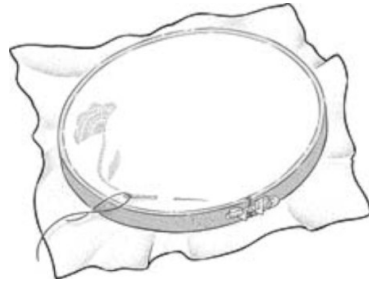
Frames and Hoops



Many stitchers work without a hoop, but a frame or hoop will keep your background fabric stretched and stable so you can keep an even tension as you stitch. You can work without a hoop, but the end result may be uneven stitches and a poor finish, wrinkled fabric and some stitches may even distort your fabric.

Hoops are the easiest to use, consisting simply of two circles placed one inside the other, trapping the material between them. The outer hoop is then tightened by turning a screw at the side. Hoops can be made of wood or plastic in different sizes and some can be attached to a table clamp or stand.

Using your hoop:

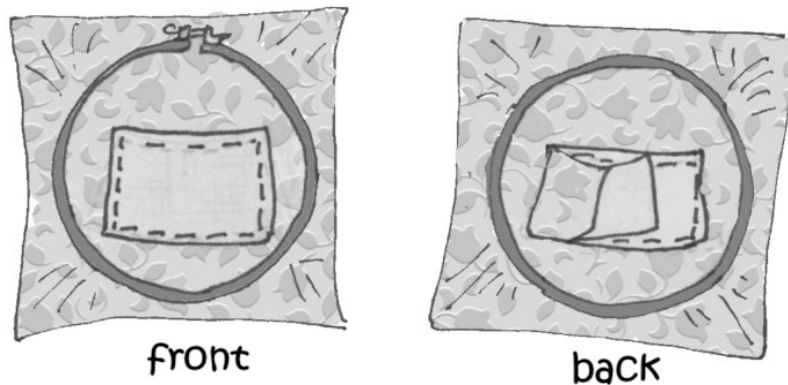


To stop your fabric slipping, bind the inner hoop with fabric strips, cotton tape or bias binding and secure the ends with stitches. If you're working with fabric that is easily marked or damaged, then you may also choose to bind the outer hoop too.

Lay the inner hoop on a clean flat surface and place your fabric, right side up, over it. Using the screw on the outer hoop, adjust it so the outer hoop fits snugly over both the inner hoop and the fabric. Push the outer hoop down, gently pulling the fabric taut. Tighten the screw.

If your piece of fabric is smaller than your hoop size (this often happens if you're embroidering small pieces for

patchwork or quilting), then a secondary fabric – which you'll remove afterwards, can be sewn around it to make it large enough to mount within the hoop. To do this place the piece of fabric you want to embroider onto a larger fabric with grains aligned. Sew the two pieces together around the edge of the small piece, using very small, closely spaced running stitches.



Mount the fabric in the hoop as usual. Then either cut away the backing fabric on the wrong side or work your embroidery through both layers.

Stretcher Frames

Some fabrics shouldn't be stitched in a hoop. These include nets and laces which are easily distorted and any materials with a pile that can easily mark. These can be stitched using an artist's stretcher frame – attaching the fabric with small tacks or drawing pins.

Slate Frames

Are also suitable for embroidery and come in various sizes. The size corresponds to the lengths of cotton webbing attached to the top and bottom edges for the frame. The length of the webbing dictates the width of the fabric you can use.



Scissors

You'll need a large pair of fabric shears for cutting fabric and a small pointed pair of embroidery scissors for cutting floss and thread.

NEVER EVER use these scissors for cutting paper as if you do you will be struck down by a thunderbolt ok maybe not – but what I can guarantee is that if you, or your kids, use your sewing scissors to cut paper, they will quickly become blunt. And blunt is not good. Not good at all.

It's worth investing in quality scissors, as with the proper care they will last a lifetime. Cheap scissors are simply not worth it. They are never sharp at the points and usually become loose at the pin.



As time goes on, you may wish to add a pair of pinking shears to your collection. These cut edges in a zigzag pattern which reduces fraying.

They're also great for making decorative edges on felt for applique. They are expensive though – but again with proper care should last forever.

Other Great Stuff

One of the wonderful things about stitching is that you don't need to purchase lots of expensive kit to get started. And for embroidery everything you need can be easily carried around with you.

In my experience there are two kinds of embroiderers:

The first, let's call her Amy, always has whatever she needs for the project in hand, wherever she happens to be. She could be out and about anywhere, on the train, at her mother-in-law's, even at the beach and no matter what she needs for her stitching, she has it. If you're with Amy then don't worry, if you've forgotten something, this paragon of stitchiness will be able to pull it out of her project bag!

Then there's the second kind. Enthusiastic, untidy and disorganised. In a nutshell – me! I am chronically unprepared and can never find what I need in the bottom of my extremely untidy bag.

So What are all these other mysterious items that you may find yourself needing as your work progresses?



Thimble: invaluable when stitching heavy fabrics, a thimble will prevent the needle from making holes in your finger (ouch!)

Needle Threader: makes it easy to thread even the finest of needles

Pins: use standard dressmaking pins or longer glass-headed pins. Ideally all pins should be stainless steel to avoid any risk of marking your fabric. In an ideal world pins should be stored in sand or sawdust filled pin cushions to prevent rusting and keep them sharp. (ahem!)

Seam ripper: for those inevitable moments when you have to accept that you've done it wrong. A seam ripper makes taking out machine stitching (slightly) less painful – and a lot easier! I have, in my darkest moments, often wondered why reaching the decision to rip out stitching is so hard. After all, I stitch because I love it – so what's not to love about stitching something twice? But somehow life doesn't work that way and accepting that there is really no way to recover some errors is a hard lesson to learn.

Notebook and pencil: to jot down any floss numbers, thread counts or your lottery numbers!

Photocopy of your stitching guide: Copyright law allows you to make a copy of your stitching guide for your own personal use. This is a very good idea as you can scribble on it, scrumple it, use it to mop up any stray coffee spills and when (that is when and not if) you lose it, it is not as traumatic as losing a whole book or the original pattern. Of course Amy would also have her guide laminated or tucked into one of those plastic pockets you can get from stationers – but let's not get too carried away here!

Work bag or box: To keep your work nice and clean and fresh it's important to store it safely. Fold it carefully – always in the same place if possible and put into your work bag. Even an old pillowcase will suffice to protect it from dust, dirt, kids and pets!

One of those plastic storage boxes with little compartments is also great to store all your stitching stuff. It's really important to keep your floss nice and untangled too ... floss isn't cheap and you don't want to waste any because it's in a horrid knotted tangle that you can't (or don't want to be bothered to) untangle.



Transferring your Design

**I'M NOT TELLING YOU IT'S GONNA BE EASY, I'M TELLING
YOU IT'S GONNA BE WORTH IT"**

Unknown



I think that the single most common question I'm aware of from embroiders is "How do I transfer the design to my fabric?"

Let's consider the situation for a moment ... here you are – you have a box full of wonderful rainbow-coloured flosses, the right needles, sharp pointy scissors and a book or containing a wonderful design that you can't wait to transfer to your carefully chosen fabric.

Then You hit a barrier. How do you get the design from the paper to your fabric? The problem seems insurmountable. Well, unless you have a specially printed iron-on transfer then I'm not telling you it's gonna be easy – but it will most definitely be worth it.

There are many different ways of tackling this task and it seems that every stitcher has their own favourite way. What I'll do here is describe some of the most popular methods I've heard of, plus how to make your design larger or smaller if you don't have access to printer or photocopier ...

Changing the size of your design

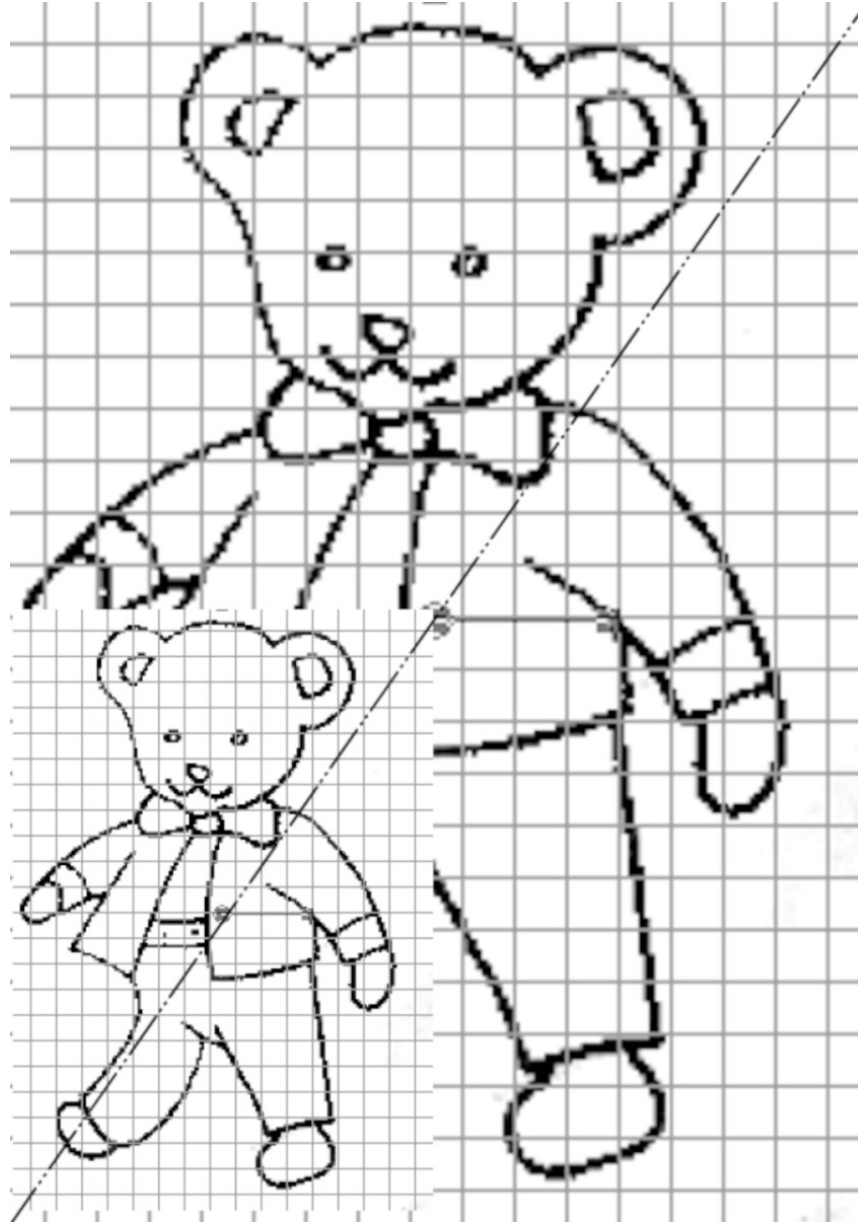
This is easy to do if you have access to a photocopier or to a computer and printer. Many printed designs that need to be enlarged will advise the size of enlargement.

But do remember, if you are increasing or decreasing the size of the design by more than the stated amount, the quantity of floss you require and also its thickness may change and indeed, you may need to use a different stitch to the one suggested. If you don't have access to modern technology you might want to resort to the time honoured

Grid Method:

Draw a small grid with equal squares over a tracing or copy of your design. Then draw an extended diagonal line through the corners of the grid to create an enlarged rectangle or square with the same proportions. Draw another grid with the same number of squares as the first in the enlarged box, then copy the design as accurately as you can from the small to the large grid.

Take a look at the example on the following page –



Scaling your design using the grid method

From Paper to Fabric

Don't be tempted by the availability of iron on transfer paper – the sort you run through your printer and then iron onto your fabric. They seem so easy ... all you need is an ink-jet printer and some special paper and you can transfer just about any design to fabric.

But these are not suitable for transferring embroidery designs. If you have a line drawing on your computer and you print it onto this transfer paper, then transfer it to fabric to embroider, you will end up with the film from the paper on your fabric as well as the lines of the design. This gives an odd, stiff finish to the fabric and which is not a good thing when combined with hand embroidery.

Just saying.

If you want to try it, then go ahead, but don't say I didn't warn you.

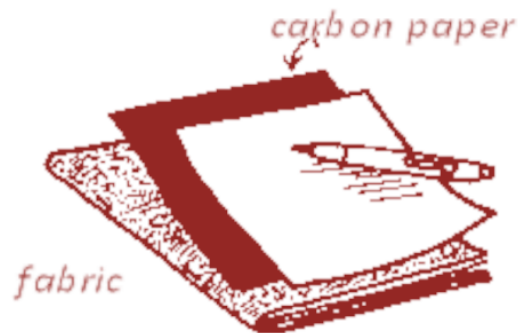
Commercial Iron on transfers:

Just set up your fabric – with the grains aligned horizontally and vertically. The side of the transfer that feels as though the lines of the design are slightly raised or rough is the side that will transfer the design, ie the right side.

Place your transfer on the right side of your fabric with the transfer face downwards. Line it up carefully. Then, using even pressure and the correct heat setting for your fabric, press over the design. Don't move the iron backwards and forwards – you don't want the paper to move around as this will lead to a smudged or blurred design. Don't leave the iron in one place for too long or you may scorch the fabric, but be careful when you move it to avoid moving the paper too.

Be aware though that not all iron on transfers wash out. If this is important to you, then it's best to test wash first –

most commercial transfers do come with a test design for this purpose.



Tracing the design:

This works best if you're stitching onto a fine, plain, light-coloured fabric. You can use either a water-soluble or a permanent marker with a fine tip.

Print, photocopy or trace the design outline and tape it onto a light box or window (bright sunlight is good here). You can even display the design at the size you want on your computer screen and max the brightness.

If you don't have a light box you can make your own using any empty plastic storage box and a light bulb. (but don't leave it unattended when on).

Now tape your fabric over the tracing, making sure the fabric is square (ie the grain is aligned horizontally and vertically). Trace the design onto the fabric with your marker. Use a smooth continuous line for best results.

Note: Air or light-soluble pens are not suitable for large projects as the design will fade and vanish over time, especially in strong light.

Dressmakers' Carbon Transfer Paper:

This comes in small packages containing about five different colours of carbon. It's not really carbon paper as we (used) to know it in the office, it's graphite & wax-free transfer paper that works just like that old-fashioned

carbon paper used to. (If you don't remember using carbon paper in the office, then obviously you're much younger than me! Ask your mom or grandma!).

Place your fabric right side up on a clean, smooth, hard surface (you may wish to tape it down to stop it slipping).

Tape your carbon onto the fabric and your printed design on top of that. Using a sharp pencil, stylus or ballpoint pen and a firm steady stroke, carefully trace over the lines of your design in long continuous lines.

Be very careful not to puncture the paper as this will leave a nasty blob on your fabric. As the transfer paper is available in many colours, it's easy to choose the one that will show best on your fabric.

Transfer Pens & Pencils:

These are easy to use – simply follow the instructions that come with your pencil or pen. You trace the printed pattern with your pen or pencil, then turn the paper face down onto the right side of your fabric (again you might want to tape both paper and fabric to avoid slipping). The ink or pencil marks will be transferred to the fabric through the heat of your iron in the same way as a commercially produced iron-on pattern.

Bear in mind though that the image you will produce using this method will be a mirror of the actual design. This method is not suitable for some synthetic fabrics as you do need to use a hot iron. It is normally also a permanent image, so is not suitable if you don't plan to stitch over all the lines.

Prick and Pounce:

This sounds like some kind of old-fashioned music hall act – in fact it's a very old tried and trusted method of transferring a design to fabric. It does take a little while, but is very effective.

The pounce is a powder which comes in either black (crushed charcoal) or white (powdered cuttlefish – yes really!) – or you can mix the two to make grey.

You can purchase a special pad to apply the pounce, or make your own from a rolled up piece of felt. Then trace your design onto tracing paper and lay it on a folded cloth or ironing board.



With a hat pin, pin in cork, or even another special tool you can purchase just for this purpose, prick a series of small holes closely together all along the design lines.

Then tape your fabric onto a flat board or working surface and tape the pricked tracing paper onto the fabric. Dip your pad into the pounce powder and, using a circular movement, gently rub the pounce over the design.

Complete the whole design before removing the pricked tracing paper in a single nice clean movement. If you brush the pounce from the pricked paper it can be reused indefinitely.

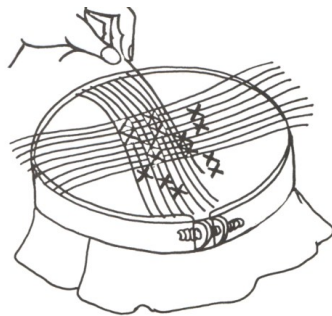
Now, following the pounce outline, paint a fine line all along the dotted outlines on the fabric, using a brush and watercolour paint, or very fine marker. Then un-tape and shake your fabric to remove the pounce.

Tacking through Tissue Paper:

Once again this is a time-honoured, fairly time consuming method of transferring your design. It is great in that it leaves absolutely no marks on your fabric. It's suitable for all kinds of fabric.

Carefully trace your design onto tissue paper. Then position your tracing on top of the fabric and secure in place around the edges. Tack around the outline starting and finishing your line securely. Make sure the stitches are not too small or they will be hard to remove, and not too big so that you miss parts of the design.

Once you've stitched over the whole design, carefully tear away the tissue paper, leaving the tacking on the fabric. (you can also buy water soluble paper to help in this stage). If you're working on a light or delicate fabric, then be very very careful when removing the paper so you don't damage the fabric. The tacking stitch outline can be removed as you progress, or after the embroidery is completed.



Transferring a Cross Stitch Pattern: If you want to work a cross-stitch design on a fabric without a clearly defined weave, eg clothing, quilt, etc, then you can do it as follows:

Baste a piece of single-weave (mono) needlepoint canvas over the area where you want your design to appear. Stretch both layers of fabric in an embroidery hoop and stitch your pattern through both pieces, keeping your stitches even by counting the threads on the canvas.

When you've finished, unravel the threads of the canvas at the edges and pull them away, one at a time. You can purchase specially designed "waste canvas" to make this process easier.

Waste canvas is a prepared, tear-away canvas that is available in many different thread counts. You temporarily attach it to the fabric you want your design to appear on with basting stitches (long stitches with long gaps between them). The basting stitches will hold the waste canvas securely in place.

When stitching treat the waste canvas and your project fabric as one piece – then when you've finished stitching remove the waste canvas by pulling out the threads with tweezers one at a time.

If your fabric is washable, it's sometimes easier to do this if you soak the embroidery in cold water. This softens the sizing in the canvas and loosens the threads enough to allow them to slip out easily. (but do check for colourfastness first!)



Navigating your pattern download

**“WHEN I’M NOT WRITING OR TWEAKING MY COMPUTER
I’M DOING EMBROIDERY.”**

Lynn Abbey

Most downloaded patterns will arrive on your computer in the form of a pdf file. This format (pdf is short for Portable Document Format) has many advantages ...

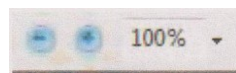
You can click on anything that starts <http://> or www. Is coloured blue and underlined, eg

<http://www.bustleandsew.com>

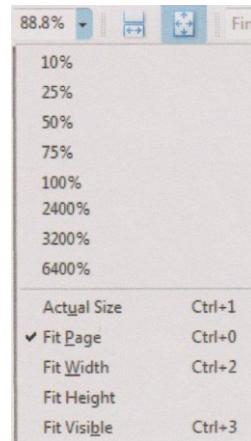
and you will immediately be taken to the correct website as long as you have an open internet connection.

The most commonly used program for reading pdf files is Adobe Reader – and here are some hints for using it:

Changing your page size – you can change the size of your page by clicking on the small blue – and + buttons

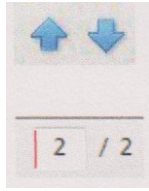


on the zoom icon at the top of the page. You can also pre-set the page size you're viewing and the size of the window you're using to open your pdf file. You can do this by clicking the down arrow next to the percentage number, then select whatever size suits you best.



Scrolling up and down – you move through your pattern by scrolling through it. To do this click the up and down arrows on the scroll bar on the right hand side of the page. To move quickly between pages, hold down the mouse button over the scroll bar and drag up or down. You can also scroll up or down the pages by using the page up or page down arrow keys on your keyboard.

Quickly moving through pages – you can skip to earlier or



later pages in a document by using the up and down arrow keys. You'll see that on the top of the screen the program will tell you what page number you're looking at.

Contents – if you're reading a longer document, such as this one, you will normally find that on the contents page the titles and sub-titles are blue and underlined. That means they're active and if you click on them you will be taken to the right place in the document.

Locating the right place - using the icon on the left of your screen



you can search your pattern or other document for a word or phrase that you remember reading, but can't remember exactly where you saw it. This can be very useful!!

Printing a copy of your pattern is easy. Just click on the



print symbol at the top of the page and choose which pages you want to print from the easy options shown. You can print just one page, several pages, or the whole pattern.

You'll see that a number of symbols will be "greyed out" on your screen. This means you can't click on them to use them. This is normally a security measure preventing you from altering your pattern.



Hoop up and start to stitch!

**"I CANNOT COUNT MY DAY COMPLETE 'TIL NEEDLE,
THREAD AND FABRIC MEET."**

Anon

Now is the most exciting moment of all – you’re ready to begin your project. You’ve chosen your fabric and floss, transferred your design, your fabric is in your hoop and you’re about to thread your needle ...



We’ve already talked a little about selecting the right needle for your work and after a while this will come automatically. But just in case – an easy rule of thumb is that the thickness of your needle should match the thickness of your thread.

If you’re using stranded embroidery floss, then this can be split. The number of strands of floss you use will depend upon the fineness and detail of the stitching in your project.

When you’re deciding how many strands of floss you need (if your pattern doesn’t tell you) then a simple rule is never to use a thread which is thinner than the thread of the material – it will look insignificant and puny against the background. My mum taught me this simple rule of thumb and it works in 99% of cases – the exception being if you’re working very fine detail in a small area of your work.

Most modern embroidery patterns will give you floss requirements for your project. The most common brands today are DMC and Anchor. The range of colour in each is amazing – DMC alone has over 400 different shades to choose from. Each shade is identified by a unique reference number which is printed on the paper band.

Both brands are readily available online, where you can also find colour conversion charts. Be very careful if you go this route though as colours will not be an exact match. If the designer has specified a particular brand and colours, then it’s best to stick with these if at all possible if you want to achieve the original effect of the design.

Floss: There is a right way and a wrong way to separate your strands of floss! I would highly recommend winding the skein onto a bobbin before you start. It is possible to pull floss straight from the skein if you pick the right end, but this is very risky – you are quite likely to end up with a nasty tangled mess – and even if you avoid this, then as the skein gets smaller, the bands will slip off and you'll have no idea what colour you're stitching with. (Take my word for this as one who knows!).

Bobbins are readily available, either plastic (which can be reused again and again) or cardboard. You can also buy thread sorters – pieces of card with holes punched to loop the floss through – these can be good while you're working a project, but at the end do remove the floss and store on bobbins.

You may think that I'm a bit obsessed with this, but do trust me when I say floss isn't especially cheap, and it has a mind of its own – tangling at every possible opportunity, which leads to waste and frustration.

Preparing your Fabric:

If you think that you will ever need to wash your finished work, then you might need to pre-shrink your fabric. Always test your fabric for projects that might need to be washed.

Test for Shrinkage Cut a 2" square of fabric, place it on some paper and draw around it. Set the paper to one side. Soak your 2" square in very hot (even boiling) water for 10 minutes, then extract and allow to dry flat. When it's dried then replace it on the paper over the square you drew to see if it's shrunk. If it has, then repeat the process and shrink your project fabric before you begin to stitch.

Bind the edges Your hands will brush against the edges of the fabric as you work and so you will need to prevent it from fraying. If your fabric is fairly closely woven then you may find trimming the edges with pinking shears will

suffice, but you may need to bind them if it's a looser weave.

You can do this by using a zig-zag stitch over the raw edges, either by machine or binding by hand – or the cheat's quick method is to use masking tape to cover the raw edges. This is fast to apply, it covers a wide area, is easy to remove and does not leave a sticky residue. What's not to like?

Threading your needle:

This isn't simply a case of licking the end and pulling the thread through – not if you want a really good result anyway. Even if this is a small project, even perhaps your first attempt at embroidery, thread licking is a really bad habit to acquire – and here's why....

1. Passing wetted thread through the eye of a needle can cause tiny tiny rust spots to occur right inside the eye of the needle. These tiny little rust spots have rough surfaces. This is very hard on your floss, causing fraying and breakages without you really understanding what is going on.
2. Whilst commercially produced floss is normally colourfast, if you're working with hand dyed thread then there may be some residual colour loss. And if you wet your thread and release this colour, you may well make an indelible mark on your clean fabric.
3. If you're using silk embroidery floss then you should be aware that silk weakens when it's wet. And this is so not a good thing for embroiderers.

OK – you've transferred your design, hooped up your fabric and threaded your needle – now is the best moment of the whole project – making that first stitch – the beginning of a beautiful relationship ...



Starting with a Waste Knot: This is the way my mum taught me to begin my project, and it's the way I've used ever since...

A waste knot is basically a knot on the front of your piece of work that you remove when you've stitched over the thread behind it. Normally knots in embroidery project are a no-go area for quite a few reasons: knots can slip through loosely woven fabric, they can wobble around and make your first stitch loose, come undone and allow the end to come through to the front, make bumps beneath your work etc ... etc think you probably get the point!!

Normally you would secure your thread by taking a few tiny back stitches through the threads at the back of your work – but of course this only works when you're part-way through a project – for that very first stitch there's nothing there to work with. So

Make a knot at the end of your thread. From the front of your project, go down through the fabric, a couple of inches away from where you intend to start work. Then start to stitch, working in the general direction of your waste knot.

Make sure that you are stitching over the "waste thread" on the back as you work towards the knot. When you reach the knot, pull it upwards and snip the thread as close as possible to the front of your fabric. The end of the thread will spring back behind the fabric and then you can just keep stitching. The pressure of the stitches you worked over the waste thread will keep the end of your thread in place without any need for a knot.

I just know you're not going to like this next bit – but as a responsible author I feel I must draw the darker side of

stitching to your attention. Sit down before you read the following sentence. Now ... are you ready? OK take a deep breath and read

**There will be times when you must
accept you will have to unpick your
work.**

Yes, this happens to all stitchers. It is not good. It is not fun. But sometimes it is necessary, particularly if the project you are working on is entirely your own design. If you've planned it, drawn it out, chosen your own colour scheme and stitch patterns, then it would be a total miracle if everything went perfectly first time. But don't be put off – if you believe in what you're doing then it will all come right in the end.

Just work through those times when nothing goes right, and you find yourself unpicking again and again, and you'll be rewarded with the thrill of seeing your very own ideas work out according to plan, the delight of seeing your creation grow and its various come together as a harmonious whole. It's so satisfying to make something completely unique to you – in this age of mass production, a handmade, one-off, piece is very precious both to the maker and any lucky recipient.



"I made it myself"



From Stitches Everywhere ..

IF I STITCH FAST ENOUGH, DOES IT COUNT AS AEROBIC EXERCISE?"

Unknown

I'm sure you must have heard enough from me for the time being – so let's have a bit of a break and enjoy some more contributions from stitchers across the globe who have generously contributed their favourite hints and tips. These range from wonderful to weird and frankly, wacky-sounding! But one thing they all have in common is that they are effective!

So here you are ... a list of tried and tested hints and tips that really do work.....



Getting Organised

"I glued some stiff foam into the top of a hinged eyeglass case for my pins and needles; then added small scissors, bobbin of thread, thimble and other small sewing items. I just close it and I can carry it anywhere. It is really handy. I get the eyeglass case from my eye doctor when I get new glasses."

Nancy

"I've found it hard to get rid of used needles and rotary blades until one day I was tossing my lancet from my diabetes testing kit into my sharps container. The container is usually red with a wide mouth and clearly marked for needles, so it's the perfect place to put dangerous pointy objects for disposal."

Heather

"At the dollar store you can buy small bands for pony tails, these are excellent to put around the bobbins you're storing for future use."

Barbara

“The best storage that I have found for all my regularly used sewing bits (needles, presser feet, safety pins, marker pens, D rings etc) is a fishing tackle box. They are inexpensive, come in all sizes and configurations, the little compartments separate all the little fiddly bits, they are easily portable and the deep section at the top can hold bigger items.”

Katherine Walsh

“We travel a lot and I am not one to just sit and stare out of the window, so I like to take projects with me. I have a metal clipboard, a strip of that magnetic “tape” that comes in a roll (to keep my place), and one of those little divided plastic boxes to put all of my needles, scissors, and threads in that I will be using. I also found a collapsible “waste basket” in the automotive section of the department store that has a strap to hang onto whatever is on the door or dashboard to put scraps in. This way I don’t get bored, and I get something useful accomplished!”

Patti

“The plastic holders that you receive toys from in the gum ball machine make great thread holders for pearl cotton. Heat the tip of a nut pick to make a hole at the top of the clear section for the thread to slide through. Snack size zippy bags are perfect for holding floss. Keep a small pair of scissors with each project – saves time in the looking. Small pizza boxes (new) are perfect for storing projects. Compact and you can label them on the outside edge. No more rummaging through bags and totes.”

Angela Prince-Bex

www.thecountrycellar.blogspot.com

“When I start a new project, I always read and re-read all materials pertaining to the project and sometimes I reread it a third time, just to make sure I have all the materials I need and that I have completely understood everything.”

Minta Fung

“I made several supply wraps and separated the supplies for crewel, hand quilting, floss embroidery and appliqué.

This way I am not hunting for the correct size needle or threader and can keep them with the current project.”

Rachel Bates:

www.dixdizzy.blogspot.com

“When completing any project keep a note of the name of the fabric and the number and type of thread used in the construction of the piece. If buttons are used in the design, then a spare button tucked inside is also a nice touch. I use a beautiful handmade book to record details of all my design work, perhaps one day my grandchildren will look back with pride and follow Harriet’s way. (Harriet was my grandmother and inspiration.)”

Amanda

“To keep several needles going at the same time is a trial. Trying to remember which colour is which. So I fold a piece of felt, 9 x 12 inches into quarters and tack it together. Then I put a piece of clear packing tape down the centre. Now I write the colour number and symbol if need be on small labels and stick them to the tape in two rows. I have been able to put up to 22 colours on my needle keeper at a time. I keep several of these around, so when I want to kit up a new project I already have a needle keeper ready.”

Kate Roland

www.crazypurplemom.blogspot.com

“When I am working on a project, I never seem to have anywhere to go with little snips of thread. I have starting saving prescription pill bottles to use as a catch-all. It’s portable, small enough to place in your project bag and when it is full you can either throw it out or use the snips for art projects.”

Tammy

“I bought a package of foam rollers to use as a pincushion for my threaded needles and to wrap the thread around when we travel. I thread my needles before we leave for our road trip, wrap the thread around the foam roller and stick in the needle. I do this for each colour change I made

need and I usually have enough done so that I do not have to try to thread a needle in a moving car.”

Sue Dodge

“Good lighting for the evenings of late afternoon in autumn & winter. I have made the mistake of mixing up navy, black, dark blue far too many times for it to be funny. This can also happen when shades are similar. Always use a strand card to separate colours as it’s far too easy to get going, pulling out threads that then end up all tangled.”

Denise

www.abigsmile4.blogspot.com

“I like to keep small magnetic marbles in the dish of straight pins I put out while pinning fabric. That way, if the pins tip (and they often do!) they don’t scatter everywhere!”

Ruth

“I always keep a #10 crochet hook by my sewing machine. I use this exclusively for any required ripping and also for guiding pieces under the pressure foot when it is important that seams are lying in the right direction.”

Becky Sazama

Needle and Thread

“To keep thread, floss & yarn from tangling and knotting when sewing, every so often hold the tail of the medium with the needle dangling and let it unwind. Another trick to keep thread, floss & yarn from tangling and knotting when sewing is to thread it through a bit of beeswax before starting, or thread it through thick unscented and non-tinted lip balm.”

Elzabet

“Just a little thing really, when threading your needle hold the thread between your thumb and forefinger, have just a little peeking out, about ¼ of an inch, then lower the

needle onto the thread, works every time for me. I was given this advice by a lady from the W.I. years ago.”

Lesleyann Bradford

“When working on a large embroidery design which uses the same colour repeatedly yet in very different areas, try threading a few needles with the same colour and work the different areas separately. It’s especially helpful if completing a background (sky or trees for example) and eliminates long jump threads or repeated stops and starts.”

Linda Bickford

“My stitching went from rather messy to quite neat when I learned that when using stranded threads one should always remove each length one at a time and then bundle them together to stitch, ie to embroider using 4 threads cut off about 18” and then pull out four strands, one at a time.”

Bonnie Kane

“If you are having trouble threading your needle, flip it over and try again. Needles are now stamped out making a “right” and a “wrong” side to your needle. If you look at it carefully, you can see which is the right side.”

Chrissy

“My tip is to always have really good light so that you can see the lines you are stitching. Good light really does make a difference.”

Carrie P

www.apassionforapplique.blogspot.com

“Find a sharp needle that suits you best. There are needles I can make perfect stitches with and needles that just don’t work for me. It mainly has to do with the thickness and the length. Don’t use too long a thread. My grandmother always taught me that if you use a long thread, you are a lazy crafter. With a long thread the thread gets into a knot

faster. Be sure you have enough thread for the project you are working on. Colours with the same number can differ, especially variegated threads.”

Simone

www.simonedeklerk.blogspot.com

“Always have your thread no longer than the length between you elbow and the tip of your finger. This avoids thread knotting up. Also, if your needle doesn’t glide through your fabric just draw it through your hair and it will become sharper like magic. I learned these tips from my nana.”

Ann Brown

www.anniehandmade.blogspot.com

“My tip is an old one I have used for quite a while. I thread several needles at one time so I don’t have to stop and try to thread a needle when I am wanting to sew.”

Patty

“Try and keep your thread about 18” long so it does not fray.”

Linne Middleton

“When working with metallic thread, place in the fridge for a few hours. Works wonders.”

Chris

“When stitching requires two threads, cut about twice the length you normally would, take one strand/thread and fold in half. Thread the two cut ends through the eye of the needle, then make your first stitch. When passing the needle to the back of the fabric, be sure to go through the loop you have created and your stitch is held securely as well as neatly. No knots or over-sewing is necessary and your stitch lies very flat.”

Jackie Boyer

www.lavenderjack.wordpress.com

“I recently used a curved needle for basting a quilt sandwich and found that it is the best way to do that task. I can recommend Dritz needles. Using the curved needle doesn’t move the layers and makes sewing them easier.”

Joanna Perry

“I find it is very important to choose the right needle for the job right from the get-go. It can mean all the difference between success and failure. A needle that is too small for your thread will be difficult to pull through and will be hard to thread. One that is too large will leave holes in the fabric. I love John James embroidery needles! I usually keep a few packages of the assorted 5 to 10 with 16 to a pack on hand and these will do me for all my embroidery tasks!”

Sandra Rocca

“For hand sewing or hand quilting, I find that beeswax is a must for keeping your thread from developing a tangled knot. Simply run your thread along the edge of a piece of beeswax (in a sewing notions store you can purchase a handy little container) and your thread will glide through your fabric so easily.”

Katherine Hawkes

“If using stranded floss to do your work, separate each strand from the whole and then put them back together to get more “fluff” from the threads and better coverage. Try to be sure to put them back together in the original orientation (ie which end was cut.) If threads are too fluffy to put through the eye of your needle, fold them over the needle and pinch between your fingers to fit through the eye. Learn about needle technology and learn to use the right kind of needle and the right size for your job/thread. Learn how to estimate how much of your hand working time a task will take so you can evaluate whether to do the job by hand or machine – reserve your hand stitching for tasks that are worthy of the effort.”

Linda Schiffer

“My father showed me how to twist the wetted thread around my finger tip and roll it so that when rolled off the tip of my finger it was knotted. When I was small I thought it was amazing he could do that and begged him to show me how.”

Wendy D

“My Oma taught me the best way to thread a needle when one is using yarn/embroidery floss etc. Fold the floss over the needle pinch it tight between your thumb and index finger, then slide the eye of the needle right down over the thread. Works every time!”

Gwen

“Mine is a simple tip, but it helps keep everything neat. When using an even number of strands, try a loop knot to start. Fold the floss in half and insert the two ends through the needle – so one strand looks like two, and has a loop at the end. On the first stitch, leave a little bit of the loop on the back, and when the needle comes back down, pass it through the loop. This secures the thread strongly and doesn’t leave any messy ends.”

Kylie Seymour-Clarke

www.persnickety-chickadee.net/wordpress

Thanks also to Dianna Hamilton and Simone Whipp (www.simone-lindengrove.blogspot.com) for sending in the same tip as Kylie.

“One thing that is very important to me when stitching is to use a thread conditioner to keep my thread from tangling and fraying so fast. I had never given it a thought until a friend gave me some as a gift and it is truly wonderful!”

Cheryl Ashmore

“To separate your stranded embroidery threads (eg DMC) cut thread to length. Hold threads about 1 cm down from top. Separate threads a bit and take hold of one thread. Gently pull out of bundle with one hand while still holding

the rest of the threads in the other hand. You will need to then run your fingers down rest of threads to straighten them. Repeat for each single thread you need. This stops all the tangling up of the threads when separating them.”

Christine MacDonald:

www.macdonaldspatch.blogspot.com

“I make a habit of trying my threads and yarns in different ways. I recently crocheted with some DMC variegated floss. It made beautiful medallions for use in my project. I’ve embroidered with thin knitting yarn. I like mixing things up!”

Lori

“When trying to thread a needle, wet the eye of the needle, not the thread. I am not sure why, but it makes it so much easier to get the thread thru the needle.”

Annelies

“Using the right size and type of needle is important to get the best results in your work. Also, don’t cheap out on your needles, you want them to be nice and sharp for smooth, easy action.”

Miranda Portaman-Secuurs

“I’ve been stitching for years and only just learned this one recently: there’s a wrong side and a right side to the needle! Not sharp versus dull but back to front! If you are finding it hard to thread a needle, flip it over! The eyes are punched and so the thread goes easier through the one side than the other!”

Margaret in VA



Weird, wonderful .. and wise

"I keep the back of my embroidery work neat by not allowing thread to "travel" more than ¼ or 3/8 inch. Instead I flip my work over, and "weave" the thread over to the new starting point and begin again from there. This also keeps thread from showing through to the front of an embroidery (important when working lightweight, pale fabrics). I realize that there are greatly differing opinions on how neat the back of one's embroidery should be, but if embroidering on bed linens which will be taken on/off beds or pillows, it's imperative that there not be big "loops" of thread on which someone's fingernail, finger or jewelry could become snagged. That could ruin hours of effort."

Lauren (aka Giddy)

"My favourite hint is to put a little super glue the wires where they connect to the metal tag on your needle threaders. I have only broken one needle threader since I heard this hint."

Karol

"If you can't make very regular embroidery stitches, try starching the fabric."

Aaltje Alting

"When you need to press your finished embroidery, place a towel, then you piece of work with the right side next to the towel then press with iron. This should prevent your

work becoming flat. Also when doing satin stitch, work your needle between the fabric and the thread to create an even piece of work.”

Jenny Southey

“To keep an older wooden embroidery hoop from getting too loose to use, try wrapping a thin strip of muslin around the top hoop and secure it with a few threads. I tried it; it works!”

Deborah Robertson

www.deborahmarie.wordpress.com

“I do embroidery (mainly on my crazy quilting) and a lot of sewing. In addition I cannot pass by a yard sale or thrift store without stopping to look for old laces, linens and sewing goodies! Therefore I have collected a large number of old wooden spools of thread, some empty and some half-used.

As I hate for anything to go to waste, I like to use this old thread (which would be unwise to use in new projects) in my machine to sew a zigzag or even satin stitch around any block or piece of needlework I am stitching on. A double purpose is served: the block of stitching is secured from unraveling and I have used some old thread!

Cathy Kizerian

www.cathycrazybydesign.blogspot.com

“Join a group of stitchers with the same interest as you. You can learn from each other and give tips and pointers while you are working on your project. Ask at your local embroidery store or quilt shop if they know a group you can join. Use the internet – there are thousands of possibilities on there. Look for links to other stitchers’ websites and blogs, patterns, tutorials, classes etc. Join online forums and meet online with other embroiders.”

Annemie Rook

“When I first started stitching, I found it difficult to get all my back stitches the same size and looking neat.” I tried stem stitch and now I use it all the time. I find it gives a lovely “flowing” look and I think it would be a good stitch for beginners. Try it and see what you think!”

Gill Smith

“Masking tape is a great way to cover raw edges so they won’t unravel when you are stitching.”

Linda Granger

“When stitching on black Aida cloth, place a piece of white cotton in your lap and work over that. The white will show through the holes in the black Aida and give your eyes a rest.”

Burtine Kendall

“When I first learned how to embroider, the best tip I got was to make sure the back was as neat as the front. I’ve been so glad I learned that and practiced it. No matter how thin the fabric I’m stitching on, I never have thread tails showing through the front, or a line of floss carrying over to another element of the design.

Another tip I’m glad I learned was to unwrap all of my floss and wind it on cardboard or plastic “bobbins” those little floss cards. I keep all of my floss organized by color and I can find the perfect shade right away. It’s no fun rooting through a messy basket of loose floss.

Also, I never use a hoop – I just take my time and never pull taut. I use a wonderful backing on all of my pieces, it's called Shape-Flex by Pellon – a fusible muslin that gives great body to my piece without bulk. Using this I can stitch on any kind of fabric.”

Allie Hartom:

www.allie-oopssweethappyife.blogspot.com

“I've learned to add an additional piece of fabric (a piece of old sheet or muslin) to the back of my embroidery project before starting. It adds some body and hides all those back of the project stitches. You just need to squish a little harder to get two layers into the hoop.”

Penelope

“This may be something that everybody already knows, but when my mother taught me to embroider, she explained what, for me, has been a very helpful tip: when you're having trouble getting the needle to come up in just the right spot – for example when working extremely small stitches or when the canvas is already quite crowded and you can't see well or stitch without catching other threads accidentally – stick the needle in from the top of the fabric where you can see exactly where you're putting it and wiggle it around for a moment. Then take it back out again without making a stitch. When you remove it the hole you've made will stay open long enough for you to take the needle round to the back again and poke it up through the hole easily in the exact right spot.”

Cecilia

“The first craft I learned was hand embroidery at the age of 6. My grandmother taught me and she would make me so mad, because I would have to rip it out or do it over until I got it right. Was not a happy little girl, but she impressed on me that if you do it right the first time and take small stitches you will have a beautiful stitchery. Sixty-something years later, still doing embroidery and loving it. People will comment on how beautiful my stitching is, and

it all goes back to dear old grandma and practice, practice, practice.”

Pat Merton

“The one tip my Grandma always told me was in cross stitching not to turn your work and keep all the slants the same way with the same tension.... For some reason I had a hard time doing that ... even on the gingham fabrics.”

Dee Dee

www.deedeecraftspot.blogspot.com

“If working a design area of pulled thread or wrapped bars for a project, try to complete the pulling or wrapping of threads in one complete area on the same day. Your pulling tension may change day to day due to your mood. By finishing a complete area at least it will be uniform.

To revive the lustre of your embroidery floss take one tablespoon of white vinegar to one cup of cold water. Soak a clean sponge in the liquid and dab your floss lightly.

Matted and tangled floss need not be thrown away. Spread it out on a cookie sheet and freeze. It comes out like new.

For the late night stitcher: You know it is time for bed when you stitch your nightgown to your piece and you have to decide whether to cut the nightgown or the stitches!!

My grandmother told me: It is always advisable to use only the best materials you can afford. Your time is too valuable to waste on anything less.”

Shari Jensen

www.mentorandangels.blogspot.com

“When coloring in on your embroidery, color in all the same direction as you go, and use good crayons and color a lot darker than you want as some of the color will iron out.”

Dee Shaw

“I have seen excellent results in embroidery by just using chain stitch for filling solids. It can feel a lot easier to do than satin stitch which can look a little untidy.

If you have a shape to fill you can go up and down in what is effectively stripes. Or if you have a circle or leaf shape, you can fill it by chaining round the edge, then filling in the inside with ever decreasing circles.”

Karen

“I know this is very basic, but I like to press the fabric smooth before placing it in a hoop. I have better luck with smoother stitches. I don’t use starch or sizing on it, just a good pressing to smooth out any wrinkles in the fabric.”

Linda

An Interesting Assortment

“My tip is a quilting tip. When cutting your fabric out, spray the back with starch, you will get a crisper cut when cutting out.”

Carla

“When gathering, put a different color thread in the bobbin, and it’s easy to see which thread to pull, and easy to remove. When lining an outfit, cut the hem of the lining $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ “ shorter than the garment so it won’t show after washing. Keep a “technique” notebook. Every time you read or hear about a technique you’d like, copy it or write it down in the notebook. Then you know where to go look when you can’t remember what it was!”

Debra Parker

“When working with fur (making toys etc) use a sharp pair of scissors and cut from the wrong side of the fabric, in between the fur so that you cut as little as possible. Then put the right sides together, smoothing the fur away from the edge. Overstitch the fabric together, then stitch. If you do that, then when you turn the fabric the right way out, you should be able to see the seams, and you shouldn't have to pull any fur out of the seams.”

Beth Butcher

www.bethbutcher.wordpress.com

“When I make quilts I love to miter my edges so they are nice and neat. To keep children safe I always go back and run a stitch over them so they are completely closed off. This helps keep those little fingers from going into them and gives the quilt a little more stability.”

Glenda Maphis

“When I sew, I do it very slowly as I taught myself ... but I do remember my mother saying that if you base your project (if the pattern says to) it will be easier to adjust the pieces of the project you're making. Also, I make sure when quilting, or making something new that I've never tried before, to sew with a decent sized stitch that would be easy to rip out if I make a mistake.”

Linda Vitzthum

“Patchwork: when you have chosen a fabric, look at the dots on the selvedge and any of those colours will go with what you have chosen. Some fabrics can be deceiving when trying to sort darks, lights and mediums – cut small samples and attach to paper, then photocopy. For more control on sewing machine turn your foot pedal round and press down on heel instead of toe.”

Marion Pidgeon

“From my mother: Sewing on buttons (by hand); making a small shank. After you've finished going forwards and backwards through the holes in the button, firmly wrap the thread several times around the threads between the base

of the button and the fabric, then take your needle through to the back of the fabric and sew a couple of tiny back stitches before cutting off the leftover thread.

Sewing on buttons by hand; making a bigger shank. Before you start put a matchstick between the button and the fabric, so that the it stands proud. When you've finished stitching, remove the matchstick and firmly wrap the remaining thread several times around the threads that link the base of the button to the fabric, then take your needle through to the back of the fabric and sew a couple of tiny back stitches before cutting off the leftover thread."

Kate Makowiecka

"When attaching strands of wool to a doll's head as hair, use sticky tape to arrange and position strands on first, and then put on head to sew on."Carola

"Whenever I make a dress I press after every seam. The result is much more pleasing, and the rest of the sewing more accurate."

Margie Buys

"When working with children and you want them to use a template to cut out a shape on fabric, photocopy the design onto plain white paper and use artist's spray mount to temporarily stick the pattern to the fabric. It makes it easier to cut the design and no need for pins. The paper peels off the fabric very easily!"

Lyn Robinson

www.lyn-everydaylife.blogspot.com

"I think the best tip I have heard in a long time is to put a scrap piece of batting over your shoulder (like a burp cloth) and toss your threads onto it. That way they don't end up all over the floor."

Linda E

“When making very small stuffed animals and toys that need to stand up, put a penny or a two pence piece in their bottom to weigh them down.”

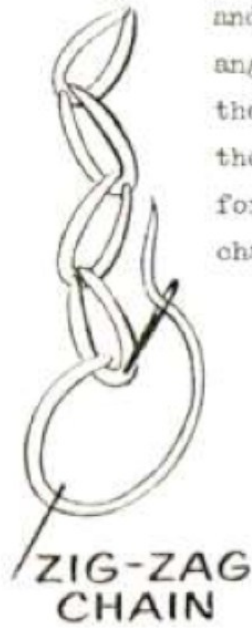
Holly Dawes

www.holloughby.blogspot.com



CHAIN STITCH

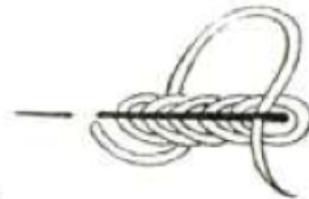
Chain stitch is one of the most important basic stitches, and has many variations which are simple and pretty. Alternate the angle of the stitches for the zig-zag chain, and vary the colours of the thread for the magic or chequer chain.



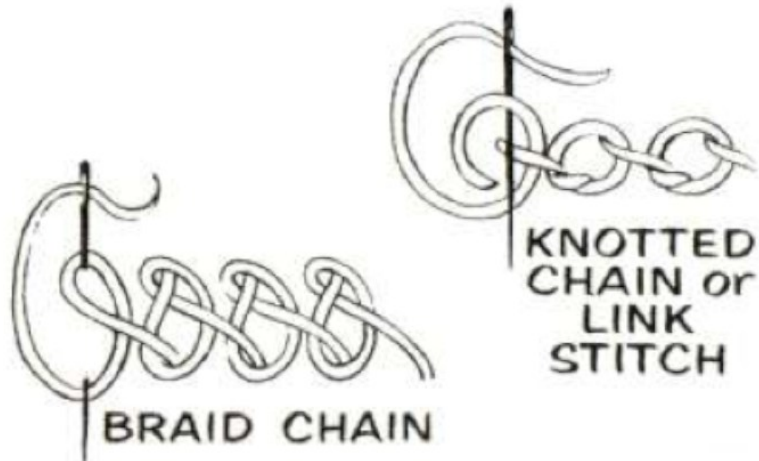
ZIG-ZAG CHAIN

MAGIC or CHEQUERED CHAIN





These stitches may look complicated, but are in fact quite easy to work. They show up to best advantage when worked in a high twist thread.

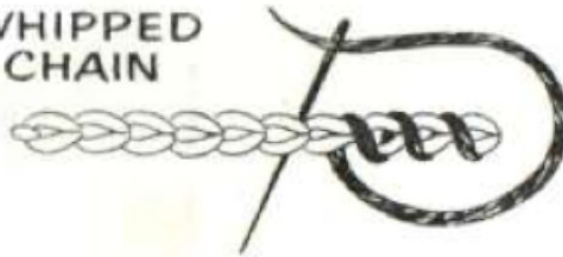




THREADED CHAIN

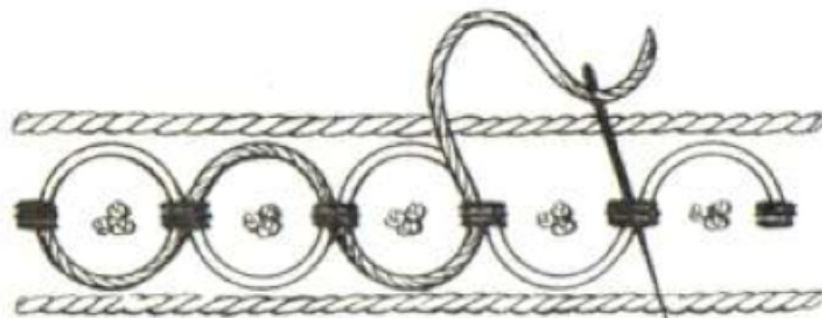
To work these three stitches, commence with your row or rows of chain stitch, and thread, whip or tie it in a contrasting colour. The contrasting thread only enters the fabric at the beginning and end of the row.

WHIPPED CHAIN



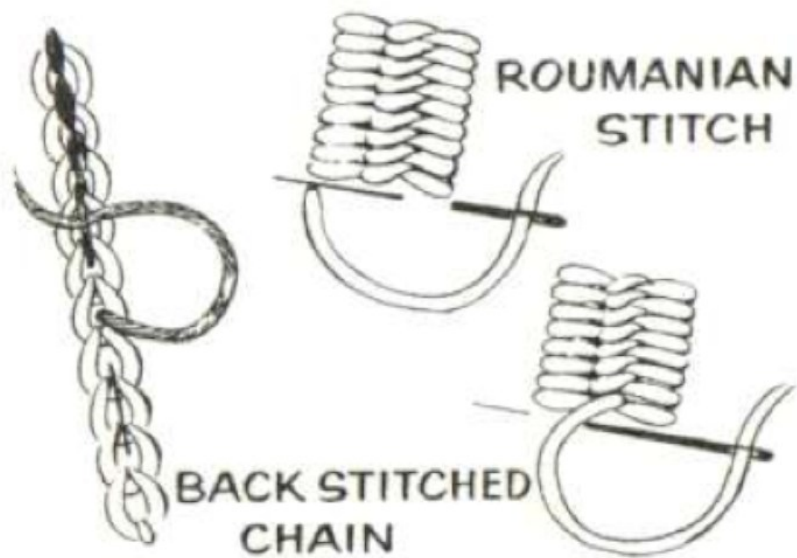
TIED CHAIN





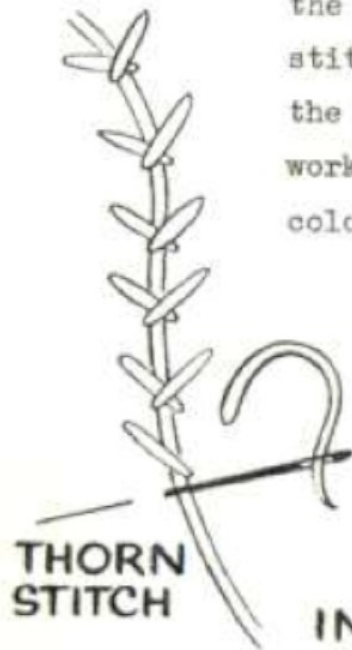
GUILLOCHE STITCH

Several stitches go to make up this composite border shown above, work the outer stem stitch borders first, next the equally spaced groups of three satin stitches, complete the lacing as shown in diagram, and then work the French knots. Different colours should be used to gain an attractive effect.



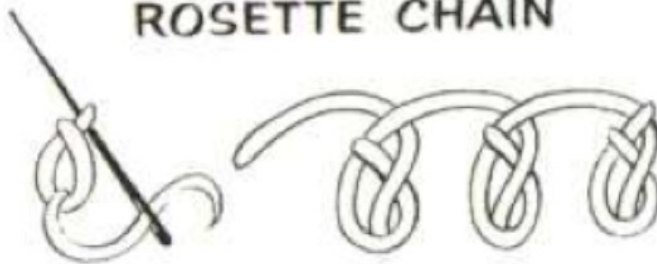


The three stitches shown below are variations of the herringbone. Thorn stitch looks pretty if the cross stitches are worked in a different colour to the "stem".

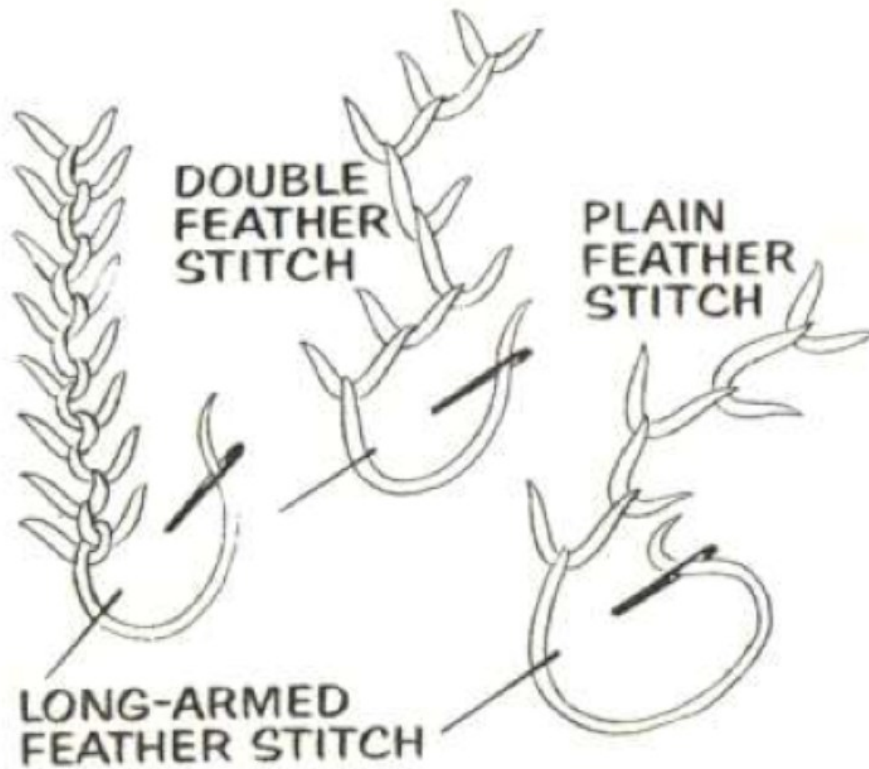




ROSETTE CHAIN



Feather stitch and its variations shown below and on following page are quick and simple to work. Stitches are worked alternately on the right and left.



CLOSED FEATHER STITCH



**SPANISH
KNOTTED
FEATHER
STITCH**

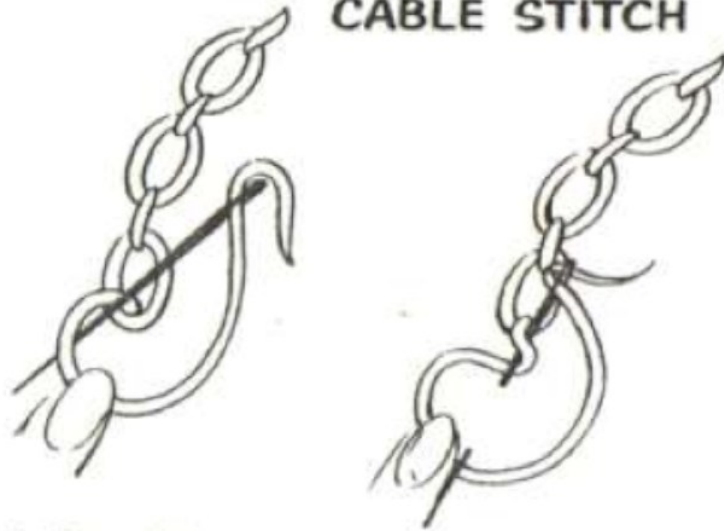
CRETAN STITCH

**SINGLE
CORAL
STITCH**



**DOUBLE
CORAL STITCH**

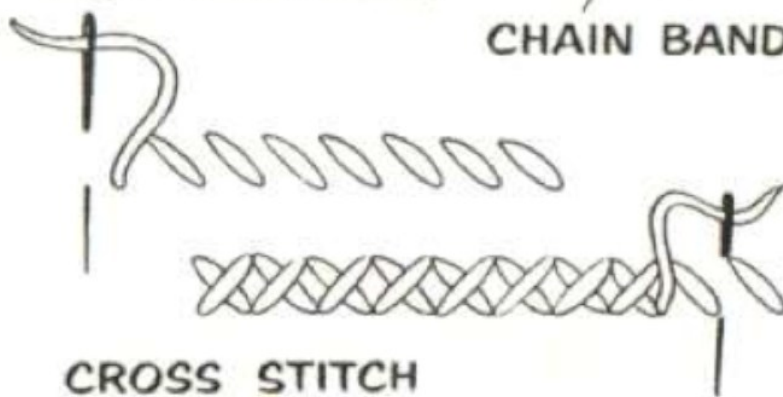
CABLE STITCH



Cable stitch looks most effective worked in a fairly heavy twisted thread, this throws the stitch into relief. Chain band — an alternative to be in two colours. Stitches illustrated on the opposite page are all variations of simple feather stitch.

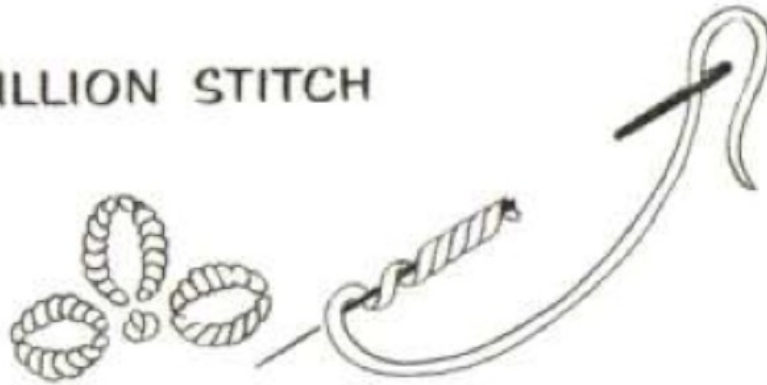


CHAIN BAND

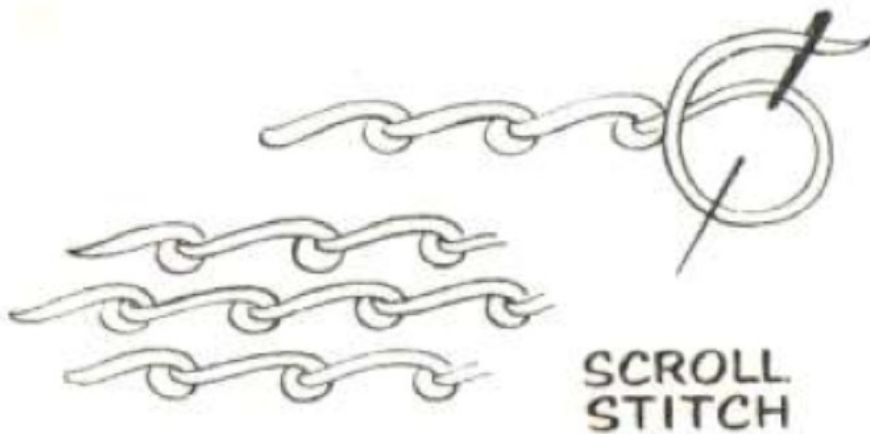


CROSS STITCH

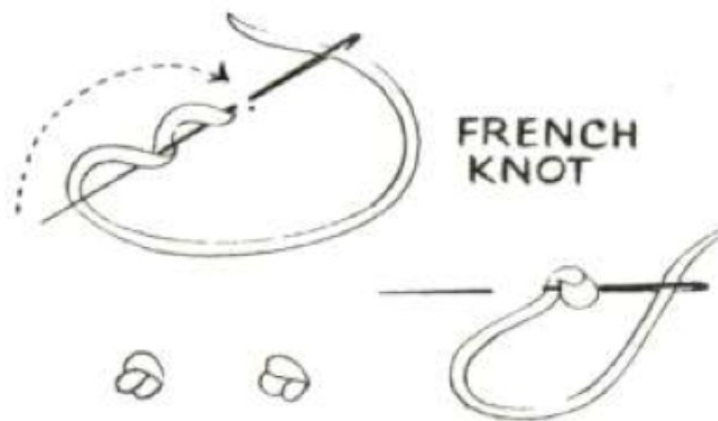
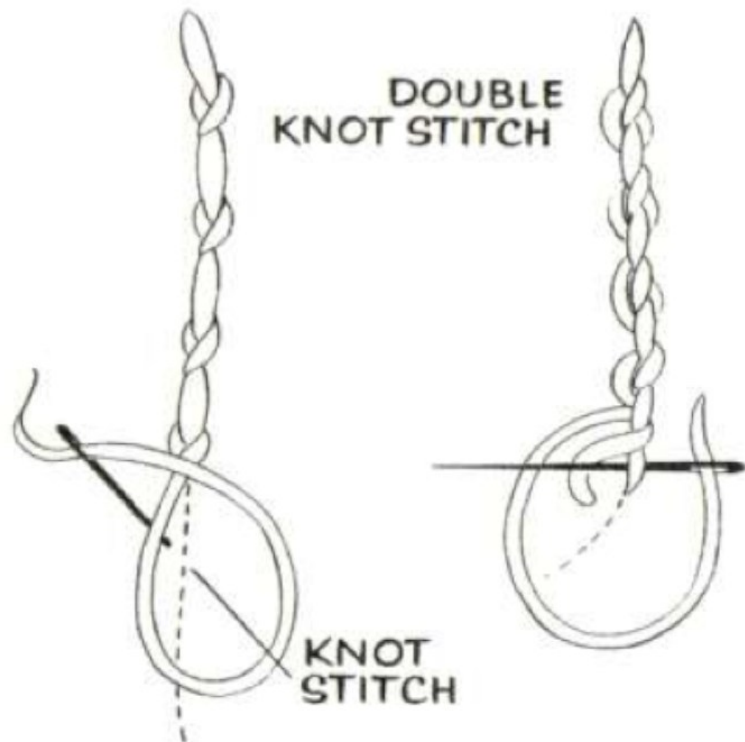
BULLION STITCH

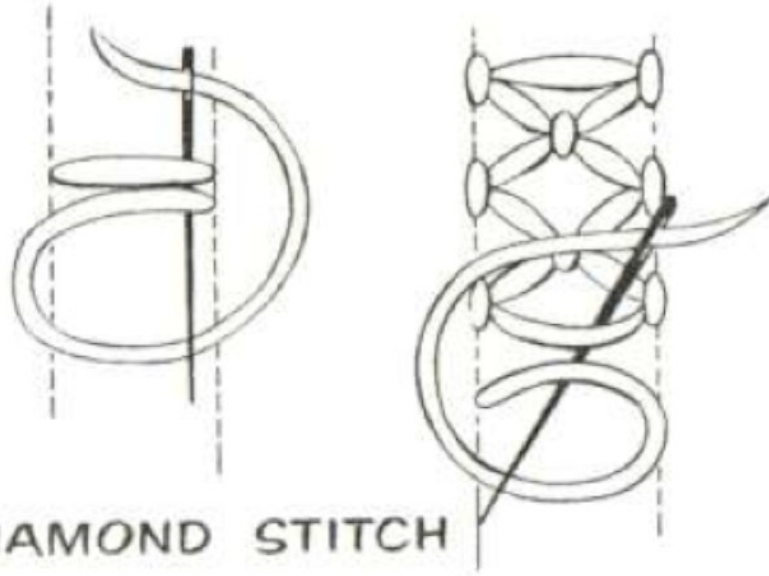


A similar method is used for these five stitches, all of which look best worked in a high twist thread, as with a soft thread the knots are not so clearly defined.



**SCROLL
STITCH**





DIAMOND STITCH

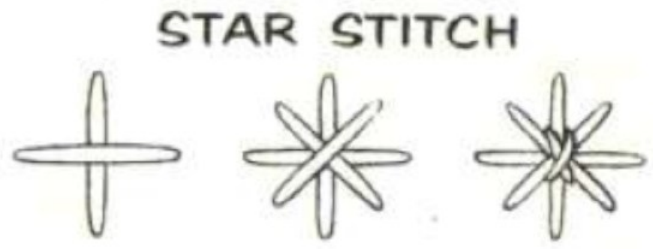
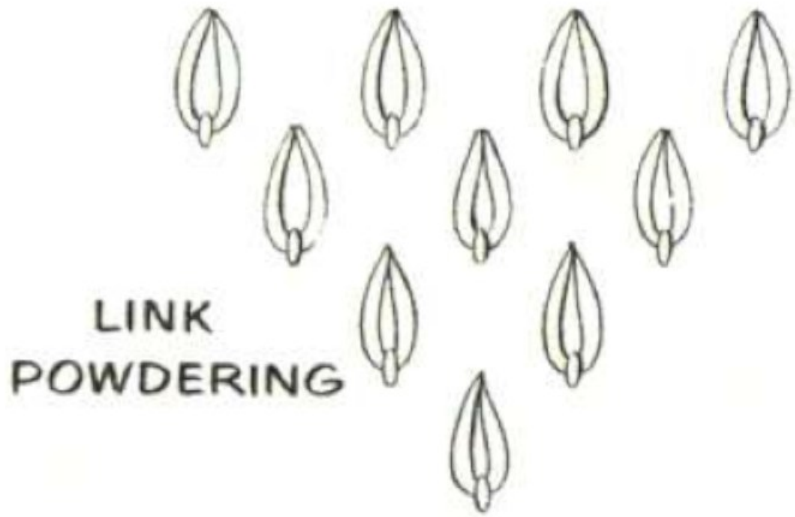
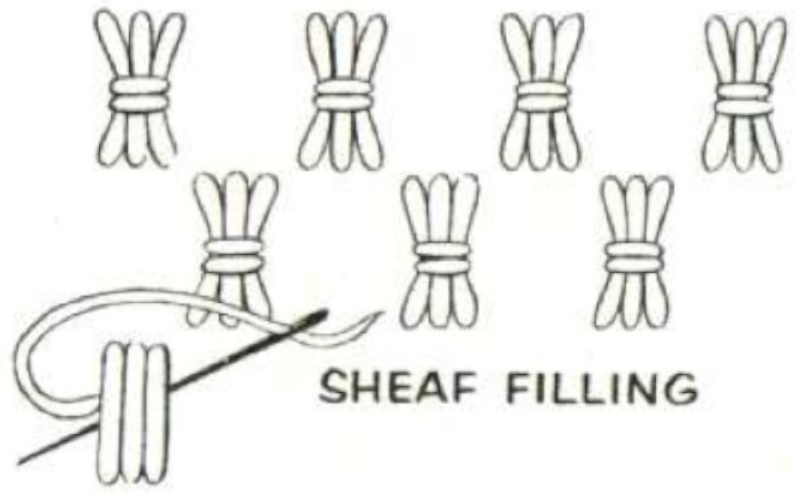


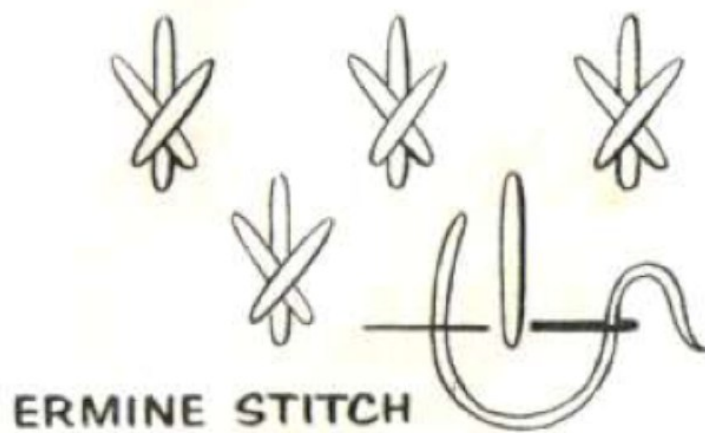
THREADED BACK STITCH

COUCHING

One of the quickest and most effective stitches to work. Several thick threads are laid flat on the fabric and caught down at intervals with a stitch or stitches in contrasting colours. From the sketches below you can see various different methods of catching the thread down.

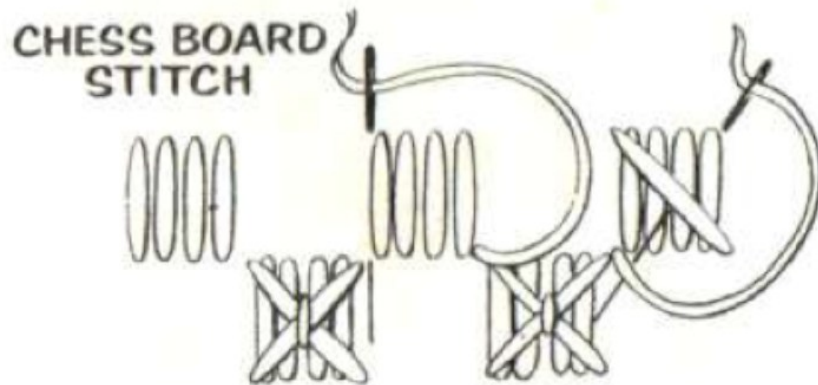






ERMINE STITCH

These five stitches are nothing more than combinations of stitches you already know. An attractive effect can be achieved by using more than one colour for each stitch.





Finishing and Framing

“SEWING FILLS MY DAYS, NOT TO MENTION THE LIVING ROOM, BEDROOM, AND CLOSETS.”

Unknown



After all the hours of hard work you've put into making your project the best it possibly can be, then it's worth making sure that, whatever you decide to turn it into, it is perfectly finished and presented.

It's tempting to rush through these steps as you're anxious to show your work to the world – or maybe you're working to a deadline, or are just fed up of looking at it and want it done! But please do take your time as bad finishing, or poorly made items do not showcase your work properly.

Cleaning your work:

If you have handled and stored your project correctly then hopefully it won't need cleaning. But it may be grubby or stained, in which case you should clean it before making it up into a finished piece or framing it. The method you use for cleaning must be suitable for all the elements used in your work, ie fabric, floss or thread, backing material plus any other elements such as applique shapes, buttons, beads, ribbons or other embellishments.

When pressing your work, place a folded towel on your ironing board, then lay your work face-downwards upon it. This will stop your stitching being pressed flat. Then press – don't iron your work. If you move the iron backwards and forwards you risk distorting the fabric and also catching any threads at the back, so stretching or distorting your stitches. You want to place a light cloth over the back of the work before pressing if you can't trust yourself not to "iron" the piece!

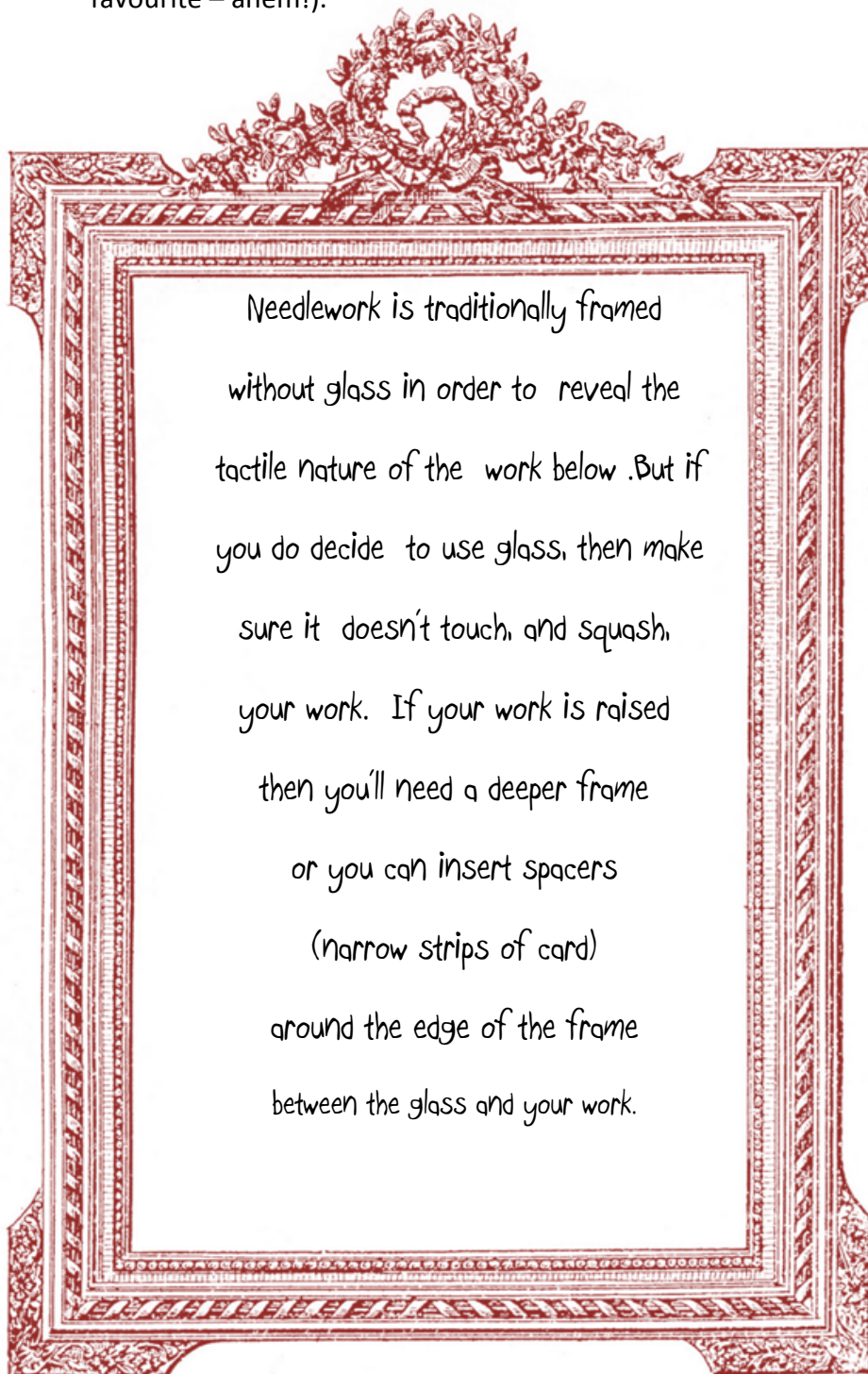
Framing:

You may have decided to display your embroidery in a frame, rather than making it into a finished item. Bear in mind that the frame you choose should enhance the appearance of your work – as suiting the space where it will be displayed. If you want to frame your work in the

traditional manner, then you could choose a framer and have it stretched and laced professionally. This is expensive though and it's perfectly possible to do the work yourself.

If you are using glass, then be aware that non-reflective glass can make your work look dull.

Another option for displaying your work is to use an artist's box canvas – you can stretch and lace your work over this as described below, or cheat and use a staple gun. (my favourite – ahem!).



Needlework is traditionally framed without glass in order to reveal the tactile nature of the work below. But if you do decide to use glass, then make sure it doesn't touch, and squash, your work. If your work is raised then you'll need a deeper frame or you can insert spacers (narrow strips of card) around the edge of the frame between the glass and your work.



Stretching and Lacing:

Sounds rather Victorian Something to do with corsets perhaps?

Thankfully not.

To be displayed at its beautiful best, you must stretch your work and lace it over rigid card that has been cut to the right size to fit within your frame, whilst allowing for the fabric to fold around it – so it will actually be very slightly smaller all round than the frame backing board.

Ideally you should use an acid-free board if you're planning on your work staying framed for a long time – this sort of board won't discolour or damage it.

When you've carefully pressed your work, place it face-down with the card on top. If you'd like a slightly padded finish, then cut a piece of felt to the size of the board, and attach it using a spray glue suitable for fabric. For larger pieces, you can use wadding or even carpet felt.

In the centre of the longest side, pin through the fabric into the edge of the card (which will need to be fairly thick). Pull the fabric towards the opposite side and pin the centre of that edge. Pinning through the edges of the board means that you don't run the risk of damaging a part of the fabric that will be seen from the front.

Working outwards from the centre pin along both long sides in this manner. Remember: you should always start from the centre as this is less likely to pull the fabric out of true. When the sides are secured, flip the card over and check that the grain of the fabric is straight and the design is placed exactly where you want it to be.

Then take a strong thread and, working from the centre out again, lace the long sides of the fabric pulling taut as you go. Mitre and pin each corner before lacing the short sides in the same way.

If you want to stretch your work over round card, work a running stitch around the edge, place the card on the embroidery and pull up the thread to gather the edges over the card. When you're happy with the positioning tie the gathering threads off as tightly as you can.

Display your work in a hoop:

A really popular and easy way to display your embroidery is using an embroidery hoop:

- When you've finished your work, press in the normal way. Then trim your work to a circle 2" bigger in diameter than the size of hoop you want to frame it in.
- Hoop up in the usual way, adding a circle of wadding below the design if you want a padded look.
- Then, using double-sided tape or your trusty hot glue gun (but be careful no drips or spills) stick down your fabric to the inside ring of the hoop.
- Take the inner hoop from a hoop the same size as the one you're using to frame your embroidery and draw around it onto strong non-bendy card. Cut out the circle and then trim it so it's just a bit smaller all the way round.
- Then cut a circle of fabric 2" (5 cm) larger than the card, run a thread all the way around the outside using running stitch and gather up over the card.
- Take the hoop with your finished work in and, with the fabric facing outwards, press the card onto the back of the embroidery so hiding the back of your work and any raw edges.
- Finished!!



Unleash your creativity ...

In an earlier chapter, I included some diagrams of stitches, both familiar and less so, that I thought you might like to try working.

Many stitchers limit themselves to working designs created by others because they believe they lack their own design skills. Perhaps this is because they have lost confidence in their own ability to draw (many a school art teacher must take at least some of the blame for this state of affairs), or perhaps they're simply unsure of how to get started.

I myself am not particularly proud of my drawing skills, and was very happy to read in an old design book that the author considered too much thought given to the actual drawing might lead the designer to forget the medium for which they were designing. It's so important to think of your design in terms of materials and stitches. If you treat your work from the beginning as a wonderful adventure in textures, stitches, lines and fabrics, your finished work will be much more spontaneous and pleasing to the eye. Don't be afraid to experiment – all that can happen is you end up doing some unpicking And that's not really the end of the world – is it?

A traditional way to start creating is by stitching your own sampler – both as a work of art and as a reference for future creations. So I've included for you here one of my most popular patterns "Rosie & Bear" based on my own daughter's childhood when she was hardly ever to be found without her best friend Bear beside her.

This pattern takes the form of a sampler – with each book being embroidered in a different pattern using different stitches. I've included my own suggestions – but why not try your own combinations – to make your very own unique work of art....

Rosie & Bear: A Good Book



A great chance to try out some new stitches – and create a sampler for the 21st century too!

You will need:

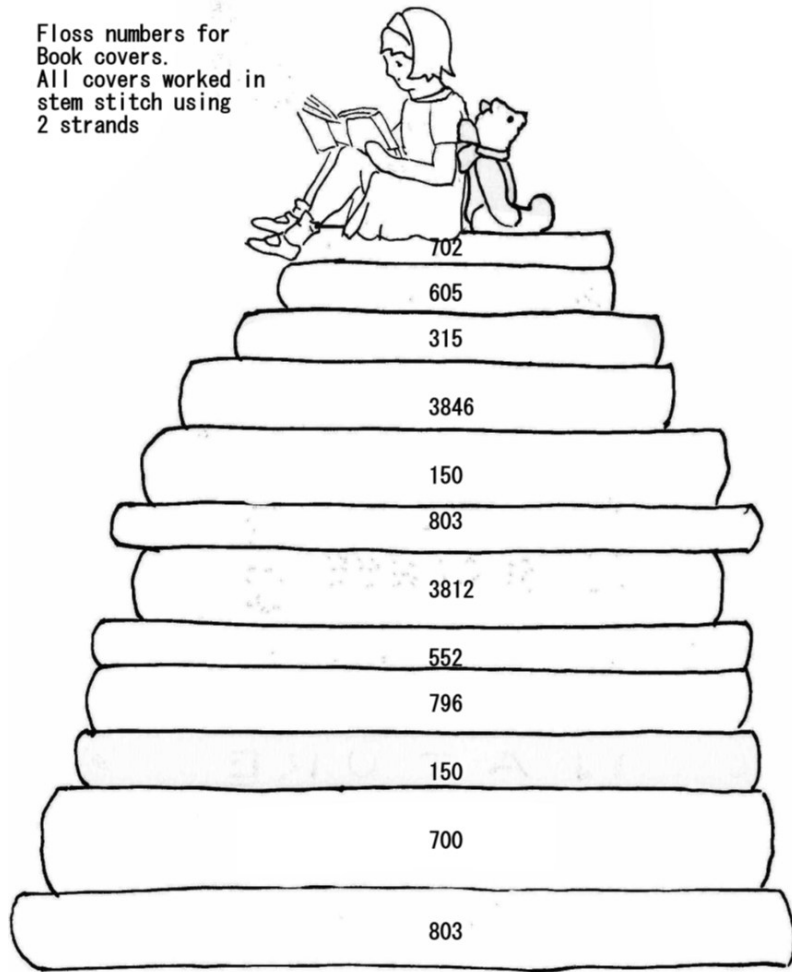
Light coloured fabric suitable for embroidery (eg linen, cotton – non-stretchy and closely woven)

DMC floss colours 150, 165, 315, 552, 554, 605, 700, 702, 775, 796, 803, 892, 973, 3078, 3325, 3812, 3846, 3862, 3864, 4065, 4070, 4170.





Floss numbers for
Book covers.
All covers worked in
stem stitch using
2 strands



The colours and stitch choices for the books are suggestions only – you may want to create your own combination of colour and texture. All the book covers are worked in 2 strands of floss and use stem stitch. I have worked 2 or 3 rows of stem stitch at the spines – notice that the books are stacked with spines on either side of the pile.

Also be aware that Rosie's dress falls down over the cover of the first book and her feet cover the end of its pages. I have also made the top book slightly curved, as though their weight was pressing down on the cover.

You will find details for embroidering Bear's fur in my free guide "[How to Embroider Fur](#)"



Bear fur is worked in a mixture of L833, 3862 and 676
Please see guide "How to Embroider Fur" for details
of working Bear.

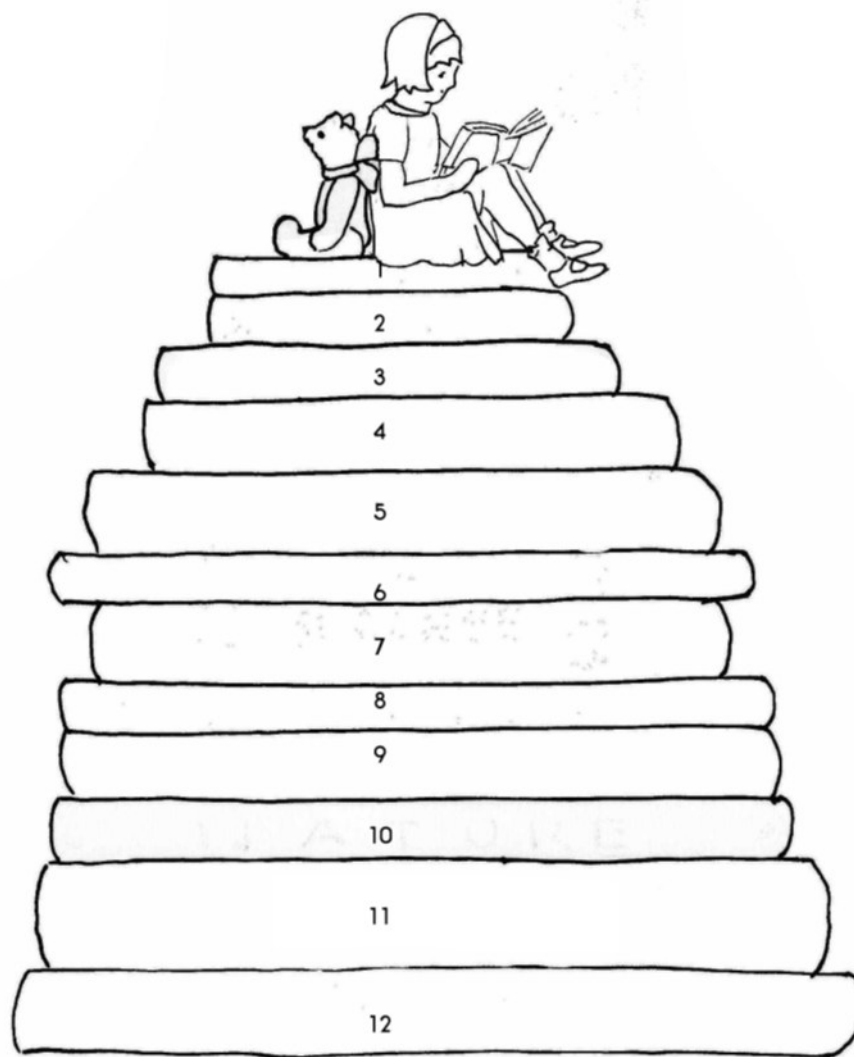
Book stem stitch and straight stitch 150 2 strands
Bear's ribbon and Rosie's hair band
Satin stitch 4065 2 strands
Rosie's skin stem stitch 3864 2 strands
Rosie's hair straight stitch 3862 2 strands
Rosie's shoes straight stitch 315 2 strands
Rosie's socks straight stitch 775 2 strands
Rosie's dress 3325 stem stitch 2 strands
Polka dots on dress 554 French knots 2 strands 1 twist



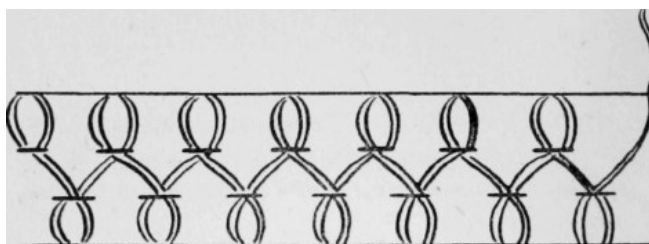


I have used a selection of stitches, some familiar and some (to me at least) less so for the pile of books Rosie & Bear are perching on....

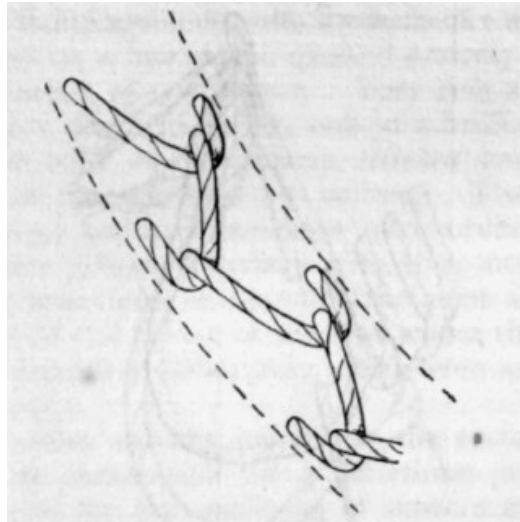




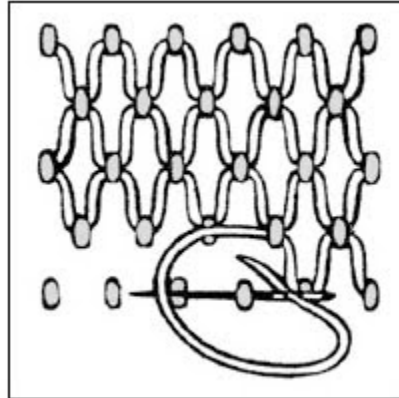
1. **Couched stitch** – 2 strands 554 laid across width of book then couched at intervals with tiny cross stitches also worked in 2 strands of 554.
2. **Herringbone stitch** – 2 strands 605 then couched with 2 strands 165 tiny straight stitches



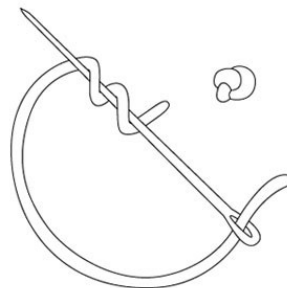
3. **Straight stitch** worked in diagonals – 2 strands 605 with **cross stitch** worked in 2 strands 165
4. **Feather stitch** 2 strands 3078



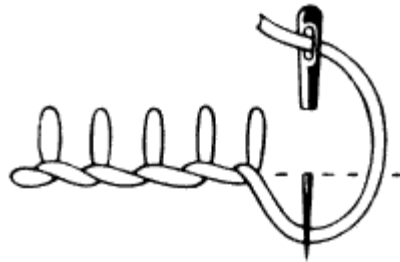
5. **Cloud stitch** tiny straight stitches in 1 strand 554 and woven thread in 2 strands 892.



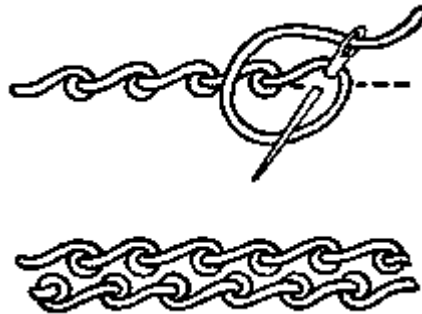
6. **French knots** 2 strands, 1 twist in 4065



7. **Buttonhole stitch** 2 strands 741 and cross/straight stitches in 2 strands 605.

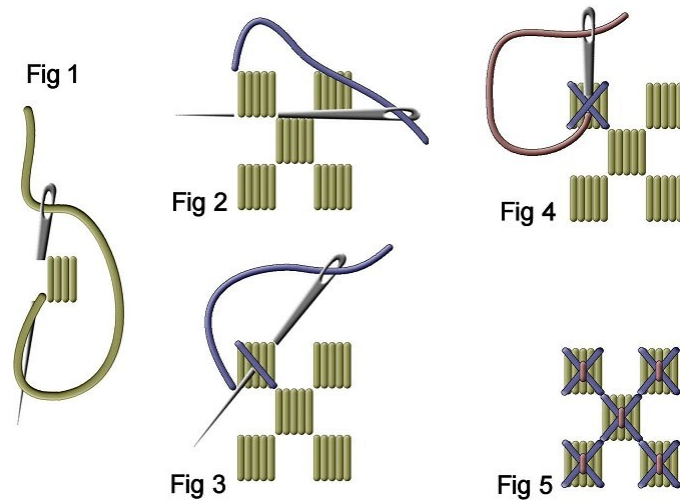


8. **Scroll stitch** 2 strands 554



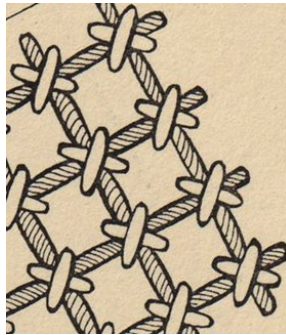
9. **Running Stitch** worked diagonally 2 strands 4070

10. **Chessboard Filling Stitch** 2 strands 775



11. **Running Stitch** 1 strand 700. Work this first, then randomly position clusters of 2 tiny satin stitches using 2 strands 973. Daisy petals are straight stitches radiating out from these clusters, worked in 2 strands 4170

12. **Couched Filling Stitch (aka Trellis Couching)** Lay down three long horizontal stitches in 2 strands 775, then cross with vertical stitches in the same floss worked in right angles. Then “couch” down each junction where the stitches cross with tiny cross stitches worked in 2 strands 165.



If you've enjoyed this pattern, then why not visit my website:

www.bustleandsew.com

where you'll find lots more to choose from!

AND FINALLY

I hope you've enjoyed this little book and found it both useful and entertaining. But remember, when all's said and done – you stitch primarily for yourself, for your own pleasure and enjoyment.

So don't worry about "getting it right" or trying something different – your work is your own creation and whether it goes wrong or not, it doesn't matter. Mistakes can be put right and making them isn't life-threatening – simply part of your stitching journey.



Helen xx

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