

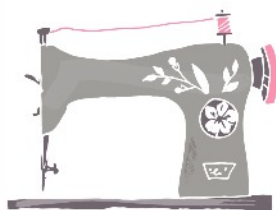


Freestyle Machine Applique

Machine Applique - freestyle and very easy!

Quite a lot of Bustle & Sew patterns use freestyle machine embroidery and raw edge applique. I love this technique as it gives great results in a remarkably short period of time – perfect if you're working to a deadline, or if (like Rosie and me) you're trying to give lots of handmade gifts at Christmas. I know many people are a little nervous of trying this technique, I most definitely was, but now I love working in this way – I view my sewing machine in a whole new light as not just a method of joining pieces of fabric together, but as a means of creative expression in its own right.

You don't need any expensive equipment for this technique – you'll almost certainly have everything you need already. You will need a sewing machine of course – but it doesn't need to be expensive and/or fancy. In fact the simpler the better as you will only need to use the basic straight stitch option.



Use sharp scissors to cut out your applique shapes. I use my large shears which seems perhaps a little odd when I'm often cutting fairly small shapes, but for me it's easier to make long smooth curving cuts with their long blades as I don't have to stop and open them again all the time. I also have a small pair of sharp scissors that are good for cutting very tiny curves.

Many people like to hoop up before starting their machine applique. I personally don't do this as I prefer to work without. (unlike hand embroidery where I simply can't stitch without one!). If you do decide to use a hoop



then, like hand embroidery, be sure to choose a good brand that will secure your fabric tightly. An 8" or 20 cm hoop is a good versatile size.



If you become really enthusiastic about this technique you'll find yourself jealously hoarding even the smallest fabric scraps in case they come in useful for one of your creations. Almost all sorts of fabrics work well including scraps from previous projects, old clothes or treasures from thrift or charity shops. Do avoid stretchy fabric though, as well as fabrics with a very loose weave as they will fray and distort. Quilting weight cotton is the perfect choice, whilst choose a heavier fabric (such as Kidston cotton duck) for the background as it will need to support a lot of stitching.

Normal thread is perfect for the actual machine stitching. You can choose a dark thread for the needle so your stitches will stand out, or perhaps a contrasting colour if you want to add some complementary stitching. Use a pale colour in the bobbin to give you a less solid stitching line as you're aiming for a sort of scribbled effect, not strong black lines on your fabric.

Buttons, braids and embroidery floss are the final elements of your kit box. It's nice to embellish your work and I think that adding

touches of hand embroidery makes it both more personal and also rather special – unlike anything you'll find in the shops.

YOUR MACHINE

When using this technique you'll need to fit the darning foot to your sewing machine. This will help stop your fabric puckering as you stitch whilst protecting your fingers as you move your work around freely. You'll also need to drop the feed dogs. When these are up in their normal position they grip and feed the fabric in a straight line beneath your needle as you stitch. When they're dropped you can move your fabric around freely in any direction. The method of dropping your feed dogs will vary between machines, so if you're uncertain then just check your manufacturer's guide.

I haven't found it necessary to alter the tension on my machine for freestyle stitching, just make these two small easy adjustments.

START STITCHING

If you're new to this method, then it's a good idea to practise before starting your project. Being able to confidently outline your applique shapes is crucial to your success. It's not hard, but is a very different feel to normal machine sewing. You have to imagine that you're drawing the shape with your sewing machine needle, but instead of moving a pencil over paper, you're moving the paper – or, in this case, the fabric.

It feels really odd to be able to move your fabric in all directions beneath the needle and it does take some practice, so don't expect to become an expert straight away.

expect to become an expert straight away. Like most skills, the more you practise, the better you'll become!

Fit your darning/embroidery foot and thread your machine in the usual way. Drop your feed dogs. Hoop your fabric if preferred. Place fabric under the needle and drop the foot. Lower the needle into the fabric before beginning to stitch – this isn't an essential step but I find it gives me more control. Set your machine to straight stitch. The actual length of the stitch will be controlled by the movement of the hoop.

Begin to sew slowly, controlling the machine's speed with your foot. Move the fabric around to create some scribbly lines – don't worry too much about the effect, this is only practising – but think about how it feels to use your machine in this very different way. As your confidence grows you can increase the sewing speed to a nice steady middling sort of pace so your stitched lines will flow smoothly.

When you feel comfortable with your needle speed and with moving the fabric in different directions try outlining some simple shapes with the needle. You can try freehand or draw shapes onto your practice fabric to stitch over. Remember – you can move your fabric in any direction.

Outlining a shape twice is very attractive and there's no need to be too neat, you are aiming for a nice scribbled effect. As your confidence grows try more complicated shapes and don't be scared of "getting it wrong" – you're only practising at the moment. Just keep everything simple and remember that wobbly lines are very attractive when combined with nice fabrics in this technique.



APPLIQUE TECHNIQUE

If you think of your stitching lines as drawing with pencil, then you're "colouring in" your drawings with your choices of fabrics. This isn't beautifully neat turned edge applique, but is a much more spontaneous technique that relies on finding exactly the right fabric for your design. The applique itself is very simple – just trace the template shapes onto the paper side of your Bondaweb, cut out roughly, then fuse to the reverse of your fabric.

Carefully cut out the shapes along the lines you trace using long smooth cuts with large scissors or shears. Hold the scissors steady in one hand then turn the fabric as you cut. Cutting this way will give you much more control than trying to move the scissors around the fabric. When you've cut out your shape, peel off the paper backing, position on the background fabric and fuse in place with a hot iron, protecting your work with a cloth if necessary.

Lots of Bustle & Sew designs use layered applique shapes. In this case you will need to work from the bottom or back upwards and cut a little extra on the underneath shapes so they will be overlapped by the shapes above – no ugly gaps in between.

FABRIC CHOICES

Choose a nice plain or discreetly patterned medium weight fabric for your background. It must be non-stretchy and natural fibres are nicest to work with. Take a look at furnishing fabrics, cotton twills and ducks are perfect. When choosing fabrics for both the background and the applique work ask yourself will the completed work need to be washed? If so, you'll need to make sure all your choices are colour-fast and won't shrink – consider pre-washing to be certain.

For applique fabrics stick to natural fibres that won't stretch when stitched or melt when you fuse your shapes to the background. Quilting weight cotton is absolutely perfect to start with as it's really

easy to use. As you gain experience it's fun to experiment with different types of fabric.

Consider also whether the fabric will fray – a little bit of fraying can be very attractive, but if the weave is too loose or unstable you won't be able to work with it properly. Also think about pattern sizes. It's best to choose fabrics with small scale patterns that can be seen when you've cut out your shapes – you'll lose the effect of larger prints. Have a rummage around the bargain bins at your fabric shop for nice remnants, many designs use only very small amounts of each print.

AND FINALLY

Most of all relax and have fun! Choose good quality materials, working with cheap and nasty fabrics will give poor results – and a lot of frustration along the way! If things aren't going very well, then take a break and return refreshed.

HAPPY STITCHING!





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Why do we love to stitch? After all you can purchase mass-produced textile items at many high streets stores for very little cost. These days handmade means something special - a unique item created with love, a gift from the heart, not one that can be bought. Hand stitching is also a great way to personalise an item, or perhaps to breathe new life into an old favourite that has seen better days.

[Bustle & Sew](#) offers my own unique patterns, designed to appeal to all skill levels and bring out all your natural

creativity. And you can keep up to date with all the latest news from Devon where I live as well as the newest patterns and much more over on the [Bustle & Sew Blog](#).

But none of this would mean anything without YOU, the stitcher. And it's lovely to be able to share hints, tips, techniques and patterns with other like-minded people. So



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