

Quilt Instructions for the Beginner

By Terry White

Part 1



Editor – Robyn Rex Reed

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1. Essential Tools Needed for Every Quilter

You'll thank me later....

If you are a beginner to quilting, the tools you need are a few. There are, literally, thousands of tools for quilting available to the stitcher..it can be very confusing. So, to simplify, here is a list of the most essential things you will need to start quilting.

Marking Tools

You will use a marking tool for appliqué, marking fusible web, placement of appliqués on fabric, placement of embellishments on fabric and marking quilt lines.



For Permanent Lines

- **Micron Pigma Pen:** an archival acid free pen, like the pens for scrap booking.
- **Fine Point Sharpies:** when I take a hot iron to the marks they become permanent.
- **Color Pencils:** can be used as they can be matched to the colors of fabric used. Then there isn't a harsh black line to worry about.
- **Fabric Markers:** are the best because they come in colors, are permanent and are made for fabric...however they can be expensive. So, if you buy just the primary colors individually from an art or hobby store you can save expense. Store all markers on their side to keep them from spilling ink or drying out.

For Temporary Lines

Chalk Pencils: and markers are good.

Wash Away Pens: however, if you live in a very humid area, the marks may disappear before you want them to.

Rotary Cutter/Mat/Ruler: The single most important tool for the

quilter has become the [rotary cutter](#). In one step, you can measure and cut perfect straight strips for making patchwork. It has replaced the need for patchwork templates and the ability to cut perfectly straight lines with scissors.

The acrylic ruler is essential to the rotary cutter. Metal rulers ruin the blade and wooden rulers dull the blade. The acrylic rulers not only have measuring lines, but marks also for cutting various angles.

The cutting mat is very necessary—it holds the fabric still, protects table surfaces from the sharp blade and it prevents the blade from becoming dull.



How to Use a Rotary Cutter

Lay your fabric on the mat, line up the edge of the fabric to the lines on the mat. Place the ruler along the fabric where you will make your cut. Place one hand flat on the ruler. Hold the rotary cutter against the ruler at a bit of an angle and cut away from your body. You may have to reposition your hand holding the ruler down so that the ruler doesn't slip on the fabric. If this is your first time using a rotary cutter, practice on some junk fabric. It took me several tries.



Best Quilting Scissors

- [Havel's 8" Sewing/Quilting Scissors](#) to cut fabric
- [Havel's 5 1/2" Curved Tip Sewing Scissors](#) for appliqué
- [Havel's 5 1/4" Ultimate Embroidery Scissors](#) at the sewing machine

Sewing Machine

It should be in good working order. If it hasn't been used in a while, it should probably be serviced. Good working order means that the thread tensions work well. When you make a straight stitch on the machine, it is a smooth, even stitch with no puckers.

A clean machine is very important. Lint can build up in the bobbin area and wreck the timing of the machine and prevent good stitching.

Be sure to follow the instructions in your owner's manual for the care and cleaning of your machine.

If you have a new machine, use the owner's manual and become familiar with your machine before starting to quilt. When I acquire a new machine, I always do this. I will spend a day (or longer) learning all about my machine and go through every operation that my machine will perform so that I understand it.



If you are thinking of buying a new sewing machine, ask someone you know and admire and who sews beautifully—what does she/he suggest? You want a good dealer. It is just like buying a car: you won't be happy with your purchase if the sewing shop doesn't support you with classes, service and supplies for your machine. I use Bernina.



Machine Embroidery Needles

Be sure you buy the sewing machine needles that fit your machine. Believe it or not, sewing machine needles come in different lengths. The company that makes your machine will have the best advice for the needles for our machine. Don't buy cheap needles—they are bad needles.

Paint Brush

Keep a soft bristle paint brush by your machine. Clean out the bobbin area and the needle area several times a day when you are doing a lot of stitching. The lint that builds up will affect the quality of your stitches.



Quilt Pins

These are long pins with a plastic ball head. They are long to be able to go through several layers of fabric and the heads make them easy to pick up and to find.

Design Wall or Layout Area



When I lived in a teeny tiny home with no room at all to lay out a quilt, I used my bed as a layout space. I would pin sections of my quilt to a sheet (which was spread out on the top of the bed) to help me see how the quilt would look. If I needed to see it hanging up, I would hang the sheet from the top of a window's curtain rod. There are many fancy solutions for this need. I use flannel backed vinyl (tablecloth material) tacked to a wall in my stitch studio with upholstery tacks.

Iron

I use an inexpensive iron that gets very hot...unfortunately, I'm very clumsy and I drop my irons. I also use hobby irons and travel irons for small areas of pressing. I find that the small irons get very hot and are very easy to manipulate in small sections of work.

I don't use steam for the most part in my work. Steam can distort the fabric.



Ironing Surface

I made a large surface that I put onto my ironing board. I followed Sharon Schamber's instructions: I started with a large section of OSB or MDF plywood board (your local home improvement place will know what this is and it isn't expensive) cut to the size I wanted. Layer this with low loft cotton batting and cotton duck fabric. Then, pull the fabrics to the back and secure with a staple gun. This gives me a large and very flat surface which is perfect for pressing quilts.



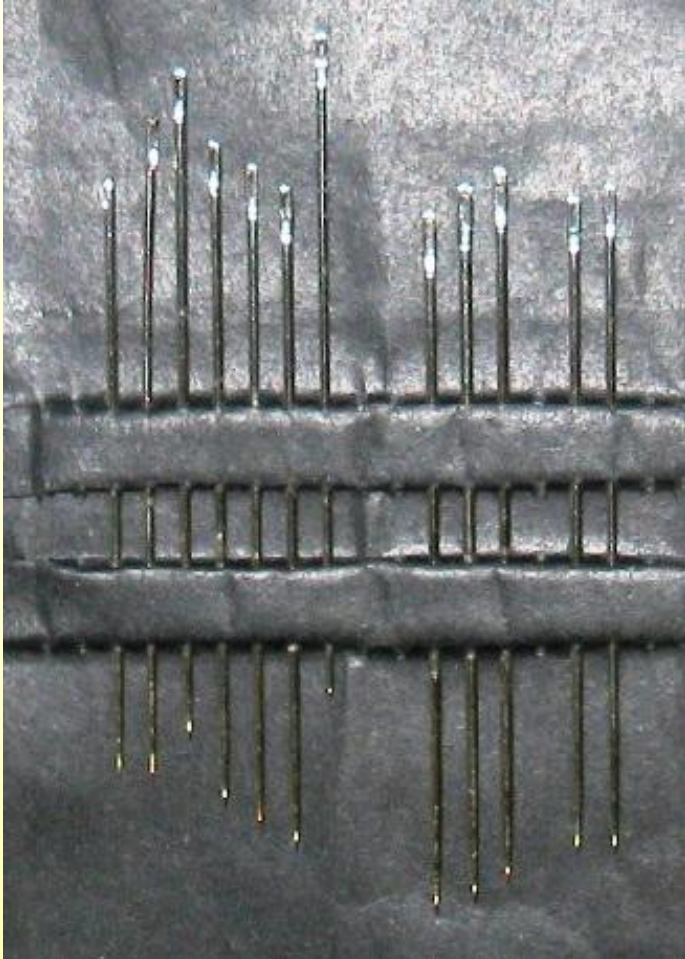
Pressing Cloth

Especially if you are using fusible webs, paints, or materials made with metal threads or nylon. Simply, a pressing cloth can be an old sheet or pillow case or a piece of muslin that will protect both the iron's surface and the fabric's surface.

Lint Roller

Can be used to clean my design wall, my ironing surface and even stray threads on my quilt.





Hand Needles

Hand Needles, called "betweens" work well for burying threads. Use in stitching binding and rod pockets to a quilt and doing any hand stitching that may be required.

2. Essential Materials for the Beginning Quilter-Fabric

Cotton Fabric

When you are new at something, it is best to use the easiest materials. When it comes to sewing a quilt, the best material to use is 100% cotton fabrics. It is very easy to find cotton fabric for quilting these days. Walk into any fabric store and they will have a whole section for quilting. Look at and feel these fabrics. The feel will be a medium weight fabric with body. This is different from lightweight fabrics or upholstery fabrics. There will be a natural feel to the fabric as well, not slippery or heavy or rough. So, this fabric is perfect for cutting out shapes for appliqué or cutting and stitching patchwork.

You will see a beautiful variety of colors and patterns in these cotton fabrics. Where do you start? My first advice is to start with your favorite colors and styles. You will enjoy the process with every quilt you make if you use fabric in the colors and patterns that you love. Here are three representative groups of fabric:

The first group of fabrics is of Japanese design and interspersed with small printed fabrics. The Japanese patterns are rather large and spray across the fabric. The smaller prints sort of contain the large prints and work well together in a patchwork quilt. The colors of the small prints also bridge the colors of the large prints. So if you like Japanese style and bright intense colors, then this group may appeal to you.



This second fabric grouping is of more old-fashioned or traditional prints. You will find this type of printed fabric in quilts made in the early to mid 1900's. The fabrics in the photo are reproductions of those old-fashioned fabrics.



Quilters who like this style of quilts tend to like a muted color palette and traditional quilt patterns.

This group of fabrics is called Batik. Batiks are made in India and the prints are made by printing the fabric with

wax and then they are dyed in various colors. The wax is then melted away, leaving the printed image. So, the prints won't be perfect even though they are perfectly beautiful. Batik is more tightly woven than regular cotton fabric and some of the wax residue will remain, so they are a little tougher and stronger than regular cotton prints. This



group is also very bright in color and appeals to some quilters.



I have shown you three different groups of fabrics, each of which is very popular among quilters. There are many more and lots to learn. You must make your own choices. The more quilts you make (or look at) the more you will learn about how the colors and prints of fabrics work together.

The pattern you will use for your first quilt will also help to determine

what fabrics you choose. For example, if you make a pattern which requires high contrast among the fabric pieces, then it will be important to choose dark, medium and light colors to create that contrast. The example above is a detail from a Seminole patchwork quilt. The high contrast is created by using colors that contrast well: dark, medium and light of one color (blue in this case).

Pre-Wash Your Fabrics

There are several reasons to pre-wash your fabric before starting a quilt. Cotton fabrics are finished with assorted chemicals to make them look good in the store, help prevent wrinkles and adds a sheen.

The chemicals can:

1. Be harmful to one's skin over long periods of exposure.
2. Hide the real qualities of the fabric by filling in the weave of the fabric and giving the appearance of a finely woven material.
3. Hold in dyes that may run when washed.

Backing Fabric

You want to use the same high quality cotton fabric for the back of your quilt as for the top. Some people use sheets, but this isn't a good idea because sheets usually have a polyester content in them which causes the needle to skip when machine quilting. If the quilt is to be hand quilted, needling through polyester/cotton mix is very hard. If the sheet used is very high thread count cotton, this is just as hard to work with as the poly/cotton blend. If you have a 100% cotton sheet that feels like your regular cottons used for the top, then this will be fine to use.

3. Essential Materials for the Beginning Quilter-Batting

The Best Battings for Your First Quilts

Batting is the inner layer between the top of the quilt and the back of the quilt. It is this stuffing that makes a quilt a quilt, and not a blanket. There is a dizzying array of battings available to the quilter these days! I will break it down for you and suggest a good quilt batt for the beginner.

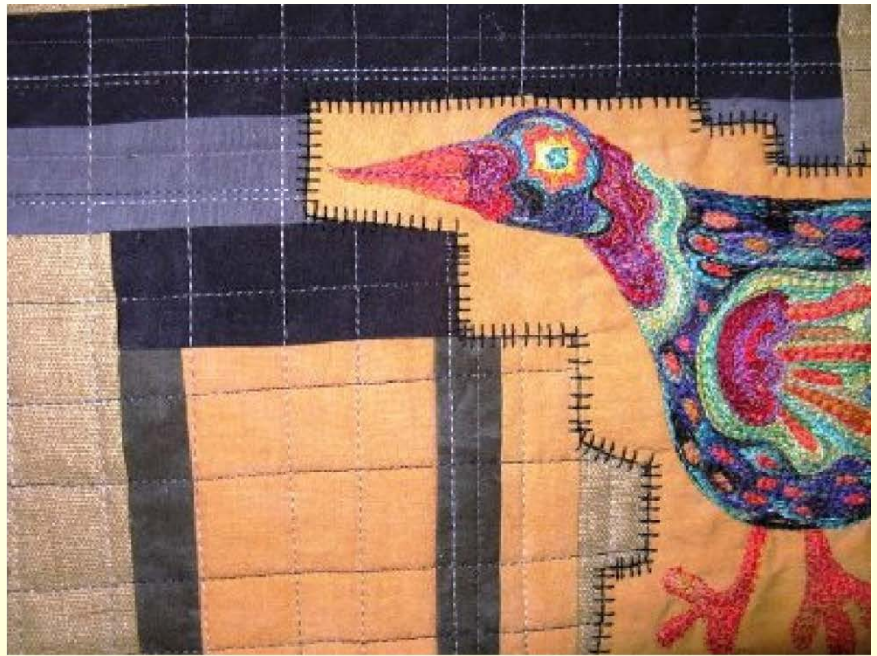


Thirty-four years ago, when I began to make quilts, there were few choices from few companies: traditional cotton batting (low-loft) and polyester batting in fluffy and low-loft. I hand quilted at the time, so a low-loft polyester batting was my best choice because it was easy to hand quilt.

I machine quilt now, so I can quilt easily through cotton batting, so a traditional or low-loft cotton batting is what I choose for most of my quilts. However, most of my quilts are artwork for the wall with lots of embellishing and quilting, so I want a very flat finished look. I get that with cotton.

For bed, baby and lap quilts, many people choose to use polyester batting for several reasons:

1. It is relatively inexpensive.
2. It washes beautifully and doesn't shrink.
3. It gives a lovely loft to the quilt stitching, creating that great quilted texture.



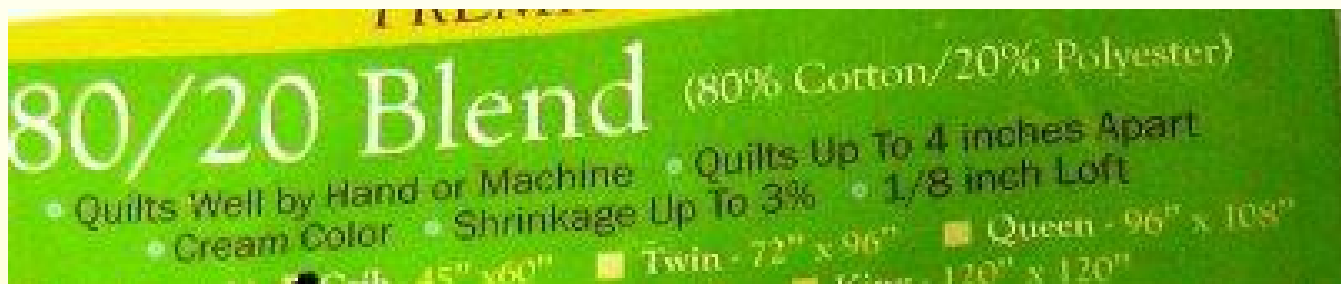
My suggestion is to use good quality low-loft polyester batting for your first quilts.

That being said, the internet has many sites about quilt battings. For instance, the companies that make them have charts that explain the fi-

ber content and intended use for each batt. It is hard to stay current with all the innovations made by the batting companies...they are improving and adding to the variety of products all the time. A few of the companies that make good battings are Legacy (by Pellon), Mountain Mist, Hobb's, Fairfield, Quilter's Dream, and Warm'n Natural.



The packaging will also give you information about the fiber content, instructions for use and other important information.



Competition quilters (those that enter contests to win) use specialty battings for their unique qualities. Three notable examples are:

- 1. Wool batting**—it is very springy, so when you have a very closely quilted design, the batting still fluffs up in the un-quilted spaces.
- 2. Silk batting**—you can get a lovely quilted texture even when quilting very close. It keeps the quilt soft, drapery and lightweight.
- 3. Bamboo batting**—environmentally friendly as it is a renewable source. This batting is lovely to the touch and quilts like butter by hand or machine.

Some fabric stores have batting on a roll with no brand on it. This stuff may be for upholstery or it may be a low quality batting. Check to see if there are holes in it, rough texture or globs of resin. Don't use it if you spot these things.

Some fabrics have good quality batting on rolls or boards...these will have a brand on the ticket and this is a great way to get batting at a good price.

The thing to do is to go to your local fabric store or quilt shop and see what is available. I like to pick up samples of different battings when I go to the quilt shows, too. When you have the chance to pick up samples of different battings, use them to make samples for yourself so that you can see the different qualities.

You can get battings in white, natural and black. The white is, of course, good for a pure white quilt and the black for a black or very dark colored quilt.

Keep in mind that when you hear about a great batting from somebody, they are talking from the experience of using it in the type of quilts they make, in other words, consider the



source. The fiber content and the way different battings are made really do make a difference in the way they perform and finish when made into a quilt.

4. Essential Materials for the Beginning Quilter-Threads

Quilters are an emotional group of people. We tend to fall in love with a thread, a pair of scissors, a sewing machine or fabric. After we love it, we defend it and try to convince everyone that, "Mine is the best!" Please keep this in mind when I give you advice...I am suggesting materials for the beginner. When you get to know all the products available, then you will make informed choices.



The variety of threads available today is wonderful! I have almost never met a thread I didn't like. However, I didn't like the 4-for-a-dollar-thread...it was bad thread.

The problem with too many choices is, "What do you need?"

You Need:

- Thread to sew patchwork together
- Thread to stitch appliqué shapes onto fabric
- Thread for the bobbin
- Thread to baste the quilt
- Thread to quilt the quilt

There are even more choices when it comes to decorative stitching on the surface of the quilt!

Sewing Patchwork

When you sew patchwork on the sewing machine, you want a thread that is of consistent high quality and will give you a good even stitch.

[Coats&Clark Dual Duty](#) regular sewing thread—this is a polyester thread of good quality that most people use. Many good clothing designers and manufacturers use this thread also.



100% cotton thread—some people feel very strongly about piecing cotton fabric with cotton threads. This thread is also used for appliqué and quilting.



The picture shows a group of 24 colors of [STAR](#) cotton thread which I designed, King Tut, Gutermann, Metrosene are favorite threads for piecing.

I use regular sewing thread for patchwork. It is economical and because this thread doesn't "show" in the work, it doesn't have to be fancy. Use a thread that blends well with your fabrics so that it doesn't show.

Stitching Appliqué

Appliqué shapes can be stitched with any good quality thread—depending on the look you want. I think that you should start with either cotton or rayon as these threads behave well in the sewing machine.

The picture shows rayon threads from several different companies. As you can see, rayon thread has a lovely sheen like silk. It actually is a silk substitute (silk thread is very expensive). Rayon thread will shrink and fade after time and it isn't as strong as cotton. That is why many people use it decoratively in machine embroidery and to enhance appliqué.



The polyester threads that have recently come on the market are quite superior to the old polyesters and give the same look as rayon. They are very good for quilting.

Bobbin Thread

This term can be confusing...there are specific threads called "bobbin thread"; and any thread that you put in the bobbin will be called "bobbin thread". Threads called "bobbin thread" are usually a lightweight thread that is used for programmed machine embroidery. For our purposes, the bobbin thread is that which is put in the bobbin.

When sewing patchwork, use the same thread in the bobbin that you will use in the top of your sewing machine, or "the needle thread".

When stitching appliqué shapes to the top of your quilt, use a regular sewing thread in the bobbin, even when you use a cotton or rayon in the needle thread.

When quilting, the bobbin thread should be the same thread as in the needle thread.

Basting Thread

When you baste, you are stitching the quilt top, batting and backing together with very large stitches. This keeps everything in a place as you quilt. I use a very strong hand quilting thread for this. I like to use a thread that is similar in color or as light in color as the quilt.

Quilting Thread

There are many threads labeled as "machine quilting" threads...they are all good. The polyester and cotton threads are the same as described above. Don't use hand quilting threads, they don't work well in your sewing machine.



Terry White is a studio fiber artist. She has been doing this work since 1996, and she discovered the techniques she uses: threadpaint, machine appliqué, piece, quilt, embellish with beads, fibers and minutiae with sewing machine techniques, through experimentation and self-study. Terry teaches these techniques through classes and videos.

Over the years Terry has been published in over 50 articles in magazines and books, including: McCall's Needlework; Quilter's Newsletter; Machine Embroidery and Textile Arts; CMA Trade Magazine; Stitch n Sew Quilts; Quick n Easy Quilts; Quilt World Magazine and Calendar; Quilting Arts Calendar 2003; America from the Heart; America's Best; America Sews.

She is a wife, stitcher, artist, sister, mother, friend, nana, gardener, baker, writer, student, teacher and American.

See more of Terry's work at www.threadpaint.com.

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