

## Quilting Tips, Tricks, and Tools

### Piecing

1. If you want really perfect half square triangles, cut the squares at a full inch measurement instead of the 7/8" in the pattern. Sew, cut, & press. Then trim to a perfect measurement using the 45 angle on your ruler aligned with the triangle hypotenuse.
2. If you have trouble with your quarter inch, use a piece of moleskin or several layers of post-it notes to make an edge. Place a ruler's ¼" line under the needle of your machine then line the moleskin up with the ruler's edge. This will act as a guide for your fabric moving through the machine.
3. Mark your ironing board cover using pigma pens with straight lines at 1" intervals. When pressing strip sets line the edge up with the lines to avoid pressing in curves resulting in the rainbow effect.
4. You can create one of those extra large ironing board covers yourself. Cut a piece of ¾" plywood 55" x 20" and cover it with a layer of cotton batting. Use a staple gun to attach a piece of muslin for the final cover that you can then mark as in the above tip. You can lay the new board right on top of the normal ironing board.
5. For paper piecing fold the paper back on the line after stitching to trim away excess. The fold will help the paper tear away easier.
6. Better yet, for paper piecing, use the water soluble paper to copy the designs and then just mist away the paper!
7. The Angler 2 works well for half square triangles. It eliminates the need to draw the diagonal line.
8. Eleanor Burn's ruler for making flying geese creates perfect geese every time with minimal wasted fabric.
9. A design wall is an excellent way to keep track of your pieced projects order. You can make an easy design wall by using a piece of Styrofoam insulation cut to your desired dimension then cover with a neutral flannel that you can pin in place using straight pins. When it gets dusty you can easily unpin it and wash it. I've even lightly ironed one large fused project while on the wall – but be careful not to iron too long, certainly not long enough for permanent adhesion with the fusible because you could start a fire or melt the underboard.
10. Does your ruler slip sometimes when cutting strips for piecing? Place your hand on the ruler so that your pinky finger rests against the outside edge of the non-cutting side. That will help hold the ruler in place more firmly.
11. Flying Geese x4 ruler by Lazy Girl Designs: A quick and easy way to make multiple flying geese blocks in 12 sizes. Cut one large square & 4 small ones to make 4 flying geese blocks. Great instructions with the ruler. Tip from Ruthie Hoover.
12. Paper piecing: I put the letters of the pattern on Post Its and stick them on the fabric. After all the pieces are cut for a section, I put them in a Ziploc bag to keep them sorted. Tip from Helen Miller.

13. Double cut: When cutting pieces from strips, double the width to decrease the “correction” required by moving the ruler. In other words, if you are making 3 inch squares, cut a 6 inch width and then cut that into two 3 inch squares. You don’t have to move the ruler as much so there is less distortion. Tip from Shannon Bartlett.
14. Strip stack: when cutting stripped pieces, stack them so that seams interlock or overlap. This will help keep the fabric flatter when you cut and you don’t have to fight the “bump” of the seams. Tip from Shannon Bartlett.
15. Tiger Tape: There is a new product out from Tiger Tape to help with triangles. It has the line down the middle with a scant quarter inch seam marked on both sides so you don’t have to draw the marking in yourself. Just stick the tape on the fabric, sew and cut. Saves lots of time. Tip from Shannon Bartlett.
16. To cut chain pieced sets apart, Evy Kummerle has a nifty tool that supports a seam ripper in an upright position so that you can just slice the threads between units with a downward slash. Her tool has a hockey puck like base with a hole in the center to hold the seam ripper handle with the “blade” portion pointing up. Keepsake Quilting has a similar tool called a “table top seam ripper” for \$4.99; however, it has a narrower base and looks like it could be a little tippy.

### Appliqué

1. Needle turn will go easier if you finger press in the fold prior to pinning or basting the piece in place. (Piece O’Cake way)
2. Needle turn is not always the best way to do appliqué. Be sure to consider other methods.
3. Circles are best done using a heat resistant template, gathering the circle around it, spraying with starch, pressing in place, and then removing the template before sewing the circle to your piece. Thin metal washers from the hardware store work nicely for circle templates. Let them cool before removing so you don’t burn your fingers!
4. Roxanne’s water soluble glue with a narrow applicator. (Be sure to wash it out well after each use.)
5. A light box can be made easily by putting a piece of plexiglass over an expanded dining table without putting in the table leaf. Or if you have a clear plexiglass extended top that fits around your machine, put a light under it. The portable Ott light works really well for this.
6. Turn narrow tubes for stems easily by using Fasturn tube turners.
7. Make bias strips for stems using bias bars.
8. You can use clear monofilament thread in the bobbin when satin stitching multiple colors on your machine appliquéd quilt top. Be careful not to overfill the bobbin as plastic bobbins have been known to break.
9. Vickie Mills sent in a tip on making perfect appliqué circles that you gather around a heat resistant template. Instead of doing a hand gathering stitch

around each piece of fabric for the circle, try this instead. Cut a scrap of fabric a little larger than your circle fabric. Using perle cotton or other heavy thread stitch your gathering stitches on this piece. Then spray starch your circle fabric. Place your gathering circle on the ironing board, lay the damp starch piece on top, then place your circle template on top of the starched piece. Pull the gathering stitches, press with a hot iron to dry the starched piece. Once all have cooled, remove the template and the circle fabric. Ungather the scrap fabric, iron it flat and repeat for the next circle. You've saved yourself a lot of hand gathering stitches!

### Hand quilting

1. The Hera marker makes straight line creases to follow for cross hatch quilting. It can also be used for curves although not as effectively. It works best with fabrics that read as a solid. Don't get your markings dampened or wet though or they'll disappear. Advantage: no marking to erase when you're done.
2. If you use the blue "disappearing" marker be very careful to NOT iron or expose to excessive heat as this will permanently set the blue lines.
3. If you have trouble keeping track of your scissors when hand quilting make a necklace by tying some ribbon to your scissors. They are always ready. Works especially when traveling and sewing in the car or on a plane. Tip from Barb Horlocker.

### Machine quilting

1. Use a walking foot that is open in the front for in-the-ditch quilting to better see what you are doing.
2. Cotton battings work best as they cling to the cotton top & back.
3. Use the needle down position on your machine in free motion. When you stop and start lift the needle before starting to avoid a jag in your stitching line.
4. From Alex Anderson, if using safety pins to baste your quilt, pin them 2" apart to avoid tucks in the back.
5. Draw your quilting design onto water soluble paper, pin to the area to be quilted, and stitch. Mist away the paper avoiding pulling stitches lose.
6. Use contact paper to get perfect circles or other shapes. Cut out the desired shape from contact paper, stick to your quilt top in desired location, free motion quilt around the design and pull off. Viola, your design is done with no marking to get out of your quilt!
7. Most machines have a spacing bar that can be used to sew straight lines evenly across your work. Mark the first line. Adjust the space bar the distance from your machine needle to equal the spacing of your crosshatch quilting design.

8. In either free motion or walking foot quilting, pull the bobbin thread up to the top, then take 3-5 tiny stitches before you start stitching at the regular stitch length. At the end of that line of stitching, again take 3-5 tiny stitches then pull up the bottom thread and cut both threads. This will prevent the knot that you get on the back of your quilt if you back tack at the beginning and end of a row of stitches.

### Finishing

1. An edge foot makes machine sewing binding to the top of your quilt much easier and more precise. Align the foot edge to the folded edge of the binding, move the needle 4-5 notches away from the fold and top stitch in place.
2. To square up your blocks or cut miter corners, try the Salem Folding SQ Ruler. (888-209-4087) Squares up 1" to 24" and can also cut corners for miters. Tip from Trish Bishop.
3. Rainbow Binding: Using scraps from your quilt make rainbow binding. Cut strips 2 ½ " (or your preferred width). Sew binding strips beginning each strip 2" lower than the preceding one (a stair step effect). Press to one side. Once you have a long strip set piece, cut along a 45° line for bias rainbow binding that matches your quilt.
4. Perfect Fit Binding from The Quilter's Edge by Darlene Zimmerman p. 80. Tip from Rose Wetherill.
  - a. Start your binding in the middle of one side of the quilt. Leave an 8" to 10" space on the quilt between the beginning and end of the binding. Leave an 8" tail at the beginning and end of the binding strip.
  - b. On a flat surface, have the binding ends meet in the center of the unstitched space, leaving a scant ¼ " space between them. Fold the ends under at that point.
  - c. Cut off one end at the fold. Then, using the end you have cut off (open it, if it is a double binding) use it to measure a binding's width from the fold. Cut off the second end at that point.
  - d. Join the ends at right angles with right sides together. Stitch a diagonal seam. Check to make sure the seam has been drawn properly, then trim to ¼ ". Finger press and reposition the binding on the quilt.
  - e. Finish stitching the binding to the edge of the quilt.
5. The Binding Gizmo from Nancy's Notions includes instructions to do the same technique as described above by Darlene Zimmerman. Tip from Helen Miller.

To get your quilt hanging straight, try these tips from Shirley Stutz.

6. Batting has grain just like fabric. One way stretches some, the other – the straight grain, does not. When sandwiching your quilt, also place it so that the straight grain is vertical so that once the quilt is hung the batting will not stretch out of shape from the weight during hanging.

7. Cut your border strips on the straight grain.
8. Binding can be cut either direction or on the bias if you have curved edges.
9. Block your quilt when it's completed. You can either wet it in the washer by filling the machine with cold water and submerging the quilt, then gently rinsing (no soap needed) & spinning or you can wet with a spray bottle. Either way pin the quilt while wet to a design wall or the carpet so that it is squared up and the same measurement on all sides. Allow to dry completely before unpinning.

### Labels

1. Print them on your computer using special treated fabric. Add a photo of yourself, the quilter, or of the person you're making the quilt for or in memory of.
2. Print the wording on your computer and then hand trace it onto fabric using pigma pens.
3. If writing on fabric, stabilize it by ironing freezer paper to the back.
4. Use a leftover block or fabric scraps from the front as part of your label.
5. Sew a lining to your label right sides together, stitching all the way around the edge. Cut a slit in the middle of the lining, turn, press. It will be easier to stitch your label in place (no turning seam allowance under) and the backing of your quilt will not show through the white area of your label.
6. Eliminate sewing two sides of your label by sewing the label into a corner of the quilt back into the binding seam.

### Embellishing

1. For beading be sure to use special beading thread. Most beads are made from glass and will cut regular threads including heavier quilting thread and then all your beading work will fall off your quilt!
2. A couching foot makes sewing decorative threads to items a breeze. You simply thread your decorative thread through the foot and then zig-zag in place. The foot holds the decorative thread in place for you.

### Designing

1. To check on fabric value or enough different values in your quilt:
  - a. Turn down the lights at night and look at your quilt in low light. You won't be able to see much color but the values will pop out for you.
  - b. If your computer printer has a copy function, make a copy of your fabrics in black and white. You'll only see value not color.
  - c. There is also a tool called a "ruby beholder" that helps with value judgment but it doesn't work on red fabrics.

2. It's helpful to get back some distance from your quilt to check on your design. If your space is small you can still achieve this in one of several ways:
  - a. Use a reducing glass or buy a door peep hole at the hardware store to use like a reducing glass.
  - b. Use binoculars backwards; that is look through the wrong end and your quilt will appear smaller and farther away.
  - c. Take a picture of it with your digital camera and look at it on the small display screen.

### Fabric buying for your stash

Also from Shirley Stutz when asked how much fabric she buys if she sees something she really likes. Remember that Shirley makes BIG quilts.

Border stripes	3 ½ yds
Big prints	6 yds
Backgrounds	5 yds
Any stripe	3 ½ yds

### Organizing

1. Fabric Organizers: Wrap your fabric stash in these plastic cards and you can arrange them on a shelf like books – your stash will look like a mini quilt shop! ([www.polar notions.com](http://www.polar notions.com)) Tip from Trish Bishop.

### Other Tools

1. Shirley Thompson recommends these thread clippers for arthritic hands. They are also excellent for snipping threads during machine embroidery because they can fit under the pressure foot to easily clip threads. (She did not know a name for the clippers, but they look almost like tweezers.)
  - a. Snip-Eze Scissors
2. Judy Theil recommends using a hemostat for the following sewing chores:
  - a. Great for pulling up a bobbin thread when the tail is too short.
  - b. Use for turning tubes or appliqués made with interfacing.
  - c. Use the tips to smooth out edges of appliqué.
  - d. Great for getting things out of narrow spaces – such as paper jammed in your printer.

### Tips internet sites

1. HGTV has many of the old Simply Quilts episodes available with instructions on the internet at HGTV.com. Search on the show first, then the topic. For tips show search on Mark Lipinski or episode 1101.

2. John Flynn Quilting ([flynnquilt.com](http://flynnquilt.com)) has free patterns and lessons including how to diagonally piece a quilt back that saves fabric.
3. From Trish Bishop an excellent tips site: [www.allpeoplequilt.com](http://www.allpeoplequilt.com)