



40 Years of Tips and Tricks from the Old Capitol Quilters Guild

Compiled by Meredith Sewell, OCQG Historian
May 2021

Caution: Not all of these tips have survived the test of time, especially those related to specific products, like marking pens/pencils.

The first “Tip” I spotted was part of a newsletter editor’s notes. “Tips” became a semi-regular feature starting in June of 1985 with them appearing and disappearing over the years. Official tips are repeated here in chronological order of their appearance. It’s interesting to see how our esthetics, interests and quilting methods have grown and evolved over the years. Some of these items would stifle the modern or art quilter and others seem no longer relevant to the way we work today. A sampling from this compilation appear in the May 2021 issue of the OCQG Newsletter.

Here we go:

February 1985 – Sallyann Mettler

Pulling Needles through Fabric While Hand Quilting

A rubber band wrapped around a thimble, or a rubber file finger slipped over it helps in pulling your needle through when quilting. [A similar tip appeared in *May 1992* with the suggestion of turning the rubber secretary finger inside out to avoid the little nobbies from getting caught on the thread. Secretary’s fingers can be found in many sizes at office supply stores. *Geneva Shannon*]

March 1985 – Ottumwa, Iowa Quilt Show

When Joining Pieced Sections by Machine...

Place a pin directly through the two already sewn seams, with the seam allowance on the top section going away from you and the seam allowance of the bottom section coming toward you. This abutment of the seam allowances ensures perfectly matched seams and eliminates bulk.

May 1985 – Muriel Owens of Cedar Rapids

When Quilting in a Quilting Frame...

Mark your quilt edge at $\frac{1}{2}$ and at each $\frac{1}{4}$ way points with a piece of colorful embroidery floss. These will serve as markers to let you know how far you have progressed.

June 1985 – Source not referenced.

Prewashing Fabric

When you buy fabric to quilt with and bring it home, it is wise to wash it right away. This will eliminate the sizing, which is hard to quilt through. It also lets you know if the fabric die will run. Before you wash that fabric cut a small triangle from each corner. This will help keep the fabric from raveling and will also be a sure sign to you that the fabric has been laundered.

October 1985 – Stitch 'n' Sew Cottage

Straightening Crooked Fabric or Blocks

If fabric is crooked from tearing, baste ends together, then wash and dry. Fabric will straighten itself. If a quilt block is crooked, dampen with hot water, blot with towel and then iron to straighten.

February 1986 – Source not referenced.

Piecing Tips

- Use the brightest color most sparingly for an accent. (*Tell this to today's Modern Quilt quilters!— mls*)
- The grainline of each piece should be parallel with the outside edge of the block. It will help if you mark this line on each template.
- Before beginning to sew, pin at the end of each piece and the middle, inserting the pins on the seamline.
- Press seams to one side, not open. Generally, it is a good idea to press the seam toward the darker fabric so it won't show through.
- Fabrics should be of similar weight.
- If you have made a mistake, you ARE permitted to rip out. However, you may not swear while you are doing it.
- Remember that when you piece, you are creating a new fabric from many different fabrics. You may have to sacrifice a favorite fabric because it doesn't fit in with the others.
- Value is more important than an exact color match. That is, you should think of your fabrics as dark, medium, and light rather than red or blue or yellow. Quilters sometimes spend a great deal of time trying to match colors perfectly, and this makes a rather dull, predictable quilt.

September 1986 – Marge Reese

Standard Quilt Sizes

63" x 87" – Twin Coverlet
83" x 114" – Twin Bed Spread
78" x 87" – Double Coverlet
98" x 114" – Double Bed Spread
84" x 92" – Queen Coverlet
104" x 119" – Queen Bed Spread
92" x 100" – King Coverlet
119" x 120" King Bed Spread

October 1986 — Source not credited.

Marking fabrics

Berol brand silver pencil works well to mark black and other dark colors. They are available at office supply stores. The Chalkoner, available from Quiltwright, in white is very nice for marking on black and other dark colors and is narrow enough to use in quilt marking templates. It is also available in red and blue. (A note found in the May 1987 newsletter reads, "The blue Chalkoners were used on the Coralville Library quilts, and are not coming out of some of the fabrics. Be sure to test before marking an entire quilt.")

November 1986 — Source not credited.

Marking Sewing Lines

When piecing triangles and other pieces that you must match the sewing lines, use a small paper punch and punch a hole at the corners of your template, then mark and match the dots and your pieces will be correctly sewn.

May 1987 — Possibly Ann Watson the newsletter editor.

Calculating How Much Fabric You'll Need for a Quilt Top.

When I had the opportunity of driving Marsha McCoskey across the state of Iowa she told me a formula for figuring out about how much material you will need for a quilt top. First figure out how much material you will need for the back of the quilt, for example a quilt that is 90" by 120" would require 7 ½ yards of 44" wide fabric. Take that amount and multiply by 1.5, for our example the total would be $7.5 \times 1.5 = 11.25$ yards. If your calculations are not close to this amount you should probably refigure.

June 1987 — Source not credited.

When ironing fabric...

You should fold it along the original fold line, with the selvages together and then iron. If the fabric is opened up there is more of a chance that ironing will distort the fabric.

October 1987 — Jinny Beyer

Dark-Medium-Light Fabrics

If you find it difficult to determine whether your fabrics fit into dark, medium, or light categories put your fabric selections together and run them through a black and white copy machine. (Today we can take a photo and change it to grayscale.)

April 1988 — Source not credited

Caution While Using Magnetic Tools

Use caution if you own a computer sewing machine and a magnetic Grabbitt, or the new magnetic seam guides. Do not set your Grabbitt directly on the machine, or attach any magnet to your computer sewing machine, this will damage the memory feature.

July 1988 — Marge Reese

Flattening a Warped Cutting Mat

To flatten a cutting mat that was warped by heat, lay it on your sidewalk or driveway on a scorching hot day.

December 1988 — Source not credited.

When pressing bias pieces...

Instead of your normal ironing board, press on a protected hard surface. A board covered with an old ironing board cover with 1 layer of towel makes an excellent pressing board.

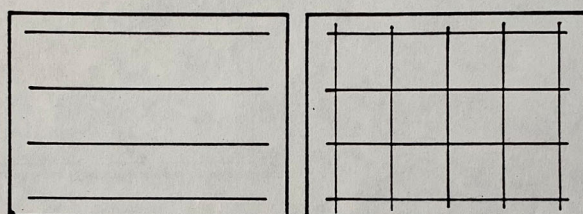
November 1990 — Instructions for block of the month.

Diagram for creating triangle squares.

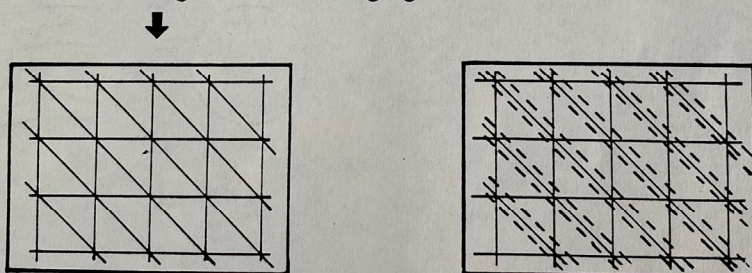
Triangle Squares --

-- the upcoming Block of the Month patterns have plenty of these units. The following steps will yield quick pieced triangle-squares.

- Step 1: Determine size of *finished* triangle-square. (Small size are 2" for Block of the Month Patterns. Large size are 4".) Now add 1 whole inch to finished size which makes small 3" and large 5".
- Step 2: Lay two fabrics *right sides* together, lighter fabric on top, and pin together. Pieces no more than 18" x 22" are easiest to work with.
- Step 3: Mark 3" or 5" grid of squares on wrong side of lighter fabric.



- Step 4: Draw diagonal lines through grid.



- Step 5: Sew 1/4" seams on *both* sides of every diagonal line. Then cut apart on drawn lines.

VIOLA -- 24 perfect, same-sized triangle-squares!!!

For even less fuss and measuring, check out Speed Grids by E Z Quilting available at most fabric stores. These are available in different sizes.

A GUIDE FOR NEW COLLECTORS

By Shelly Zegart

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BUYING OLD QUILTS

The bidders shifted nervously in their seats as the next item was offered for sale: a 19th century applique quilt from Baltimore, Maryland. \$17,000....\$18,000.... \$20,000!

As antique quilt prices have climbed, interest in collecting quilts has grown proportionately. The number of collectors grows each year, and often many of these new collectors have questions. What do you look for in an old quilt? What makes a good investment? How do you start a quilt collection? As a quilt collector, I have developed a few guidelines.

Buy condition. Old does not have to mean torn and ragged. You can buy an antique quilt, even a 19th century one, in excellent condition. The same rule applies to quilts that are signed and dated. Unfortunately, a signed and dated ragged quilt is still a ragged quilt.

Quilting counts. I don't carry a ruler in my pocket to measure the number of quilting stitches to the inch, but in general, smaller stitches and intricate quilting patterns add visual appeal and increase value. As a quilt dealer, I have learned that well-quilted quilts sell. As a collector, however, I have learned to break this rule. One of my favorite quilts, a "Curiosity Bedspread" made for a Sears, Roebuck and Company contest in 1935, is not quilted at all! A

charming barnyard scene made this non-traditional quilt irresistible.

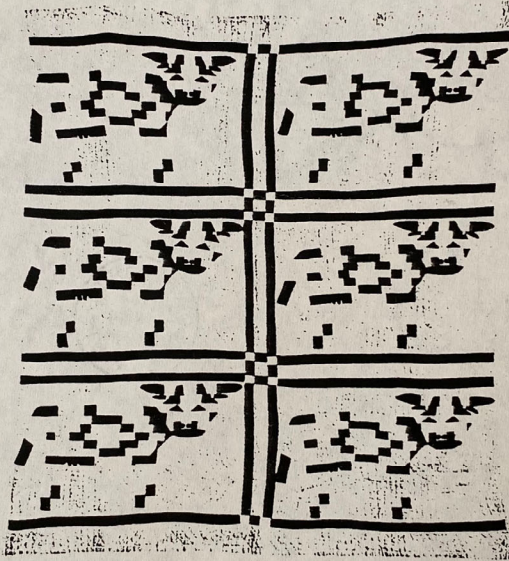
Think thin. In general, thin quilts are better than thick quilts with heavy batting (these are also called "fat" quilts.) Again, I have ignored this guideline more than once. It depends on the kind of fat

Be an informed buyer. Read, visit museums with quilt collections, talk to other collectors. Look at as many quilts as you can before you actually spend your money. You will have a better sense of what you like, as well as what is available in terms of both style and quality.

Be realistic. Of course it is fun to use and display your quilts. However, using a quilt as a bedcover or wallhanging does shorten its life. If you want to make sure your quilt will be around for future generations to enjoy, save it for special occasions. When in doubt, use only a textile professional for repairs and cleaning.

Buy what you love. This is perhaps the most important advice I can give a beginning collector. Ten years ago, I was a beginning collector. I knew nothing about quilts, but I had studied contemporary art. My interest developed when decorating my new, contemporary home.

The first quilt I ever bought is hanging on my family room wall. It's a Carpenter's Wheel variation, a traditional pattern executed in subdued blues and browns. The quilting is neither fine nor fancy, just parallel lines running the length of the quilt. It's not an exceptional quilt, or a best of kind, nor is it not like anything else in my collection. Nevertheless, it is wonderful and I love it. That is what collecting is all about.■



COWS, 62" x 69", c. 1900, from Kentucky, maker unknown, collection of author.

quilt. One of my special treasures is a folksy cow quilt on feedsacks. Technically it is not very good, but it is a one-of-a-kind piece with naive appeal and it makes me smile!

Buy from a reputable dealer. You will have a larger selection of better quality quilts and you should receive a guarantee of authenticity.

Shelly Zegart is an internationally respected authority on the cultural, historic and investment value of antique quilts. A founder of the Kentucky Quilt Project, the nation's first quilt project, she has lectured for Sotheby's, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, New York University, the Museum of American Folk Art and many other museums and organizations in the United States.

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September 1991 – Sharon Somers

Dark-Medium-Light Fabrics

When doing patterns like the Log Cabin it's important to make sure the light fabrics are light and the dark fabrics are dark. If too many medium fabrics sneak in you will lose the striking dark/light effect. To help you distinguish the darks from the mediums and lights take a piece of red acetate, a red report cover will work, and place it over your different pieces of material. The red acetate will eliminate the colors, leaving you with just reds of dark, medium, and light.

October 1991 – Sharon Somers

Create a Flannel Wall

Buy 5 yards of white flannel cut in half and sew the two pieces side by side to make a wall sized piece of about 6' x 8'. Now comes the hard part: you have to find a wall big enough to hang it on, in your sewing room. You can fold over any excess and thumbtack the flannel to the wall. Then, you just stick the fabric pieces and blocks to it, rearrange them, step back and look, and rearrange them again. No more crawling around on the floor and no more cats tearing through your perfect arrangement of 200, 2" triangles.

December 1991 – Velma Beaver

Dealing with Stray Threads

While quilting on the Raffle quilt we began to get a good scattering of loose threads and clippings and had no place to put them. Velma Beaver piped up and told us of a good method to deal with stray threads. Get a small empty margarine tub and cut a circular hole in the lid. Simple! Now you can stuff the clippings and other pieces of small trash into the tub, it's neat and out of the way.

January 1992 – Sharon Somers

Graph Paper for Drawing Patterns

Graph paper ruled 4 squares per inch is good for drawing patterns, because the 1/4" seam allowance is so easy to determine.

February 1992 – Harriet Hargrave

Marking Quilts

I learned a great way to transfer a quilting pattern to your quilt top using tulle (bridal netting). Lay the tulle over your paper quilting pattern and trace the pattern on to the tulle using a Sharpie (indelible) marker. Pin the net pattern to positions on your quilt. Now you can use chalk, white colored pencils or those blue pens to mark your quilt top through the tulle marking.

March 1992 – Carolyn Anton-Page

Storing Those Blocks and Tops

If you're like me your blocks for that rainy day quilt are crammed into some drawer somewhere all wrinkled. Well, a friend recently presented her blocks to us all neatly stacked and clamped together on one side with a pants hanger. To store them all you had

to do was hang them in an out of way closet or on the back of a door. For tops you fold them neatly lengthwise and drape them over a regular hanger.

April 1992 – Maybe Lauren Tiffany

Antique Quilt Care

For those antique quilts that you are too afraid to wash here is the method used by museums to clean their quilts. Lay a clean sheet on the floor and lay the quilt on it. Take a piece of plastid window screen and lay it on the quilt. Now thoroughly vacuum the quilt through the screen. When you refold the quilt fold it in thirds rather than in half. Many old quilts have a permanent crease down the middle from always being folded in the same spot.

May 1992 – Jean Reimann

Shaving the Beard

Sometimes a batting beards badly. Bearding is when fine polyester fibers sneak through the top of your quilt and it looks like it's grown a thin head of hair (or beard). You can take a cloths shaver to the quilt and it does a very good job.

June 1992 – Sharon Somers

Machine Washing Narrow Yardage

Ever wash a $\frac{1}{4}$ yard of fabric and have it come out twisted up like a rope? Often you end up with permanent crease marks. To prevent this all you have to do is fold the fabric in half, pin the layers together with a brass safety pin and wash. (Brass doesn't rust)

July 1992 – Sharon Somers from her high school Math

Determining the length of diagonal side of a triangle

Sometimes you need to know the length of the diagonal side of a triangle when you're piecing. Like, when you put your blocks on point and you need to cut the big triangles along the edge. Multiply the length of the short side of the triangle (say 12") by 1.414 (use a calculator) and then add 1-1/4" for the seam allowance. So the formula is: short side times 1.414 = diagonal side.

September 1992 – Sharon Somers

Sewing Machine Thread Tension

When checking the thread tension on your sewing machine it makes it a lot easier to see if you use red thread in the bobbin and white thread on top.

October 1992 – Sharon Somers

Using Mirrors to Simulate Duplicate Settings

Never quite sure what a block repeated over and over is going to look like? Get two 12" mirror tiles and tape them together along one edge. Hold them open at a right angle and place on the edge of your quilt block. Now you've got four blocks!

October 1992 – Sharon Somers

Planning Quilting

I love quilting that flows from one block to another and ignores the seams. Get some tracing paper and lay it over your quilt. Now you can draw on the paper, experimenting with different designs, and at the same time see the quilt underneath. This method will let you see how the quilting will look on your quilt.

(Updated in November 1992 newsletter – Waxed paper works even better. Draw on the paper using a dead or retracted ball point pen. Because wax paper is long you can lay it between two or more blocks to design an overall quilting design. – Kathy Mueller)

December 1992 – Sharon Somers

Working on the Chain [Piecing] Gang

Often times when you're starting the chain piece the very first piece gets eaten by the machine and the thread knots up on the bottom. To prevent this start your chain with a piece of scrap fabric. If you start and end your chains with scrap pieces then when you cut all your pieces apart you can reuse your two scrap pieces and never have to bother with stray threads running around your sewing room. They will be attached to your scraps.

January 1993 – Sharon Somers

Light Table

There's a light table in every home! My favorite light table is our sliding glass door. Just tape your pattern to the window and then tape your paper or fabric over it and trace away. If at night try turning all the lights on in your room, putting on your hat and glove and then going outside and taping everything to the outside of the window. At this time of year you'll soon decide that you HAVE to do it tomorrow. Either that or your neighbor will call the police about a prowler. (My dining table can be expanded to add table leafs. I will expand the table without the table leafs and place a wood framed glass storm door window over the expanded opening. When I place a light below the glass I have a great horizontal surface to work on. **March 2021** – Meredith Sewell)

February 1993 – Sharon Somers

Cone Thread Holder

Need a holder for your cone thread? Place the cone in a jar and set it behind the machine. Next take a closed safety pin and tape it to your machine near the spool pins and with the small hole sticking above the machine. Now run the thread from the cone through the hole in the safety pin and from there, thread the machine normally.

March 1993 – Sharon Somers

Use 100% Cotton Fabric

Polyester fabric tends to be slippery, ravel more and be very difficult to sew accurate $\frac{1}{4}$ " seams. Cottons will stick together and be sturdier, making it easier to sew and giving you straighter finished edges. Always remove the selvage and throw it away. The selvage is tighter and stiffer than the rest of the fabric and woven with inferior thread. Use good quality thread—preferably cotton. (I know the 6 spools for a \$1 is tempting, but don't. You get what you pay for.)

April 1993 — Sharon Somers

Return of the Flannel Wall

A flannel covered lapboard can come in real handy. It's small enough that you can use it on your lap or next to your sewing machine. Use it to lay out one block at a time. This allows you to see the finished block and makes sewing the pieces together less confusing. Get a piece of scrap board between 1/8" and 1/4" thick (Masonite, paneling) and cut it 12 x 12". Then, cover it with a scrap of white flannel.

May 1993 — Sharon Somers

Hand Quilting

The quilting stitch is a small running stitch. Use a thin batt not a fat batt. Thinner is easier. The quilt in its hoop should not be taut but loose. Try different size hoops to see which is most comfortable. Mark straight line quilting using masking tape. Cookie cutters make nice little quilt patterns. Wear a thimble on the middle finger to push the needle through.

June 1993 — Candace Carmichael

Hanging Miniature Quilts

To hang a miniature quilt, pin two safety pins in the top corners of the back of your quilt. Now you can use the round holes in the pins to loop over nails or straight pins stuck in your wall.

February 1996 — Source not credited.

Removing Cat Hair

Slightly dampen a sponge to remove cat hair from finished projects.

February 1996 — Source not credited but it could be Becky Ross, the newsletter editor.

Storing Blocks in Pizza Boxes

Clean unused pizza boxes are great for storing quilt blocks flat, or organizing watercolor squares (good for carrying to class).

February 1996 — Source not credited.

Using Chopsticks as a Tool

Use a chopstick for poking out binding corners and stuffing dolls and appliqué grapes.

March 1996 — Source not credited.

Light Table Ideas

A piece of Plexiglas supported by kid's blocks and a night light on an extension cord, or use your kitchen window!

March 1996 — Source not credited

Closing Safety Pins

Use grapefruit spoon or serrated steak knife for closing safety pins.

May 1998 – Source was the Quintessential Quilts Newsletter

A Variety of Tips

- Try putting a piece of white paper behind your needle's eye for easy threading.
- Take quilts that are faded and frazzled at the edges and add a new brightly colored binding. It does wonders to revive.
- To keep the edge of a heavy cardboard pattern from wearing, edge it with cellophane tape.
- Allow about 17" extra at the top of a bed quilt to cover the pillows.
- Stick your quilting needles into a bar of still wrapped soap – it keeps them sharp.
- A dull needle can be sharpened by rubbing the point against an emery board.
- Roll leftover fabric strips into cardboard tubes from paper towels. Makes storage neat and tidy.
- Never sew a second seam across a first seam until it has been pressed.
- An unusual source for quilting motifs for borders or setting strips is the tire thread on your car.
- Cocoa is a good substitute for stamping powder. Use it with a stencil to mark quilting designs on light cloth.

April 1999 – Source not given

Setting Dye in Fabric

To set dye in fabric, soak it in a sink of hot water with ¼ cup vinegar and an eye dropper's worth of iodine. Let the fabric soak one hour, then rinse.

April 1999 – Source not given

Eliminating Wrinkles after Washing Fabric

Remove fabric from the dryer immediately and steam-press them. If they are too wrinkled, dampen them and iron them dry.

May 1999 – Source not given.

When traveling

Take along a light bulb with high wattage to put in lamps in motel rooms so you can see better for sewing. Always carry a magnet with sewing projects in the event that you need a quick pick up of spilled pins or lost needle. Use a small bar of soap for a pincushion. It lubricates needles and prevents pins from rusting.

November 2002

Bounce – More Than a Fabric Softener (quite the promo for Bounce!)

- Repel mosquitoes – tie a sheet of Bounce through a belt loop when outdoors during mosquito season.
- Eliminate static electricity from your television screen – Since Bounce is designed to help eliminate static cling, wipe your television screen with a used sheet of Bounce to keep dust from resettling.
- Dissolve soap scum from shower doors – Clean with a used sheet of Bounce.

- Freshen the air in you home – Place an individual sheet of Bounce in a drawer or hang one in the closet.
- Prevent thread from tangling – Run a threaded needle through a sheet of Bounce to eliminate the static cling on the thread before sewing.
- Eliminate static cling from pantyhose – Rub a damp, used sheet of Bounce over the hose.
- Prevent musty suitcases – Lace an individual sheet of Bounce inside empty luggage before storing.
- Freshen the air in you car – Place a sheet of Bounce under the front seat.
- Keep the shock away – Place a sheet in your coat pocket to avoid the shock you get getting in and out of the car in the winter.
- Clean baked-on food from a cooking pan – Put a sheet in the pan, fill with water, let sit overnight, and sponge clean. The anti-static agents apparently weaken the bond between the food and the pan while the fabric softening agents soften the baked-on food.

October 2009 – Credit not given

Nicked Rotary Cutter Blades

If your rotary cutter blade has a nick on the edge and skips threads with every turn, turn the blade over in the rotary cutter and it will often work better. .

November 2009 – Credit not given

Storage

Roll quilts on “swim noodles” and lay flat for storage. Your quilts will have fewer creases than if folded for storage.

December 2009 – Credit not given

Cleaning Scissors and Blades

Use a little rubbing alcohol on a cotton ball to clean scissors blades and rotary cutter blades.

January 2010 – Credit not given

Prewashing Small Pieces of Fabric

Put small fabric pieces in a mesh bag for prewashing. It will reduce fraying and tangling.

February 2010 – Credit not given

Avoid Fabric Softener When Preparing for Fusing

Avoid using fabric softener in the washer or dryer when you prewash fabrics that you later intend to fuse. Fusible web will not adhere properly to fabrics treated with fabric softener.

March 2010 – Credit not given

Take Pictures of Various Settings

Use a digital camera to take pictures of various settings for a quilt on your design wall. It will be easy to recreate the design you like best.

April 2010 – Credit not given

Prewashing Fabric

Completely unfold fabric before putting it into the washing machine to prewash. This helps to eliminate the centers fold.

May 2010 – Credit not given

Making Plastic Templates with a Soldering Iron

Use a soldering iron to perforate plastic templates to make stencils for quilting designs.

June 2010 – Credit not given

Storing Pins & Needles in Empty Tubes or Film Canisters

Use an empty “Chap Stick” tube or 35mm film canister to store pins and needles ready for discard.

July 2010 – Credit not given

Carry Small Graph Paper Pad for Sketching

Keep a small graph paper pad in your purse to take to quilt shows and workshops so you can sketch quilt block designs you want to remember.

September 2010 – Credit not given

Using Christmas Fabrics to Learn New Techniques

Use Christmas fabrics when attending workshops to learn a new technique. Use the blocks to make Christmas gifts such as pillows, bags, or wall hangings. .

November 2010 – Credit not given

Sewing Kit

Prepare a permanent kit of essential sewing tools and keep at the ready for workshops and retreats.

December 2010

Taking Irons to Classes or Retreats

When you go to a quilting class or retreat, take along a pull-top water bottle filled with distilled water for your iron. The bottle doesn’t drip, and the pull-top makes it easy to pour water into the iron. Carry your iron to the workshop in a basket or metal bucket. At the end of the day you can put the hot iron in the basket or bucket for the trip home.

January 2011

Prewashing Fabric

When pre-washing your material, place a piece of muslin in the washing machine. That way you will be able to tell if the fabric is going to run. Before washing fabric, using a rotary cutter with a “pinking” blade, pink the cut edges of the fabric. This will help control fraying and you will easily be able to identify which fabrics in your stash have been pre-washed.

February 2011

Prepping the Quilt Sandwich

When you get ready to sandwich your quilt it helps to use a large yardstick to smooth out the wrinkles in the batting. It only takes a few strokes of the yardstick to get a smooth laying batting, the yardstick acts as an extended long arm and works like a charm. Make sure your yardstick is smooth so that it can glide over the batting easy without any damage to it.

March 2011

Slipping Foot Pedals

Rubberized shelf protectors are wonderful to prevent your sewing machine foot pedal from slipping all over the place. Just cut a piece larger than your foot pedal and place it underneath the foot pedal. Also, if you have trouble with your sewing machine —walking across your table, this same product will help.

April 2011

Dealing with Stray Threads

Use an empty square tissue box for cut threads and small snippets. Place next to your sewing machine and when full, throw it away.

May 2011

DIY Sharps Container

Use an empty pill bottle from your last pharmacy refill (use the child-proof type) to make your own “sharps container” for storing broken needles and pins. When a needle breaks or gets dull, put it in the container. When the container is full, dispose of it in the trash.

June 2011

Foundation Paper Piecing

When paper piecing, use a short stitch length when sewing your fabric to the paper foundation, but use a regular stitch length when sewing blocks together.

July 2011

Easier Needle Threading

If you have a hard time threading a needle from one side, try turning the needle around and thread the other side, every needle has a front and backside.

September 2011

Change your sewing machine needle!

Worn or damaged needles result in:

- Broken or shredded threads
- Skipped or uneven stitches
- Puckered or damaged fabrics
- Popping sound made by sewing machine.

It is recommended that you replace your needle after every four hours of sewing time.

October 2011

Choosing Thread Colors

Choose a color of thread that matches the most dominant color in your fabric. If you are unable to find a perfect match, select a thread that is one or two shades darker. Stitches made with a lighter shade of thread will stand out more.

November 2011

Sewing with Metallic Threads

Use a 14/90 metallic, topstitch, or embroidery needle when sewing with metallic thread. If using a flat metallic thread, it is important to use a vertical spool pin. The twisting action from a horizontal spool pin can cause breakage. Sewing slower will also help prevent breakage.

December 2011

Dealing with Stray Threads

Place a coffee filter on your sewing table next to your sewing machine. Put the cut threads from your sewing project on the filter and they will stay there, keeping your floor thread-free.

January 2012

Hand Sewing Binding

When you are doing the hand sewing of a binding on a quilt and have to stop for a break, put a —chip clip over the needle at the spot where you have stopped sewing. You will protect the needle from falling out of the fabric and it will be easy to find where to begin sewing again.

February 2012 — Eleanor Burns

Turn Project Leftovers into Squares and Strips for Scrap Quilts

When you finish a project cut your leftover scraps into 5" squares, 10" squares, or 2 1/2" strips. Store them together with like size scraps, and on a rainy day pull them out and make a scrappy quilt."

May 2012

Threading a Sewing Machine Needle

If you find the needle hard to thread on your sewing machine, put a piece of white paper behind it and the hole seems to pop out for you to see.

June 2012

Project Management

To take advantage of limited sewing time, keep together all the supplies that you are using for each project so that if you have to abandon the project for a few weeks or even months, you can quickly get back to where you left off.

July 2012

Foundation Paper Piecing

Use an open toe or clear foot on your machine if you have difficulty seeing the lines when you are foundation piecing.

September 2012

Keeping a Thimble on Your Finger

If your thimble is a little too large for your finger, remove the thimble, lick your finger and put the thimble back on...your thimble will not fly off your finger again.

October 2012

Making a Personal Magazine Index

Copy the cover page of a quilt magazine along with the table of contents. Highlight on the table of contents page any article or any quilt you are interested in making. File these cover pages/table of contents in a 3-ring binder. It is easy to flip through these pages to learn the volume and year of the magazine you are looking for.

November 2012

Removing a Spool of Thread from Your Machine

When changing thread on your sewing machine, cut the thread at the spool, and pull the thread out toward the needle. This is much "healthier" for your machine than to pull the thread backwards through the tension disks.

December 2012 — Klaudeen Hansen gave us this tip at her workshop

Sewing Strips Together

When sewing strips of fabric together and one of the strips is a striped fabric, always place the striped fabric on the bottom when sewing the strips. The feed dogs will feed the striped fabric at the same rate on all seams allowing the stripes to remain straight.

February 2013 — from Diane Gaudynski

Adjusting Stitch Length for Machine Quilting

When machine quilting, adjust the length of your stitches based on the weight of your thread. For fine thread, stitch length should be short so the stitches don't look spidery and strung out. Use longer stitches for heavier threads.

March 2013

Cleaning Lint from Bobbin Cases

Small paintbrushes come in handy to clean lint from the bobbin case area of your sewing machine. A good rule of thumb is to clean the lint out of the bobbin area of your machine after every second bobbin runs out.

April 2013

Make a Trial Block before Cutting All the Fabric for a Quilt

Make a trial block to test the accuracy of the pattern before cutting all the fabric for a quilt. This trial block also allows you to change the fabric placement or to change fabrics that don't work well.

May 2013

Pay Attention to How Thread is Wound on the Spool

Thread comes wrapped on a spool two different ways: cross-wound (looks crisscrossed on the spool) or stacked (looks like one thread is next to the other). For best results, place cross-wound thread on a horizontal spool pin and stacked thread on a vertical spool pin.

June 2013

Adjusting Bobbin Tension

Before you adjust your bobbin tension for specialty threads, mark a small dot on the bobbin case with a permanent marker to show the position of the tension screw for normal stitching. Adjust tension in small increments by turning the screw counterclockwise to loosen (the most common adjustment) and clockwise to tighten.

July 2013

Working with Fusible Web

When working with fusible web, slide a paper grocery bag that has the bottom cut out over your ironing board to protect the cover. As you work, rotate the bag to position a clean area under your project.

November 2013

Ergonomics

Try putting a book under the foot that is not on the sewing machine's foot pedal. This helps keep your hips and spine aligned and reduces back strain when sewing for long periods.

December 2013

Identifying and Storing Stabilizers

The different types of stabilizer (tear away, wash away, etc.) look and feel the same. Use a pen to write the type near the top on each piece so you won't get confused. Wrap your stabilizers, along with the directions for use, on an empty paper towel tube. Secure with a rubber band and store on a shelf or in a drawer.

January 2014

Decorative Machine Stitching

For an interesting decorative machine stitch effect, thread two different color threads through a single #80/12 or #90/14 topstitch needle. Thread the top of the machine as you would for a twin needle. Check your sewing machine manual for the method of threading a twin needle. Loosen the top tension so the bobbin thread is not pulled to the surface.

March 2014

Cleaning Lint from Bobbin Cases

Read your owner's manual to learn how to clean the lint out of the bobbin area of your machine. It will sew so much better and it will save on repair bills. The lint comes from your thread and also from fabrics. Flannel will leave a great deal of lint in this area.

April 2014

Free Motion Practice

A good exercise to practice free motion quilting is to quilt your name over and over. Focus on the way you want your name to look and not on the mechanics of quilting.

July 2014

Test Sew Every Time

Be sure to test sew even if you are doing something you have done before. If you forgot to change certain settings on your machine, you will find the problem before you start on your actual project. Save yourself from ruining good pieces of fabric.

September 2014

After washing and ironing new cotton fabrics...

...lay them out flat on a table or ironing board for 24 hours to dry completely before folding and storing to avoid fold lines and creases.

November 2014

Resizing Blocks

If you wish to make a block $1/2$ the size of your pattern:

(1) Measure the original pattern pieces; (2) subtract seam allowance ($1/2$ inches) from the length and width of each piece; (3) divide this measurement by 2; (4) add the seam allowance ($1/2$ "). Your new block will be 50% of the original pattern.

March 2015

Labeling Quilts

Make sure the label you add to your quilt cannot be removed. Stitch to the back of the quilt before the quilting is completed. Quilt though the label.

April 2015 – Taken from Craftsy.com

Sewing Quarter Inch Seams

Sewing a precise $1/4$ " seam is the most important tool a quilter can have. To test your seam allowance, rotary cut three $1\ 1/2$ " x 5" strips of fabric. Sew them together with your $1/4$ " seam. Press the seams open and measure the width of the middle strip from the right side of the fabric. The middle strip should measure exactly 1" wide. If this measurement is not correct, cut new strips and continue to make adjustments until your seams are $1/4$ " and the center strip is 1" wide. Some machines allow the needle to be moved to the right or the left, and often it's possible to make an adjustment by simply moving the needle.

May 2015

Save Silica Gel Packets

When purchasing a new pair of shoes, a purse, or even with some over-the-counter medicines, there is often a small packet of silica gel (a moisture absorbent ingredient) in the box, purse, or bottle. Instead of throwing it in the waste basket, place it in the container where your pins, needles, and safety pins are kept. The ingredients in this packet will keep them from rusting. The label on these packets warn “Do Not Eat” so make certain a child does not have access to them.

July 2015

Fusible Web

When working with fusible web, slide a paper grocery bag over your ironing board to protect the cover. Cut the bottom out of the bag to slide the bag to a comfortable area on your board. As you work, rotate the bag to position a clean area.