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SEWING TIP

I was using a damp cloth to wash out the water-soluble pen marks when the dye of one of the red flags ran down the blue sky. Oh no! What to do? My friend and fellow quilter Carolyn Birge suggested that I use a bit of Synthrapol® soap when washing the quilt to see if the red that bled would come out. It did! Hooray!

Now when I start to make a quilt that contains colors that MIGHT run, I cut two-inch patches of each suspicious fabric, place them across a piece of muslin, and quickly machine sew a line down the middle. I then dip the fabric with the patches in water and let it drip-dry over the bathtub. Whenever I find a fabric that bleeds and leaves a trace of dye along the muslin, I eliminate that fabric from the quilt.

Taking the Mystique out of Appliqué

This book is my opportunity to share the knowledge I've acquired and hopefully get some ideas buzzing around in your head. While it's not quite the same as a class, we can still kick some ideas around. There are some questions that seem to get asked time and time again—perhaps you have found yourself wondering about the same things. Let's start with our favorite subject of hand appliqué:

What needle do you like to use?

My favorite needle is a size 10 quilting needle that is stainless steel and made in England. They are distributed by Jean S. Lyle in Quincy, Illinois, and come in a little wooden case. They have an eye large enough to thread even with my bad eyesight and slide easily through fabric. The needle being short, it's easier to make tiny stitches, and since I also use this needle for quilting, I don't have to adjust to a different size for appliqué.

What thread do you like?

Can you believe that I love Coats and Clark Dual Duty Plus® thread? I like cotton thread next to the cotton fabric, but I also like the strength of the polyester core. It is easy to thread in my needle and usually doesn't tangle up or break. One of my students recommended a 60-weight cotton European thread that she loved. I tried it and liked it, too. It melted beautifully into the cotton fabric, but when I was on a trip adding embroidery next to my appliqué, I was horrified to find that some of the threads had broken. I realized that the thread wasn't strong enough for me—maybe I drag my quilts around too much, or maybe it's simply just not strong enough. I'll not use it again and will go back to my Coats and Clark.

Some of my students love silk. Fine. I just find it more difficult to work with. Again, find what works for *you* and keep going.



Think about it! If you're stitching on the bias part of an appliqué piece and the background happens to be on the straight grain at that point, the appliqué is stretching and the background isn't! Or, if you're stitching on the straight grain of the appliqué piece and it happens to be on the bias part of the background, then the background is stretching away from the appliqué piece. Wouldn't it be better for everything to be *moving or not moving* at the same place at the same time?

Keeping the grain lines matching between the appliqué and the background helps with stability and keeps everything from stretching out of

place after the background is cut away. And by using notebook paper for the appliqué templates, it's easy to match the grain lines because of the lines on the notebook paper. See pages 101–104, *The Nuts & Bolts of Take-away Appliqué*, for step-by-step pictures of the process.



How do you make sharp points?

1. Stitch to the exact place where you want the point to be.
2. Turn the top fabric back and trim the seam allowance underneath on a diagonal. Even trimming a couple of threads will help eliminate bulk.
3. Turn the fabric under straight back at the point and hold it down with your thumb.
4. Turn the fabric under beyond the point—think about pushing it “downhill” from the point.
5. Pull on the thread to extend the point and stitch.

How do you make smooth inside curves?

1. Stop stitching *at least 1/4" to 1/2" before* the inside curve.
2. Turn the seam allowance under *1/4" to 1/2" after* the inside curve and hold it down with your thumb.
3. Sweep the needle between your thumb and the last appliqué stitch, smoothly turning under the fabric. In order to do this, lay the needle *flat* across the seam allowance with the point of the needle away from you; then stand the needle up so that the needle pushes towards *you* with the needle appearing in a vertical position.
4. Hold the turned under fabric down with your thumb and stitch.

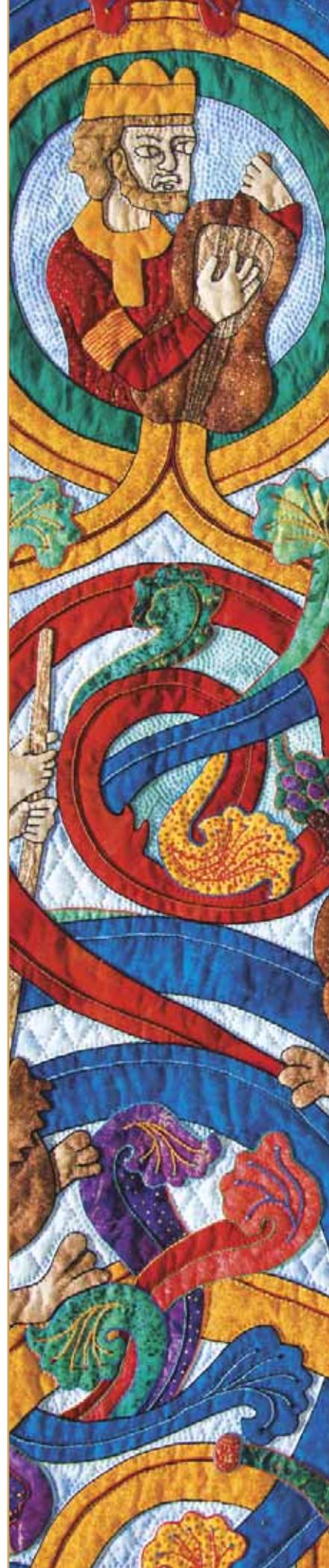
Is it okay to pin the appliqué pieces to the background before stitching them down?

I really like basting the pieces in place instead of using pins. Since I often take appliqué on trips to work on, I don't risk the chance of dribbling pins all over the place, especially in the doctor's office or in an airplane. I also don't like pricking myself since it might cause me to bleed on my quilt. My threads catch on the pins, too. Besides, pieces appliquéd with pins have much less stability.

Why are my appliqué stitches sometimes visible on the front of the quilt?

First, be sure you are using thread that matches the color of fabric you are appliquing. Sometimes the appliqué stitches need to be tightened a bit. To see if they are loose, pull on them with your needle on the wrong side of the background fabric. Check the front to see if this helped the visible threads disappear. If it did, try to make your appliqué stitches a bit tighter.

It's possible that a slanted stitch was made on the front, like a whipping stitch. The needle needs to go into the background *right next* to the place where the thread comes out of the appliqué. If the needle is moved forward before going into the background rather than directly next to where the thread comes out, a slanted stitch will be made that will more likely show on the front.



How do you make bias stems for appliqué?

There is an easy way to make bias without needing to purchase a gadget to do so:

1. Cut your fabric in half on the bias.
2. Press under a ¼" turn-under allowance on the bias edge of the cloth. This is very easy to do because the fabric is being stabilized by being on the whole cloth. If it were cut in a strip, it would stretch while pressing and would be very easy to burn fingers working with such a narrow piece of fabric.
3. Make another fold that defines the *width* of the bias strip that you want. Press again.
4. Baste down the middle, catching all three layers with your basting stitches. If you have lots of bias to make, you may go to the sewing machine, change the stitch to *baste*, and sew. It helps to loosen the stitches so that they can be more easily pulled out after the appliqué is finished.
5. Turn the folded fabric back and cut it close to the basting stitches on the underside of the bias strip.
6. Now you have a piece of perfectly basted bias that can be manipulated any way that you want in your appliqué project.

