



BEST TIPS^{to} Prepare your Quilt for Machine Quilting

Here is a handy go-to list as you prepare your quilt for Machine-Quilting, including some basic quilt-making tips to help you make your quilt something to be treasured!

CUT IT OUT

Cut your fabrics as accurately as possible using rotary cutting equipment: Mat, Ruler, Cutter with a sharp blade. If you find your blade skipping or if you have to saw back and forth with the rotary blade, it's time for a new blade. Practice safety—don't angle the blade, keep your fingers protected, and always close the blade after use. Remember, it's a very sharp circular knife blade. Purchase the best equipment you can afford.

SEW FUN

Piece blocks using an accurate, consistent 1/4-inch seam allowance. Stitch a test seam and measure the seam allowance including the stitches. Or try this: Accurately cut three 1-1/2" strips. Stitch together and press (see below for pressing tips). Measure the center strip and if it's exactly 1 inch, your seam allowance is perfect. If it's not perfect, adjust the seam allowance until it is. Once your 1/4" seam allowance is established, strap a bit of painter's tape on the deck of the sewing machine as a guide.

Avoid bulky seams at intersections by fanning out the bulk. If the longarm machine's hopper foot can't get over the bulk, it can't be quilted in that spot. Do not serge your seams—not only does it add bulk to the seams but the stitches show and will sometimes unravel.

Use a smaller stitch length on the sewing machine for piecing—around 2.0 to help keep stitches from showing. Use the correct size needle for the type of fabric and thread you are using. A thinner thread or finer fabric requires a smaller needle. Change the needle often (every 8 hours of sewing). This can sometimes prevent skipped stitches. Adjust the tension as needed to get a good stitch. Give your machine regular checkups to keep in prime working order.

PRESSING MATTERS

After stitching your blocks, press the seam flat to set the stitches, then press seams with right (printed) side of fabric facing UP. This will prevent that little fold that occurs when pressing from the wrong side of the fabric, which can change the desired size of your block.

Press with the grainline, even on diagonal seams, so as not to distort shape of the block. And unless you have pre-washed your fabric, use a light spritz of water or starch only if necessary, do not steam. Remember, this is cotton, and cotton has a tendency to shrink.

If you want the quilt "stitched in the ditch", press seams to one side or the other. Avoid twisted seams.

BORDERING ON INSANITY

Avoid tight or ruffly-looking borders by taking the time to accurately measure the quilt and apply borders. Some things may be "quilted out", however, you will be happier with your results if you take a few extra steps.

- Find side dimensions of quilt by measuring **lengthwise** through the quilt center, (not along the edges, since they may have stretched). Take three measurements and average them to determine the length to cut your side borders. Cut both borders the **same** measurement.
- Pin each side border to quilt at the ends and the center, then pin every few inches, easing in any fullness if necessary. Press seam toward borders.
- Find top/bottom dimensions of your quilt by measuring **across** the quilt and side borders. Cut both borders the same measurement.
- Attach top and bottom borders to quilt, pinning as you did side borders. Press seams toward outer edge of quilt. Repeat process for multiple borders.

BACKING IT UP

Backing fabric should measure a *minimum* of 5- to 6-inches longer and wider than the quilt top (about 3 inches on each side). If thick batting will be used, additional length and width may be necessary. This allows the backing to be pinned and clamped in position on the quilt frame. Use small print fabric when possible.

Backing should be trimmed square. If not, additional charges may apply for trimming.

If the backing is pieced, trim off selvage edges. Selvages have a much tighter weave and may pucker. Press seams open to avoid additional bulk in the backing.

Do not add a border on the backing hoping the quilter can center it. If you need to add length or width to a back, add it somewhere in the middle or offset to one side. There are many factors that do not allow accurate centering of a pieced border backing—the loft of the batting, quilt not square, shifting because the quilt is secured to rollers—quilt shifts in one direction or the other, etc.

FINAL PREP

Pull out or clip stray threads that may have come through the seams on the quilt top. Trim points and clip threads on the back of the quilt top paying particular attention to those that may cause “shadowing” under light colored fabrics.

Securely stitch any seams that end on the outside of the quilt so the seams don’t pop open when stretched on the quilting machine.

Don’t add embellishments to the quilt prior to machine quilting (beads, buttons, crystals, etc.). These may interfere with the quilting path and cause damage to both the quilt and the machine.

Give your quilt a good press. Gently fold the backing and the quilt top over a plastic hanger for delivery.

MACHINE QUILTING

Communicate with your quilter regarding design options, batting, thread choices, trimming, prices and timeline. Work together as a team to create the treasure your quilt is intended to be. Be open to suggestions, ask to see samples. If you want the quilt and backing lined up in a certain direction, pin a note to the top. Be clear about your preferences. Your quilter may use a work order form or you can write down details. Ask about other services such as embroidery, binding service or demo.

Once you receive the quilt, inspect it prior to writing the check. If there are problems, they can be worked out. Again, communicate!

Finally, give credit where credit is due. Include your quilter’s name on the label or quilt journal. (Made by: Quilted by:)