



Talking about Fabric & Thread

These days there are so many fantastic pre-cut fabric packs available that it is worth explaining about these, so that you don't miss out on a great way to make your quilting projects easier and perhaps more cost efficient. I have also added in some tips about using fabric generally and some information about threads, as there are literally hundreds of choices. This information is all just my personal choice everyone has their own ideas and there may be many more interesting products out there that are as yet unknown to me ... do let me know.....

HAPPY STITCHING.....Ruby x

Fabric

As most quilting patterns and books and a lot of the fabrics come from the US, you need to get used to working in inches and yards. It is surprisingly easy to do this, especially when you have the rulers and cutting mat, with these markings on. I always laugh though, because as soon as I move away from quilting, to make perhaps a new blind for the kitchen - I instantly and unconsciously switch to metric measurements without even a thought. I just don't worry about this.... it only becomes complicated if you keep switching between the two on the same project and then it can be confusing. In my book - stick to inches and yards for all quilting projects and you will be fine.



Because I belong to the decimal generation though - I did have to look this info up, so I decided to put it on here for quick reference.

1 Yard = 36" inches

Most fabrics off the bolt are approximately 44" wide.

These days there are many pre-cut fabric packs available, all colour co-ordinated and ready to go. The standard packs contain approximately:

Fat Quarter = 18" x 22"
Fat Eight = 9" x 21"
Jelly Roll = 40 strips - 2.5" x 42"
Layer Cake = 10" Squares
Charm Pack = 5" Squares

These can be both time saving and cost efficient and you can even look up for example 'fat quarter' friendly patterns. They also take the sting out of having to select fabrics as they usually contain a range of designs that all fit together perfectly. If you are a fabric hoarder like me...you can fill your shelves with absolutely delicious packs of your favourite fabrics and then mix and match your stash to make interesting and beautiful quilts. Most of the popular fabric designers have a colour palette that recurs each season, so you can easily merge them and swap them around. You can also top up these with fabric off the bolt in the same fabric range, which is great if you want to add a border and to match the backing fabric too. Although a word of advice.... some fabrics sell out quickly and it is advisable to purchase everything you need for a quilting project in the beginning, to avoid problems.

Some of the main suppliers of quilting fabrics are: Moda, Tilda, Robert Kaufman, Free Spirit, Andover, Westminster, Makower, Riley Blake and Michael Miller. There are plenty more besides and a few of my favourite websites for finding fabrics are:

thequiltcabin.co.uk

cottonpatch.co.uk

prettyfabricsandtrims.co.uk

and in the US: fatquartershop.com and hawthornethreads.com although remember that you might incur customs duty on orders from overseas.

'To wash or not to wash' - I see this question endlessly debated on the internet. My personal preference is to wash all the fabrics that I use, before I even begin cutting. I like to use a lot of white fabric in the background of my quilts with stronger, darker fabrics for the piecing and nothing would break my heart more than if I made a quilt and the colour ran. I use a 'colour catcher' in this first wash and in any subsequent laundering of the quilt.

If you are washing small pieces of fabric - they can get a bit raggedy around the edges in the washing machine and I usually just run a zig zag stitch around smaller pieces before I put them into the wash. I know all this sounds like a lot - but for me it is well worth it.

Once the fabrics are washed, it is helpful to use some spray starch when you are ironing them. I particularly like 'Mary Ellen's Best Press' for this, but any supermarket brand will do really.

Threads

Again there are many debates about what kind of threads to use for piecing and quilting. It is entirely a personal preference. I sometimes use the vintage threads from my grandmother's sewing table, but on the whole I nearly always use 100% cotton thread. I am a big fan of 'aurafil' thread and it comes in both cone size - for basic piecing and a whole variety of colours and colour boxes to co-ordinate with your quilt, for appliqué and quilting. Polyester threads can be good for quilting too and give a nice sheen to your quilt and some of the variegated threads available now are wonderful.

If you are hand quilting, which can look absolutely beautiful and give a real personal touch to a project, then I would use YLI Hand quilting thread. This is slightly thicker than normal sewing thread and gives the quilt a real 'pop'. I also like to use perle cotton #8 for adding embroidery and decorative lines of hand stitching on quilts. Both DMC and Anchor make these in a whole pile of gorgeous colours, so you can always be sure to find something to match your fabric.

At the end of the day, the threads you use are a personal choice and these are just my preferences.

