

TIPS FOR HAND QUILTING

The quilting stitch is merely a series of small running stitches. DO NOT poke down, pull the thread through onto the back, and poke back up again! That is not a running stitch.

Hand quilting is a “rocking” motion with your quilting finger (the one with the thimble on it!) and the “under-the-quilt” finger, the middle fingers of each hand. When the right-hand finger is pointing down, the left-hand finger will be pointing up (underneath where you can’t see it!) If necessary, take one stitch at a time. Try to keep your stitches the same length, whatever length that is. They will get smaller the more you hand quilt.

Practice, practice, **PRACTICE**!! With practice and determination, your stitches will become smaller.

Always, always, **ALWAYS** use your **thimble**!! Your finger will thank you forever! I like quilter’s thimbles with the grooves, but there are regular silver thimbles, leather thimbles, plastic advertising thimbles, finger guards (simply around the finger—they are often called “tailor’s thimble”) and small fingertip guards for the “under-the-quilt” hand. NOTE: You can eventually poke the back end of your needle through any thimble! When you do, it’s time to get a new one!

When you hand quilt, use a “between” or a quilting **needle**. Betweens are short, stubby needles, and that’s what you want when you’re pushing through three layers. Betweens range in size from 1 to 12. A size 1 is huge, the size of a small dagger, and a size 12 is itty-bitty, teeny-weeny!! We are using a size 7 tonight. In contrast, a “sharps” or regular needle is long and slender, nice to appliqué with.

We are also using hand-quilting **thread**, which is sturdier than regular cotton thread, let alone polyester thread. It seems to have a coating on it. We used to use regular cotton thread and pulled it through beeswax to give it a coating that made it easier to pull through those three layers.

Always use a quilting **hoop** (not an embroidery hoop) or quilting frame, of wood, made of plastic or PVC piping, round, oval or square. This keeps your fabric sandwich taut (tight), so you don’t get pleats in the back and so your stitches can be smaller.

When I hand quilt, I will thread baste my sandwich. I remove the basting as I quilt or afterward. When I machine a quilt, especially a child's quilt, I will pin-baste it and remove the pins as I machine it. I've done many dumb things, including running over a safety pin with my free-motion or walking foot! (It broke both the pin and my sewing machine needle!) And—finally—baste all around the edges of your piece. This makes it easier when you put on binding. (A narrow, colorful stripe will make a lovely binding on your little sample here.)

There is a plus to using muslin for your backing—you can see your quilting stitches and they look beautiful! You are familiar with this from some of our speakers, as we Ooh and Aaah about the backs of their quilts! (This comes from the woman who often pieces her backs to use up fabric she's not crazy about!)

There are entire books written only about hand quilting:

- “Quilting Makes the Quilt,” by Lee Cleland (hers are machined, but she makes 6 of the same quilt and quilts 6 completely different patterns and you can see the vast array of what you can do!
- “How to Improve Your Quilting Stitch,” by Ami Sims