

BASIC FUSIBLE APPLIQUÉ

By Carol Bruce, *Needlesongs*

Overview:

Fusible appliqué is so easy that anyone who's done it once rarely needs to look at directions again. However, if you haven't tried it yet, here's the basic idea:

A tissue-like web of heat sensitive glue, backed with paper, is ironed to a piece of fabric. Then the paper is peeled off, leaving the glue on the fabric, and the piece of fabric can be ironed to another piece of fabric. To make the appliqué permanent on fabric the edges must be sewn down, usually with a zigzag satin stitch; otherwise washings will eventually cause it to peel off.

Supplies required:

- Assorted 100 % cotton fabrics
- Fusible web such as Wonder Under™
- Rayon machine embroidery thread [Recommended: Sulky® thread.
(Sulky is a registered trademark of Sulky of America)]
- Regular sewing thread
- Pencil or marking pen
- Scissors
- Iron and ironing board
- Iron cleaner (just in case)
- Muslin or pressing cloth
- Sewing machine

Additional supplies suggested for best results:

- Tweezers
- Semi-transparent pressing sheet [Recommended: The Appliqué Pressing Sheet
from Bear Thread Designs, Consumer Products, P. O. Box 1452; Highlands,
TX, 77562; 1(281) 462-0661 www.bearthreaddesigns.com
- Tear-away or wash-away stabilizer
- Light box
- Rotary cutter, mat and ruler

Preparations:

1. Pre-wash and iron fabrics

Always pre-wash fabrics—and dry without fabric softener or dryer sheets. This handles several problems. First, even expensive cottons can shrink. It's frustrating to finish a piece only to find in a later washing that part of it puckers up. Also, some dark colors—especially reds—may bleed in the wash. Finally,

fabrics contain sizing or chemicals that may prevent fusible web from bonding as well as it can. –But, if fabric softener is used it can deposit chemicals right back on!

Most quilters prefer 100% cotton. Other fabrics may be used, but always test a scrap to determine the correct pressing time and temperature, and whether a pressing cloth is necessary. Fabrics such as metallics and lace can be tricky.

2. Tracing and cutting patterns

Please note that patterns are printed in reverse and should be traced this way onto the paper side of the fusible web. It isn't necessary to cut them out before tracing, and it avoids losing the small pieces. Simply lay the fusible web, paper side up, on top of the pattern pieces and trace with a pencil. A light box may be used but isn't necessary. DO NOT cut out the traced patterns on their outlines at this stage. Cut them apart at least 1/8" to 1/4" outside the lines.

3. Ironing patterns to fabric

(Read the product instructions with your particular brand of fusible web for any differences).

****Oops alert****

[It might be helpful to cover the ironing board with an extra piece of muslin—just in case—to prevent scraps of fusible web from being accidentally ironed onto the ironing board.]

Place the fabric wrong side up on the ironing board. Lay the fusible web pieces with the traced patterns, paper side up, on top of the fabric. Press for 5 seconds with a dry iron. Let cool, then cut out pattern pieces on the outlines and peel off paper. If the paper is difficult to peel off, stretch the piece slightly and the fabric should stretch but the paper will start to tear or pop off. If it's stubborn, it may not have been fused enough to release from the paper and need to be ironed again.

Cut the background fabric about 2" larger than the finished size to allow for any distortion of shrinkage from the machine embroidery. (Excess will be trimmed away after sewing). If you don't have an Appliqué Pressing Sheet, lay out the background fabric and assemble the appliqué on top of it according to the design. Be sure to tuck edges under each other where indicated. It may be easier to position the largest pieces first and use tweezers to place the tiny ones. Be sure to have the glue side down! When the appliqué is assembled, gently iron it by raising and setting the iron in place, not by sliding it from side to side.

If there's an "Oops!" with a piece stuck to the iron, use tweezers to pull it off. Then reach for the iron cleaner.

If you have the Appliqué Pressing Sheet, it's a snap to assemble the entire appliqué accurately as a single iron-on unit. Simply cover the entire placement pattern design with the sheet and assemble the appliqué directly on top of it. Then fuse with the iron, allow to cool, and peel the appliqué off the sheet in one piece ready to fuse to the background fabric.

4. Sewing preparation ****Please don't omit sewing****

Think of fusible web as a **temporary** glue only. After a number of washings it will break down and only the sewing will hold it the appliqué in place.

Choose machine embroidery threads to contrast or blend with each piece as desired. Some threads, especially regular sewing threads, don't fill in the satin stitches as well as others and will make a great difference in looks. If you want the project to look really great—as opposed to just ok—use the Sulky or similar threads.

It isn't necessary to use a stabilizer, but it will add a more professional look to the project. Cut a piece large enough to generously cover the sewing area on the appliqué and position it beneath the background fabric under the appliqué. Pin or baste into place.

To ready the sewing machine, set it on zigzag with the stitch width at 2 or 2.5mm (or 1/16" to 1/8"), the length at less than 1. The top thread tension should be set at slightly looser than normal and the bobbin a smidgen tighter. Machines vary, so it may be necessary to experiment to find the perfect combination. It's a good idea, once you decide on the perfect settings on your machine to write them down on the pattern. Some machines have other decorative stitches, such as a blanket stitch, that are also attractive for fusible appliqué.

Use machine embroidery thread in the needle (a brand new sharp #11 or #14), and regular sewing machine thread in the bobbin. If available, use an open-toed appliqué foot on the machine.

Before sewing the actual appliqué, make a test of the sewing machine stitching. Fuse a scrap of cotton fabric to a piece of background fabric. Lay this on top of a piece of stabilizer the same size (if you are using one) and zigzag the edge of the fused scrap. Stitching should appear as a nearly solid, thick satin line. If the stitching is too open, shorten the stitch length. If it stacks up, make the stitch length longer. If the bobbin thread shows on top of the fabric, either tighten the bobbin tension or loosen the needle tension—or adjust both. Be sure to check stitching on the underside of the fabric. It's ok if the top embroidery thread shows a little underneath.

5. Sewing

Look at the appliqué and determine which layers are on top and which are on the bottom. Sew pieces in order from the bottom to top, and each outline of stitching will fasten the ends of the previous stitching. On the last piece it will be necessary to backstitch at the end or draw threads to the back of the fabric and tie a knot. Be sure that every raw edge of the appliqué is sewn down, and that all ends of the stitching are secure.

Zigzag tips

Most of the zigzag stitch should be on the appliqué, with the outside of the stitch just a hair's width onto the background fabric. The zigzags should always be at

right angles to the edge of the appliqué as well. To keep the stitches at the right angles around curves, stop sewing with the needle down in the fabric on the outside of the curve. Pivot the fabric slightly, then sew. Stop and pivot again as often as necessary. Sometimes the outside or widest part of the curve will go to the left, sometimes to the right, so the pivot point may be at either the right or left needle position, depending on which way the curve goes.

When sewing toward points, corners, or the ends of detail lines, the zigzag width may be gradually narrowed.

6. Finishing the appliqué

Check the appliqué to see that all raw edges are sewn and loose threads fastened and cut. If stabilizer was used, it may be left in or removed following specific product directions. Finally, iron the piece flat and carefully trim the background to the required size for the project with scissors or a rotary cutter.

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