

# TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR STITCHERIES

**WHAT IS NEEDED TO GET STARTED STITCHING?** The supplies are simple ~ a good pair of scissors, small, sharp embroidery needles, a hoop, mechanical pencil or washout marker, fabric, cotton batting, floss.

**HOW DOES THE DESIGN GET ON TO THE FABRIC?** The easiest way is to place a lightweight piece of fabric over the design and then trace it with a mechanical pencil, using a lightbox. If you don't have a lightbox, you can tape the design and the fabric on to a brightly lit window. Taping the design to a computer screen or TV works great when the Sun goes down. Some people like to use a washout marking pen to trace the design but you must be careful not to iron the fabric until all the marker is removed or it will leave a permanent mark.

**WHAT IF THE FABRIC IS TOO HEAVY TO SEE THROUGH?** Trace the design on to tracing paper, the kind you'd use for artwork. Turn the tracing over and retrace the design on the backside with a lead pencil, blowing off any residue. Turn the tracing right side up again and center it on your fabric. Use the handle of a scissors to carefully rub over the design. Check to see if all the design has transferred before removing the pattern. If the fabric is dark, use a thin line chalk pencil or soapstone to trace the lines on the backside, and then follow the same procedure as above.

**WHAT ABOUT THOSE PATTERNS THAT ARE PRINTED ON DARK PAPER?** Please keep in mind that the patterns have a copyright but as a consumer, you can make copies as aids, but not to give away. For those patterns that are printed on tan or colored paper, make a copy using a lighter setting on the copier. Go over the lines with a dark marker. This should give you enough contrast so you can see the design.

**WHY DO SOME DESIGNERS SAY TO PUT COTTON BATTING BEHIND THE FABRIC?** Cotton batting behind a stitching gives it more of a primitive look. Try not to pull your threads too tightly so they don't pucker the fabric. Basting spray works great to keep the fabric and cotton batting together without pins.

**HOW MANY STRANDS OF FLOSS SHOULD BE USED?** Floss is thread that is six plies thick and can be separated into single strands. Typically, two strands of floss are used in stitching but more or less is determined by personal preference or the instructions in the pattern you're using.

**IS IT NECESSARY TO USE A HOOP?** When stitching without cotton batting behind the design, a hoop is suggested, but not necessary. It does keep the stitching even and the fabric from puckering. With cotton batting behind the design, it's a matter of personal preference. Remove the hoop when done stitching.

**WHAT IS PRIMITIVE STITCHING?** Primitive stitching is a method of stitching that gives the finished item a childlike look. Some people like to refer to it as a folk art look, naïve stitching, or country stitching. The best thing about it is it makes everyone an excellent stitcher! If your stitching is a little bit inconsistent in length or off the design line, it's ok. Often, the stitches don't connect as in traditional embroidery. A space is left between them. In primitive stitching, there aren't many stitches to learn. Typically, a backstitch and French knots are the most used stitches, however, it's not unusual to see satin stitching or running stitches used as well. Sometimes cross stitches are used as part of letters or numbers for a special effect. All these stitches are easy to master.

**WHAT IS REDWORK?** Redwork is a name for finer embroidery done in just one color ~ red! If you see a pattern designed for redwork, it's ok to change the color to something else. Blue is very common as is green. The best part of redwork is you never have to check which color goes where and you don't have to carry a ton of floss around with you. Most of the time, redwork is done on white fabric but is very charming done on tan fabric, too. You can even stitch on to printed fabric! Some favorite red floss colors are DMC 221, 498, 815 and 816. Redwork is fun to do and often the designs are reminiscent of Grandma.

**HOW DO YOU COLOR ON FABRIC?** Coloring on fabric and then stitching around the design makes for a great look! It's really simple to do and lots of fun besides. Kids love to do it, too. Purchase a box of Crayola 96 crayons and a pencil sharpener with a large hole that a crayon will fit into. Trace your design on to the fabric. Use a pencil or a black Pigma fabric pen, size .01 or .03. Cut a piece of freezer paper ~ the kind you get at the grocery store ~ and press the waxed side to the wrong side of your fabric. Use an iron setting of 'wool'. The freezer paper will stabilize the fabric as you color. Color in the design with your choice of colors. Keep your crayon point sharp. You can use other colors to shade or highlight if you wish. When you are happy with the results, place a piece of paper toweling over the colored design. Heat set it until the color starts to show through the towel. You can touch up the colors at this point but be sure to heat set it again. White sinks into the fabric. Color that in after all the heat setting is finished. Remove the freezer paper when you are done and stitch around the design.

**HOW DO YOU GET THE TEA DYED LOOK?** Tea dying is a simple process. There are several ways to do it. One way is to mix a strong solution of regular tea, either instant or tea bags, about three bags to a cup of hot water. Put the solution in a spray bottle and spray the piece to saturate it. Another way is to spray the fabric with clear water, sprinkle on instant, unsweetened tea, and then spray again with water until the tea begins to wick out. If you get little clumps of tea on the fabric, just rub them with your finger. To get a darker, more mottled look, lay the item in the sunshine to dry. You can also put it on a piece of foil in a warm oven ~ about 250° ~ for about 15 minutes. Watch it carefully!

**ANY LAST HINTS?** Don't limit yourself to patterns that are just for stitching. Look around for other options. A child's handwriting or artwork makes for a great design, especially if you can get them to write out a poem, psalm or part of a song. Look through painting books for stitching designs. Many of the line drawings lend themselves to stitching. Coloring books, old books, notecards, all give you an opportunity to create wonderful projects. Open your mind to what's around you. Stitcheries are great embellishments on clothing, quilts or bags. Have fun personalizing things with needle and thread!

**WISHING YOU MANY HAPPY HOURS OF STITCHING!**