

TIPS FOR WOOL APPLIQUE

WHAT ARE PENNY RUGS? Penny rugs often are attributed to the colonial era of America, although there are examples available from an earlier period in Europe. Usually made from wool, coins of various sizes were used to cut wool, homespun or other fabrics to make rugs. Designed as floor coverings, initially they were large pieces of heavy fabric covered entirely with circles stitched on top of circles. As the early Americans became more affluent, their rugs began to take on a decorative look, incorporating flowers, birds, berries other articles in nature or home. There was a strong, patriotic push during the Civil War when it was common to use the flag and eagle as symbols sewn on the rugs. The style often follows rug hooking and quilting. Colorations are in the folk art range ~ black is a common background, with deep reds, gold, blues and greens being standard. Those colors were the easiest to dye.

WHY ARE THEY CALLED TONGUES? The outside of a penny rug is often finished off with layered circles, or a tongue shape with a circle on top. Sometimes you'll find smaller tongues nestled inside a larger one. Tongues are rectangles that are rounded on one end. Tongues are often the shape of tongues on animals!

HOW DO YOU FELT WOOL? You need to have a thicker consistency of wool for wool appliqué. 100% wool needs to be used and it needs to be preshrunk, or felted. Submerge the wool into very hot water and agitate it. This helps shrink it and meld the wool fibers together. For small pieces, it's ok to soak them, manipulating them by hand for agitation. You can use a small amount of soap but fabric softener isn't recommended. Dry in a hot dryer, check the lint filter often. Repeat the steps if the wool doesn't seem thick enough for you, however, it might not change the texture if there are acrylic fibers woven into the piece. Properly felted wool will have a minimum of fraying.

DO I HAVE TO FELT WOOL THAT IS HAND DYED? Because the dyeing process for wool is done with very hot water, the wool is already felted.

WHAT IS WOOL FELT? Wool felt is a nonwoven fabric. It differs from traditional felt in that wool fibers are used in combination with acrylic fibers. Common combinations are 80% wool and 20% acrylic. Wool felt will shrink in the felting process. It has a bumpy surface when felted. Don't try to iron it. If it comes out of the dryer wrinkled, hand smooth it or steam it lightly. Use it for the same applications as wool.

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO CUT SHAPES? Making freezer paper templates helps keep the shapes consistent with the pattern. Trace the design on to the paper side of the freezer paper, then lightly press to the wool. Cut out the shape, then remove the paper. Templates can be reused. Personal die cutters are an easy way to cut wool shapes, too.

HOW DO I GET THE APPLIQUES TO STAY IN PLACES? Water based glue, such as Roxanne's, is the best way to hold the pieces. Appliqué pins are a great tool because they won't catch on your threads as you stitch. A stapler will hold big pieces in the right place!

WHAT'S THE BEST THREAD TO USE? Perle cotton is preferred by many. However, embroidery floss is a good choice. Floss comes in more colors, it can be divided to make your stitching as thick or thin as you want. Three strands of floss equals size 8 perle cotton. If you like the look of variegated thread but don't have colors you like, mix two or three strands of various hues on one needle.

WHAT KIND OF STITCHES SHOULD I USE? To heavily outline a shape, use a buttonhole stitch. If you want your stitching to blend in, especially if you want to embellish the shapes, consider using one strand of floss, contrasting or matching, and a whip stitch to anchor the pieces. A #9 embroidery needle is a good choice.

HOW ARE PENNIES AND TONGUES ATTACHED? Lay the pennies or tongues along the edge of the background. Anchor them with a pin, sliding from the background to the edge of the penny. Whip stitch with invisible stitches and matching thread or floss. Stitch pennies together for stability. Lightly press when you're finished.

WOOL APPLIQUE IS RELAXING AND CREATIVE!