



## Block of the Month or Quilt-Along

Timeless Stitches – Quilt Capital of Kansas

Liz Granberg-Jerome

Quilters of all levels of experience enjoy quilting along with friends in Block of the Month (BOM) and Quilt-Along (QAL) programs. These are similar but with a few key differences. Each provide a pattern by a designer who agrees to share with others, some for a fee and others for free through their websites, blogs, or Facebook pages.

The Block of the Month programs are often offered by fabric companies that feature a particular line of fabric and a pattern designed specifically around those fabrics. The fabric companies advertise the BOMs with a photo of the custom quilt and the shops buy the bolts of fabric to cut kits as directed in the pattern. Those kits and the pattern are then distributed to quilters once a month for typically a year long program, with extra fabric for borders and binding included. In this way, a quilter can spread the cost of a large quilt out over multiple months and only need backing and batting when they are done and ready to quilt it.

Many shops offer a BOM that is designed by the shop owner or a local designer. The block patterns are distributed over a period of six to twelve months and may be made from fabrics already available in the shop rather than new bolts. Quilters always have the option to substitute fabrics of their choice; although, the kit contents and price remain the same. The unused fabric from the kits can be used in other projects or added to the quilter's stash. The BOM quilts will all look the same or very similar as the fabrics and pattern are used by everyone who signs up.

A Quilt-Along tends to be organized in an online community such as a Facebook page or group run by a particular quilt designer. The patterns may be emailed to the participants who sign up, made available on websites or in blogs, or posted to pages requiring a login to access. With QALs the quilters typically pull from their own stashes for fabrics. These quilts, while all made from the same pattern, will each look completely different as the fabrics will vary widely.

Some QALs are mystery quilts where you get a clue once a week or once a month. A popular QAL is Bonnie K. Hunter's Annual Mystery Quilt. Once a year Hunter creates a pattern that she offers for free to anyone. The clues are posted weekly on her blog between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. She provides a theme with a suggested colorway that is scrappy in nature where quilters pull multiple fabrics in particular color families such as neutrals (whites and creams in small prints that read neutral in value), oranges, greens, or golds. Some quilters pull their own favorite colors to use and create a different look, while using the same clues for the pattern. Mystery QALs can be great fun as the participants try to guess what the final blocks will look like and what design they will make when the reveal is made.

For newer quilters, a BOM or QAL is a great way to jump in and make a quilt with a lot of guidance and pre-selected colors. With so much being done now with Facebook Live sessions or Zoom calls and even YouTube videos, extra tips on assembly that participants can watch can be very helpful. Shop BOMs are often sampler quilts with twelve very different blocks and sometimes an alternate block used in the layout to create a specific look. More experienced quilters may like the more complex BOM patterns that stretch their skills.