

So What's Upside Down Bobbin Work?



Supply List:

- Sewing Machine
- Solid fabric to sew decorative stitches on
- Aqua Tear – Tear Away Stabilizer
- Sewing thread to match cords and ribbons
- Open Toe Applique Foot
- Additional bobbin case for bobbin work (optional but highly suggested)
- Trims, ribbons or yarns, 2mm silk ribbon, metallic cords, needlepoint, cross-stitch or heavy embroidery threads or specialty bobbin thread
- Small Sharp Scissors
- Chalk pencil or water-soluble marker
- tweezers
- Microtex 80 or 90 Needle and #100 Topstitch

What is Bobbin Work?

Bobbin work amounts to sewing upside down where the decorative thread goes in the **bobbin**, and you sew from the wrong side. The embellishment thread doesn't need to go through the needle.

Creative Bobbin Case Facts:

You can use the creative Bobbin Case in several different ways - with the decorative stitches, in or out of the tension, free motion and with embroidery.

Rough, textured threads need to bypass the tension in the creative Bobbin Case. You can always tell whether the bobbin case is in the tension by looking to see if it is coming diagonally across the top of the bobbin, then into the needle plate. If you see it coming from the back of the bobbin, directly into the needle plate, it is not in the tension.

Another tip to remember, your creative Bobbin Case will be a different color than the bobbin case that comes with your machine. If your machine does not have a Creative Bobbin Case for bobbin work, then get another bobbin case and put nail polish or a marking on it to distinguish it from your regular sewing bobbin case.

Try size 5 or 8 perle cotton, it works well when it is threaded into the tension or left out of the tension. There are thorough instructions that accompany your creative Bobbin Case. Adjust the bobbin case tension until the perle cotton pulls freely through the tension, Test on a fabric scrap until you are happy with the stitching.



Threads, Braids, and Cords

With bobbin work, you're not restricted to conventional sewing-machine threads. For unique stitch patterns and hand-sewn textures, experiment with decorative serger threads; needlepoint, cross-stitch, and heavy embroidery threads, knitting and crochet threads; and other craft threads.

Decorative serger threads include those like Halo from Superior Threads, Pearl Crown Rayon and Ombre soft metallic from Kreinik. 2mm silk ribbon looks fabulous and creates twists and unique patterns as it is stitching.

Knitting yarns and crochet threads include those from DMC, pearl cotton #5, and craft and miscellaneous threads include such things as novelty yarns.

These are just a few examples.

New threads are emerging all the time, and you already may have some in your "stash". Stay away from yarns that are too nubby and coarse, like boucle yarns. and stay away from gross grosgrain ribbons, because they are not flexible enough.



What about the needle thread?

For the best results, keep in mind that the needle thread will show a little on the right side, (remember you're stitching from the wrong side), since it will anchor and "couch" the bobbin thread on yarn. Choose a color of needle thread that works with the thread you're using in the bobbin. Regular sewing thread is fine to use, or choose a thin, decorative thread, like a metallic, to add a bit of sparkle to your embroidery. You can also use monofilament thread in the needle, which is strong and invisible. Select a sewing-machine needle that's appropriate for the thread you choose.

Two Types of Bobbins

There are many models of sewing machines, but only two types of bobbins: drop-in bobbins that fit into a built-in case and load from the top, and bobbins that fit into a removable bobbin case that's inserted into the machine from the front or the side. In order to adjust the bobbin tension for bobbin work on a top-loading bobbin, you may need to remove the cover plate and unscrew the bobbin case. In order to adjust the bobbin for using heavier cords, bypass the tension springs in the bobbin case and let the thread flow directly through the hole on the throat plate.

You can also loosen the tiny screw in the front loading or the top loading bobbin if you're using thinner threads, loosen the tiny screw on the bobbin case by turning it slightly to the left. It is a better idea to purchase a second bobbin case the purpose of using decorative bobbin work.

You may also need to adjust the upper tension as well. To do this, turn the top tension dial a number or two higher than normal to offset the looser tension in the bobbin. Remember to return it to its normal setting for regular sewing.

Winding the Bobbin

Decorative threads and ribbons that can't fit through the needle won't pass easily through a machine's bobbin-winder tension points either. But you can still wind the bobbin on the machine: Start by feeding the thread end through the hole at the top of the bobbin, from the inside out, leaving a 1-inch to 2-inch tail of thread, and make three or four complete wraps around the bobbin by hand. Place the bobbin on the winding pin, click in place, and trim the thread tail so it's flush with the top of the bobbin. Then place the thread spool on an upright spool pin. Pinch the thread between your thumb and forefinger to give it a little tension, and press the foot pedal slowly to engage the bobbin winder. You may need to guide the thread up and down the bobbin so that it fills evenly, and be careful not fill it beyond the edges of the bobbin or it won't fit into the bobbin case. For ribbons and threads on a skein, start the process in the same way, but feed them over your fingers, being careful to keep ribbons flat and untwisted as they wrap around the bobbin.

Should the feed dogs be up or down?

You can use heavy threads and ribbons successfully in the bobbin with the feed dogs engaged as for regular sewing, and you can put the feed dogs down for free-motion stitching.

With the feed dogs up, you can sew regular straight stitches, utility stitches, and programmed decorative stitches. You can finish a garment using a simple straight stitch to achieve the look of beautiful topstitching. Use a longer stitch length (about 3mm) to showcase the thread. And for more creative effects, loosen the bobbin tension as far as possible, and the thread will weave loosely back and forth, producing a lacy, free-form stitching line. Utility stitches take on a new dimension when used with decorative threads in the bobbin, a zigzag for example, looks more intricate. If you are using programmed stitch patterns, stick to those with simple outlines. The more intricate patterns, or those that include satin stitches or tight reverse stitching, can cause puckering and/or create little tunnels under the stitching. Whatever stitch you choose, always experiment on a small square of fabric, since it's hard to predict the results when using a variety of threads in the bobbin.

Free-motion stitching is another fun way to do bobbin work. You need to move the fabric along by hand, because the feed dogs are lowered and not there to help, but you can stitch in any direction you want. It's best to use an embroidery hoop for free-motion work so you can keep the fabric as taught as possible, but some fabrics may require a stabilizer as well. Remember to mark and stitch on the wrong side of the fabric, so you don't worry about the markings showing on the right side.

Fabric and Stabilizers

Bobbin work can be done successfully on all kinds of fabrics, including knits, velvets, and sheers, and in most cases, it's necessary to use a stabilizer to prevent puckering. Use tear-away, water-soluble and fusible stabilizers. You can also use batting; it gives a nice loft to the stitching.

Tear-away stabilizers come in different weights, and provide a sturdy backing, and generally can be easily removed from the stitched area. With elaborate stitch patterns, however, you may not be able to remove all the tear-away, and it will be visible on the wrong side.

Water-soluble stabilizers can be washed out after you have finished stitching so be sure the fabric you use then on is washable.

Fusible stabilizers are permanent and can add bulk to the fabric. Therefore, it is not recommended for garments, but they're suitable for projects like place mats, pillows, and other items.

Batting can also be used as a permanent stabilizer. It gives a quilted effect and adds body to the fabric to support the stitches.

Test each stabilizer before you decide to use it for your project!

It's All About Tension

Using thicker threads in the bobbin may require that you loosen the bobbin tension of your machine in order for the thread to flow easily through the hole in the needle plate. The tension discs at the top of the machine are responsible for controlling the amount of drag placed on the needle thread. The bobbin tension is responsible for how easily the thread flows from the bobbin case. If either tension is too tight, there is more resistance on the thread, which will affect the look of the stitch and possibly cause the fabric to pucker. If the top or bobbin tension is too loose, the stitches will be uneven. Try to have a balance in both top and bottom tensions.

Check the tension with every new thread you use by making a test sample on your chosen fabric. If the bobbin thread loops to the top of the fabric, the top tension may be too tight or the bobbin thread too loose, and the reverse may be true if the top thread pulls tightly to the fabric's wrong side. You can also check the bobbin tension by pulling up a length of thread from the opening on the bobbin. For normal tension, it should pull out easy, but not too freely.

Here are a few examples of stitches that work well for upside down bobbin work:

