

# Beginner Quilt Top Pre-Class Reading:

## Quilting Tools & Materials

### Fabric

Fabric is probably the most important part of the quilt. You can piece precisely, press perfectly, and quilt beautifully, but if the fabric is not of good quality, the quilt will show it by distorting as you piece it together, by fading, or by wearing quickly. There are major differences in fabric, beginning with the *greige* goods—the base cloth that the pattern is printed upon. If this base cloth is not of good quality, the fabric will stretch and become limp, no matter how pretty it is.

Some “Big Box” stores carry prints that look similar to what you find in a true quilt shop, but these may be printed on lesser grade greige goods, and have extra sizing applied to make them seem heftier than they really are. When the sizing washes out, you are left with thin, limp fabric. Buy the best fabric you can afford.

Stay away from the flat-fold cuts. Sometimes they are “testers”—first runs of fabric to see if there is a problem. If there is no problem, the fabric is rolled onto bolts. But if there is a problem, the company cuts it off and sells it as flat folds. Sometimes you can tell if the flat fold is a tester just by looking at it (colors aren’t right, the outlines don’t line up correctly, etc.) or by feeling it (it should feel soft but not limp and not stiff and “boardy”—it should have a nice *hand*). Sometimes you can’t tell until the fabric has been in the quilt awhile. As you gain experience, you will be able to tell a good buy versus a waste of time and money. Don’t forget to check out the sale racks at the quilt shop for first-quality fabrics at sale prices.

Color is a personal choice—you have to love it to feel good about working with it. Almost all good-quality quilting fabric is 100% cotton. Cotton fabric sticks to cotton fabric, making it easier to piece—it doesn’t slide.

Many quilters prefer to work with fabric before it has been washed. It can be more crisp and easier to handle before it’s washed. But your fabric can be prewashed, too. This shrinks the fabric; removes the chemicals in the fabric; removes excess dye (which causes bleeding).

If you choose to prewash: Wash all the fabric for the quilt in the same load in the washing machine (you are going to wash them all together when the quilt is finished, right?) on gentle or regular cycle in cold water and add Retayne, which will prevent bleeding, or throw in a color catcher sheet. Throw the fabric in the dryer and remove it before the wrinkles set in. Press your fabric. If you can’t press it right away (yes, I know pressing is a pain!), fold it as flat as you can. To restore that crispness the fabric had before it was washed, buy a bottle of Best Press at your quilt shop or a can of sizing in the laundry aisle at the grocery store, and use that when you press.

Also, use a dry iron to press. If you use steam and you haven’t pressed correctly, the steam will “set” the mistake. Press without steam and then if you want to set it after you have made sure you have pressed correctly, give it a little spritz from a spray bottle of Best Press or water.

## Thread

If you are sewing with 100% cotton fabric, you should be sewing with 100% cotton thread. (Note that cotton-wrapped polyester is not the same as 100% cotton. The cotton is wrapped around a rough piece of polyester and the cotton eventually wears away. You are left with a rough polyester thread, which is not good for the quilt.) Look for quality cotton thread – we recommend Mettler, Aurifil, and YLI. Presencia, Superior, and Signature are also good quality brands of thread.

Choose a neutral color for piecing (beige, light grey, etc.) Medium weight, around 50wt to 60 wt, is ideal. If your machine's tension is set correctly, you shouldn't see the thread used for piecing.

Later, when you choose a thread for quilting, you will want to choose a color that either blends into or contrasts with the fabric in quilt top. You may also want a thread that is heavier, such as 40 wt to stand out, or one that is lighter weight, for a more subtle look.

## Needles

Whether your sewing machine cost \$6,000 or \$250, you are not going to get a good stitch if you don't have a good 75-cent needle in it. Get in the habit of changing the needle as you start each project and every time you hit something with the needle. (You really shouldn't be sewing over pins!) Use a #80/12 microtex/sharp or topstitch needle for piecing. Use a #80/12 or #90/14 quilting needle or topstitch for quilting. Klasse and Schmetz are good brands, as is Organ Needles. Singer needles should be used only in Singer machines.

## Rulers

This class requires two rulers—a 6 ½" x 24 ½" (6" x 24" as an alternative) for cutting long strips, and either a 6 ½" square or a 6 ½" x 12" for smaller cuts. These two rulers are all you need to begin your quilting journey. We highly recommend Quilter's Select Rulers, as they do not slide and the markings are nicely done. Creative Grids are also good rulers, and easy to use.

Rulers should be clear with thin lines. Fat lines are hard to see through and make accurate cuts hard to get. If you are using more than one ruler, hold them up together and make sure all the lines on both rulers align correctly. If they don't, you won't be cutting the same measurements with both rulers, and the blocks will be off.

The edges of old, worn rulers may no longer be straight, as over time, the repeated contact with the rotary cutter's blade can start to shave the edge of the ruler.

## Mats

You will need a mat long enough for cutting strips. Make sure your mat is self healing, and it will perform better and longer. Anything shorter than 24" is not going to work as your main mat. Look for an 18" x 24" or 24" x 36" mat to start. Smaller mats are good for cutting smaller pieces, but these bigger sizes are a necessity for cutting width of fabric strips. Mats need to be stored flat and out of direct sunlight or they will warp. Once they warp, it's nearly impossible to get them to lie flat again. Mats do wear out and need to be replaced; the cheaper mats need to be replaced more often. If you have an older mat, run your hand across it. It should feel pretty smooth. There shouldn't be grooves and gouges in it. Older mats that need to be replaced will dull the rotary cutting blades faster. Flip the mat over to the plain side and see if you get cleaner cuts. Use that side until you need to replace the mat.

## **Before the first class:**

- Check to make sure you have all the rotary-cutting equipment and rulers listed on the supply sheet. If you already have a rotary cutter and have not changed the blade recently, do so before the first class. If you bring in your cutter and purchase the blade, we will show you how to change it, or change it for you.
- Check to make sure your machine has a 1/4" foot if not, you will need to purchase one before you take the class. You will need a 1/4" foot on the very first week. • Wind some bobbins beforehand with cotton thread. Test your thread tension before class, making sure your stitches are even and balanced.
- If your machine hasn't been serviced in a while and is making clunking or other abnormal noises, or the tension is funky, take it in for service before you start. A well-running machine will make piecing and quilting so much easier. Install a fresh, new topstitch needle in your machine before coming to class. Please bring your sewing machine manual.

Press your fabrics before coming to class. You may wish to store/transport your fabrics on a skirt hanger, rather than folding them up after they have been pressed.

## **Class Etiquette:**

Please plan to arrive 5-10 minutes early to set up your machine and be ready to sew at the class start time. Allow extra time if you need to purchase supplies.

Homework from the previous class must be completed before the current class.

Please turn Cell phones off or switch them to silent.

Don't hesitate to ask questions!