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Pictorial Guide to Back Basting

This pictorial guide will take you step by step through the process of preparing a block using the back basting method. Jeana Kimball introduced the quilt world to back basting - a technique that she learned from another quilter. I learned the technique from Suzanne a gal in the Des Moines TAS group. My heart-felt thanks to these gals.

Each of the following steps is on a separate page. Several of the pages have lots of pictures. Please be patient while they load. You may click on any of the steps to go directly to that topic.

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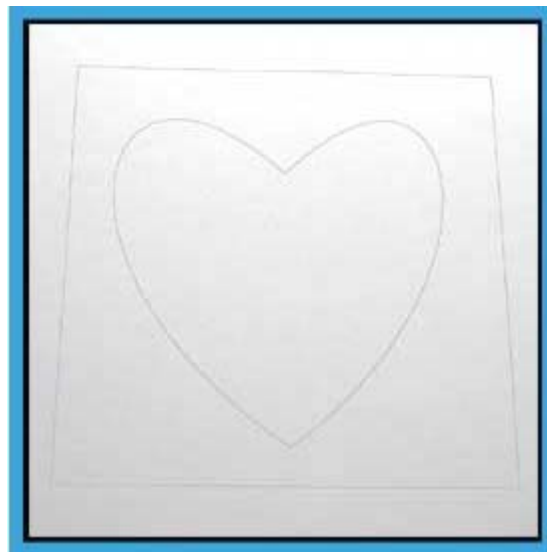


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Reverse your Pattern

Step 1: First, you will need a pattern that has been reversed. We will be drawing the pattern on the back of our background fabric so it must appear as the design will appear on the back in reverse. Some patterns are already reversed. If this is the case, the pattern should be clearly labeled as a 'reverse pattern'. Other patterns are symmetrical and will not need to be reversed.



If your pattern has not already been reversed for you, you will need to reverse it yourself. This can be done a number of ways.

- Check the back of your pattern. Is it blank? If so, place the pattern over a light source. The reversed design should be facing you. Then place the background fabric (right side down) over the pattern. Secure fabric so that it doesn't slip. Can you see the pattern lines? If so, go to the next step. If not, you will need to trace the pattern onto the back of the paper pattern. Place the pattern over a light source and simply trace over the lines of the pattern. This light source can be a light box, a window or a piece of glass on a separated dining room table over a light. I like to use a thin, permanent marking pen.
- Scan the pattern into your computer. Use a graphics or photo handling software

to reverse the pattern. Then print it and you are ready for the next step.

- Trace the pattern onto a thin material such as tissue paper or thin interfacing using a thin, dark marking pen. You will be able to see the design on the back of your marked material. If necessary, trace over the lines on the back. Use the backside as your pattern. You are now ready for the next step.

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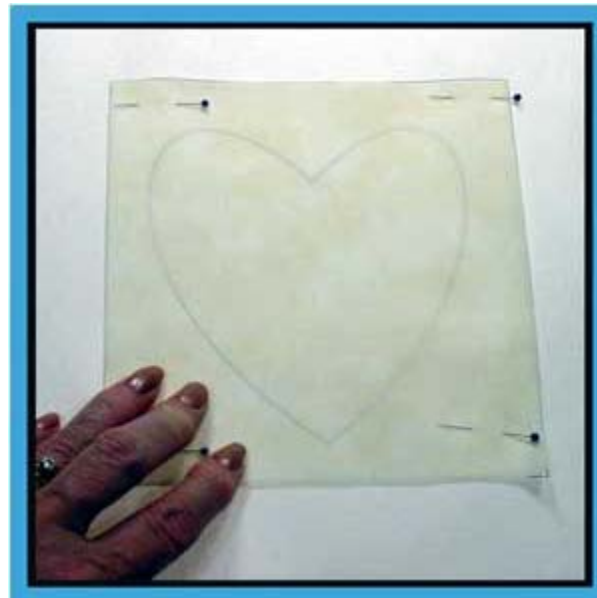
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Mark the Pattern

Step 2: Once you have a reversed pattern, you are ready to mark the pattern on your background fabric.

Place the reversed pattern over a light source.

Place your background fabric over the pattern. Be sure the right side of the fabric is face down next to the pattern. Center the pattern under the fabric. Use any registration marks that are provided with the pattern. Secure in place so that the fabric doesn't move when tracing.



Using either a #2 pencil or a mechanical pencil with #2 lead, trace the pattern onto the back of your background fabric. Logic says that we should probably draw a light line. However, in my experience, these lines lighten as you appliqué. The lead actually rubs off. I have had to re-draw lightly drawn lines in order to finish a block. As a result, I now make a firm line using medium pressure rather than drawing a light line. You can experiment with line pressure until you find a pressure that works best for you. A thin,

light weight or light color background will require a lighter line as the line should not show through on the front of the background fabric.



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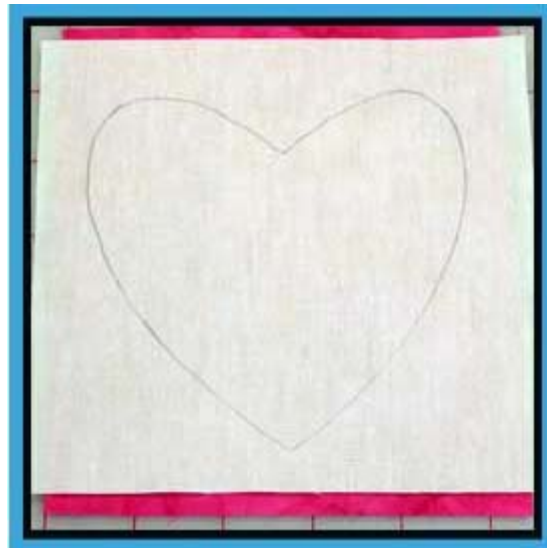
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Place appliqué fabric

Step 3: Next we will need to baste an appliqué piece into place on the front of our background square. Study your pattern. If the order of appliqué has been numbered on the pattern just begin with appliqué piece number 1. If the order of appliqué has not been numbered on your pattern, you will need to study the pattern carefully. Begin by choosing an appliqué piece on the bottom layer. A bottom layer piece will not overlap any other piece. Other pieces may overlap a bottom layer piece but the bottom layer piece will not overlap any other piece. In a large design, there will probably be several pieces on the bottom layer. Select one.

Choose a fabric for this appliqué piece. Place a piece of this fabric over the design on the front side of the background and pin in place. To me this is the most difficult step in this process. We do not want to waste fabric and yet we want to be sure that we completely cover the piece that we will be appliquéing, including seam allowance. There are two methods that may help you in this placement.



Method 1: Light Source Method of Placement. After pinning the fabric to the front of your background piece, hold the background up to the light with the back facing you. Look at the drawn patch. The appliqué fabric should show completely around your

patch and should extend beyond the drawn line by the width of the seam allowance that you will be using. (Approximately 1/8" - 3/16") If there is a lot of extra appliqué fabric showing around your drawn line, reposition the appliqué fabric on the front. Try to shift it into a corner so that 2 sides are close to the edge.

This method works well if you are using a light background or if you are applying the first few pieces on a new block. The method doesn't work on a dark background as the appliqué fabric on the front of the block will not show through the dark background. Also many layered objects such as a rose with 6-8 petals, will begin overlapping themselves in such a way that you will not be able to see the appliqué fabric when you turn the background over and hold it up to the light. As a result I use the pin method of placement to solve this problem.

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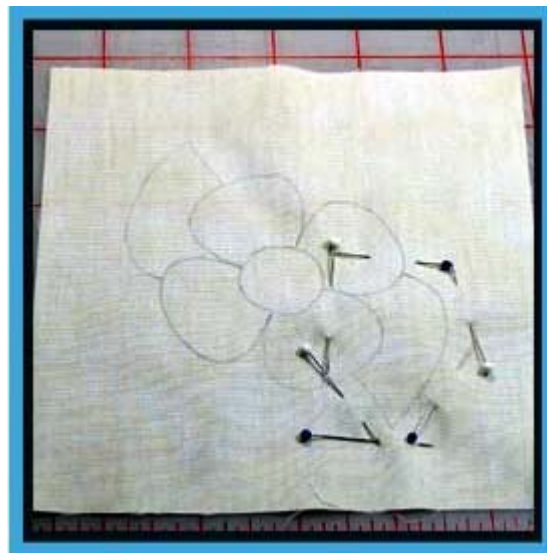


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Pin Method of Placement

Method 2: For this demonstration we will switch from our heart appliqué to a leaf. This leaf is part of a larger design and has already been drawn on the backside of the background fabric. The leaf is on the bottom layer of the design.



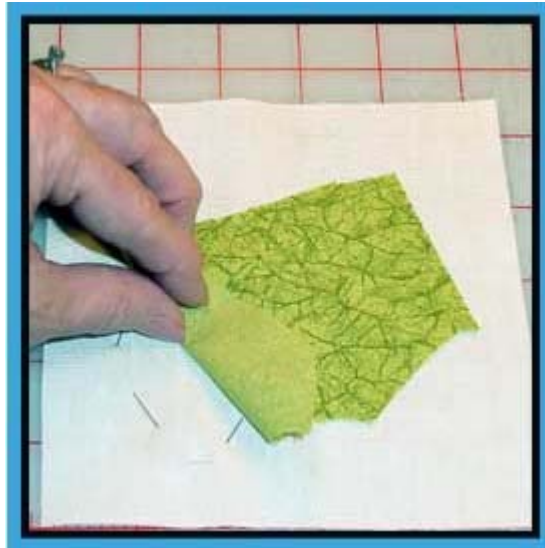
We will begin by placing pins around the leaf that we have chosen to appliqué. Place these pins on the back of the background fabric. I place the pins about 1/4" outside the pencil line.



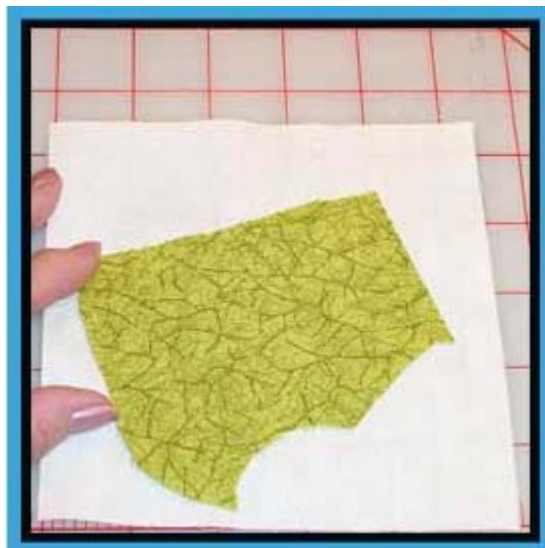


When we flip our work to the front side, we see the pins that we have placed around the leaf.

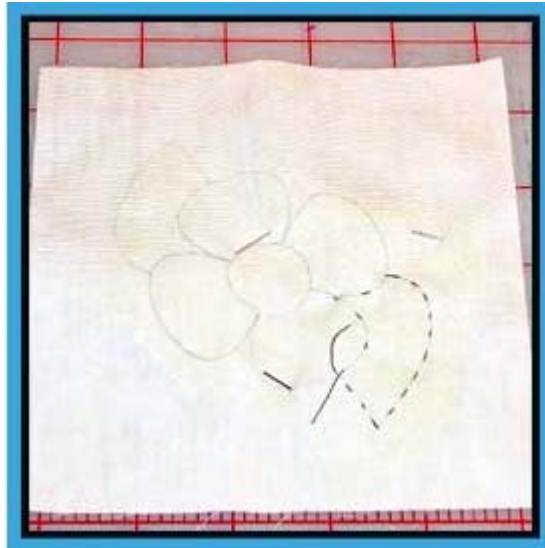
Next we will place the fabric that we have chosen for the leaf, over the pins on the right side of our work. We can either use small scraps or larger pieces such as fat quarters.



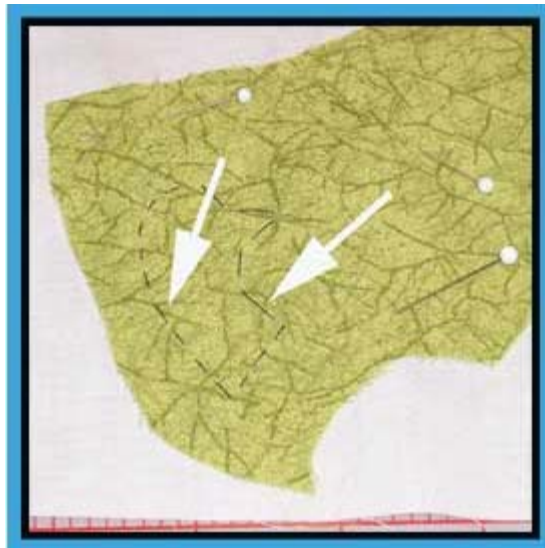
All that is necessary is that the fabric we choose covers the pins. Place the fabric so that one or two edges are almost on the pins. This will waste the least amount of fabric. Pin appliqué fabric in place on the front. If possible, I like to pin outside the set of pins that we placed on the back.



Flip the work to the backside. You may take out the pins that you placed on the back of the fabric. Your appliqué fabric will be held in place by the pins you placed on the front. Now using a heavy, coarse, contrasting thread and a large needle, baste around the leaf. Stitch directly on the drawn line. I have found that taking medium length stitches works well. Stitches that are too small will be difficult to take out when stitching. I use long stitches to baste areas of the design that will be under other appliqué pieces.



Note the arrow to the left is pointing to the medium length stitches I use to mark my stitching line. The arrow to the right is pointing to the longer stitches I use to mark the area that will be underneath the next appliqué piece.



Complete this step by trimming around the appliqué piece. Use a seam allowance width that you feel comfortable with. It will probably be about 3/16" wide. I find it helps to "eyeball" the stitching line if I keep my seam allowance as even as possible.

As you can see, we will be able to get another leaf out of our scrap of green fabric.



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Baste and Trim

We will now return to complete our heart appliqué. You should have your appliqué fabric pinned to the front of your background.

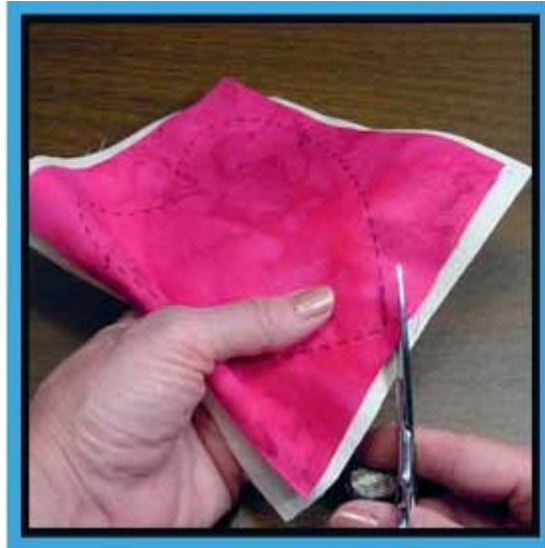
Step 4: Turn your work to the back. Using a large needle (size 8 works well), and a coarse thread (cheap, thick thread with little hairs showing), baste around the piece that you will be appliquéing. Use fairly short basting stitches on edges that you will be needle turning. Use longer stitches on edges that are under other appliqué pieces. Be sure to either start or end a stitch in each turning point.



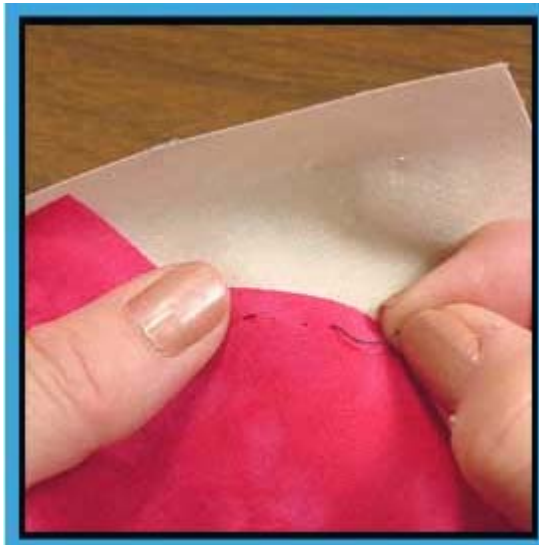
Back

Front

Step 5: Flip your work to the front side again. If you have a small patch such as the leaf in the previous example, trim the design using small scissors or appliqué scissors allowing a 1/8" or 3/16" seam allowance. If you have a large piece, rough cut around the appliqué patch. This rough cut doesn't have to be even but it does have to be outside of your normal seam allowance. If I have enough material I will make this cut between 3/8" and 1/4" outside basted line. I rough cut pieces that I will not be able to stitch in one sitting.



Step 6: Thread your needle with your favorite appliqué thread. We are ready to begin sewing. First we will select a beginning location. On a piece that will be overlapped, begin stitching where the stitching will be underneath the piece that overlaps it. On a piece that is not overlapped, select a spot that is fairly straight. On a large piece, trim the seam allowance to either 1/8" or 3/16" in the area where you are going to begin. This is our final trim so try to keep the seam allowance as even as possible. If you are stitching a small piece you will have already trimmed to the desired seam allowance. Clip a couple of the basting threads in the area where you have chosen to begin. These clips will probably need to be about 1" apart when we first start. The basting threads can be removed by pulling them out by hand or by lifting them out with the tip of your needle.

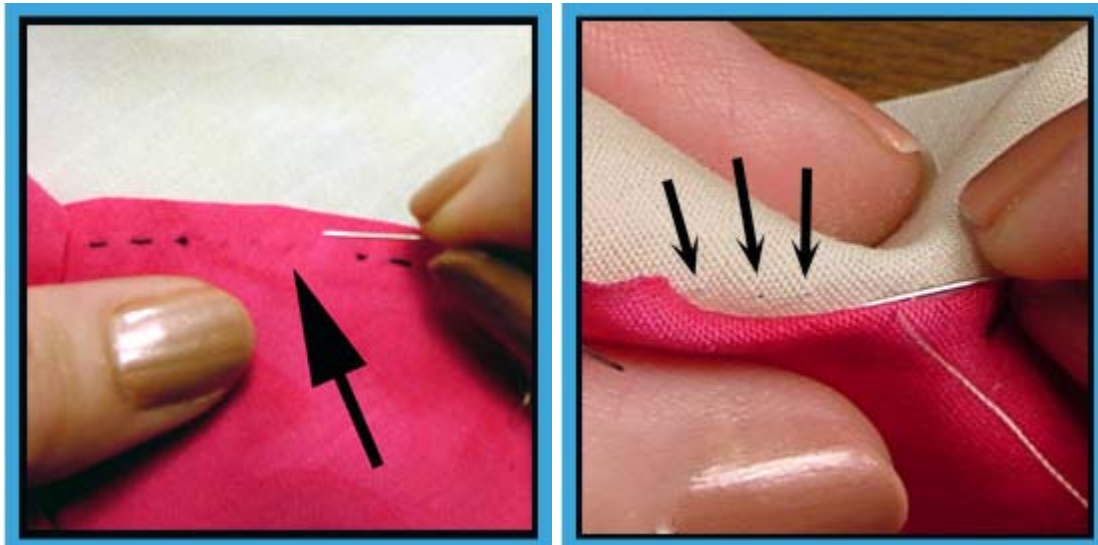


Pull basting thread by hand



Pull basting thread with tip of needle

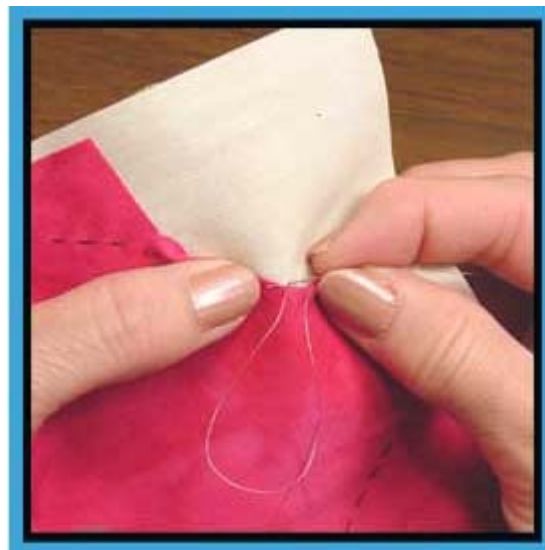
After pulling the basting thread you will probably see small holes made by the thread in either the appliqué fabric or in the background fabric. I have found that the holes stand out better if I have sprayed the fabric with sizing before I begin.



Holes in appliqué patch

Holes in background

Using your needle or a toothpick, turn under the seam allowance. Use the holes as a guide. You will find that your seam allowance will turn very easily along the line that you have basted. You are now ready to stitch. As you stitch, the fabric will return to its normal state and the holes will no longer show.



Well, that's all there is to it. After stitching your first piece, pick another patch and repeat steps 3-6. Check out the next page for additional tips.

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Tips and Tricks

A special tip from **Suzanne**

Suzanne, who taught me back basting, sent me an e-mail with another great tip. Occasionally, when a fabric she is using doesn't show holes to use as a guide, Suzanne uses a General's® chalk pencil to mark between the stitches. Suzanne says, "It's like connecting the dots." When she takes out the basting thread she has the chalk line to

Tip1: Spray either your background fabric or appliqué fabric with sizing before beginning. This will make the holes left by the basting thread easier to see. I spray the lighter colored fabric as the holes will show up in that fabric.

Tip2: I have found that it goes faster if I clip the basting stitches every 2 or 3 stitches for several inches on large appliqué pieces. For smaller pieces I often clip the basting stitches every 2 or 3 stitches on the piece before I begin. However, I only take out one section of basting thread at a time. If you take out too much your appliqué piece may shift.

Tip3: I never trim the seam allowance on a large appliqué piece all at once. It may take me several even days to get the work done. During that time the edges on my appliqué may fray. Instead, I only trim the seam allowance about 1"-2" ahead of where I am stitching. I then stitch that area before trimming the seam allowance for the next section of my appliqué.

Tip4: On some fabrics you simply will not be able to see the holes left by the basting thread. When this happens you may use two other guides to help you stitch. First, you can look ahead to the basting stitches that are still in the fabric. This will give you a good idea as to your destination. Second, use your seam allowance as a guide. This is why it is so important to cut your seam allowance very evenly that is, the width of the seam allowance is very even.

Tip5: Select a cheap, coarse, heavy thread for your back basting stitching. The thread, while wrapped around the spool, will look fuzzy. There are actually small fibers that stick out away from the main thread. Those fibers actually leave behind a very good hole as you pull them through the fabric. If that type of thread isn't available, a heavier weight thread such as quilting thread will often produce holes large enough to see. Experiment until you find a thread that works for you.

Give yourself time. It may take a little practice but it is well worth it. Once you master back basting, you will find it is

- faster
- just as accurate
- easier

than any other form of needle turn appliqué.

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