

Lesson 16 – Stems

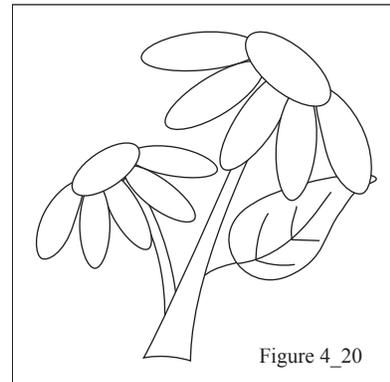
Stems

Stems are an often overlooked part of our appliqué designs. They are there. They are essential, but they aren't as exciting as flowers or rabbits. There are several ways of appliquéing stems. We will explore the following four.

1. Normal patch.
2. Celtic bias strip.
3. Double-sided narrow.
4. Skinny free-style.

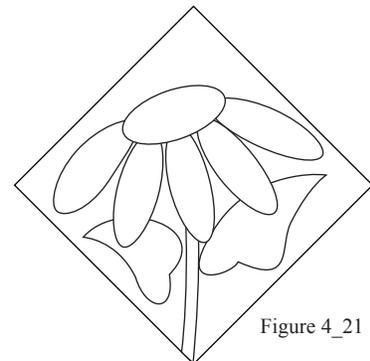
Normal Patch Stems

These are the simplest and easiest stems. We create them just like any other patch. That is we work from the traced pattern on the back of our background fabric. We place the appliqué fabric with the pin method of placement. We QuikPrep baste the stem, cut it out and appliqué it as usual. We use this method for any stem that is at least 1/4" wide and for asymmetrical stems. (Figure 4_20)



Celtic Stems

Celtic stems can be made when the stems are even in width. (Figure 4_21) They are a wonderful way to guarantee uniformity across a quilt. This makes them especially useful when making opportunity quilts where every block is made by a different appliquéer. One individual can be responsible for



making yards of celtic strips. Then as each block kit is made up just cut off the necessary length of celtic strip to add to each kit.

To make celtic stems we need a set of celtic bars. I prefer the metal ones as these produce the sharpest, crispest edges on our bias strips.

Basically you will cut bias strips, fold, stitch and press them. Follow the instructions that comes with your Celtic bars to determine the width of the strips that you will need to cut.

There is one feature of Celtic strips used as stems that can be either a positive feature or a negative one. In some parts of the strip there are four layers of fabric plus the thread that stitched the strip. This can be very bulky. If you want a padded look this is great. If you don't there are at least two methods of reducing this bulk.

First of all you can reduce some of the bulk by using a very light-weight thread when sewing the strip. I like to use a 60 wt. or even a 100 wt. thread. Once appliquéd in place, this thread will not be needed to hold the stem together. So we can get away with using such a light thread. Just handle the Celtic strips gently until the stems have been appliquéd.

The second method entails removing the seam entirely just leaving the seam allowance on each side. Let's look at each step in this method.

1. Cut the desired width of bias strip as per the instruction chart that came with your Celtic bias bars.
2. Fold and stitch your bias strip. Once again follow the instructions that came with your Celtic bias bars.

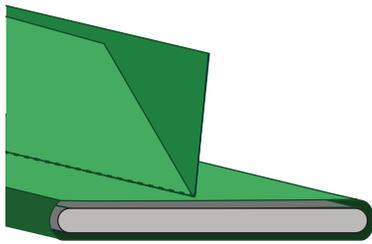


Figure 4_22

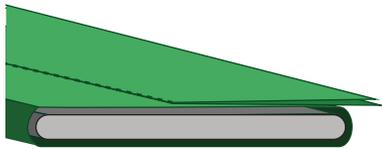


Figure 4_23

3. Insert the appropriate Celtic bias bar into the tube that you created. Rotate the seam so that it is positioned in the center of the Celtic bias bar. (Figure 4_22)
4. Using a steam iron firmly press the seam allowances to one side. Be careful. The metal bias strip can get hot enough to burn. Allow it to cool down after each steaming before handling it. (Figure 4_23)

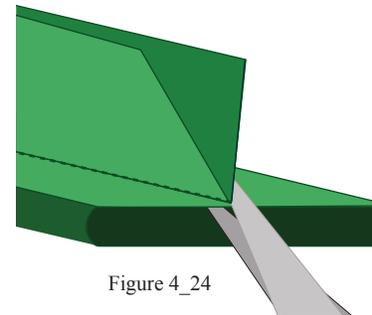


Figure 4_24

5. Remove the bias bar. Press the Celtic strip a second time using steam. We want a very sharp, crisp edge on our Celtic strip.
6. Now cut on each side of the stitching cutting out the seam and the extra seam allowance. (Figure 4_24) We are left with a bias strip of even width that has seam allowance turned under on each side. (Figure 4_25)

There are two advantages to cutting the seam allowance and the stitching out of the Celtic bias strip. Firstly it reduces the bulk giving a much flatter look. Secondly it makes the bias strip much more pliable. It will make tighter curves and do it more smoothly than a bias strip that hasn't been altered.

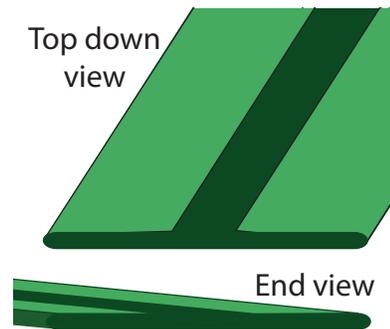
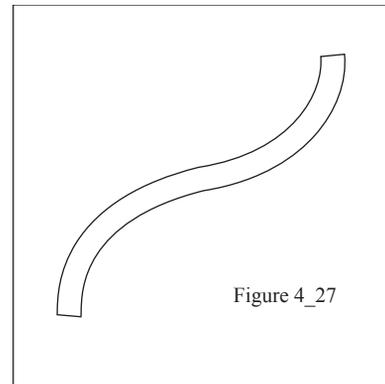
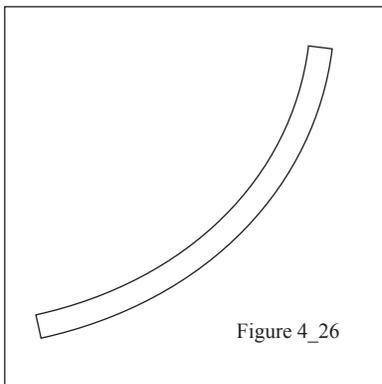


Figure 4_25

Celtic bias strips can also be used for other elements of appliqué other than stems. There are several sizes which allow for variations in the width of the finished bias strips. I have used them to weave baskets and trellises, basket handles, fences, spokes on wagon wheels and poles for birdhouses.

Double-Sided Narrow

The double-sided narrow stem is less than 1/4" in width. Figures 4_26 and 4_27 are two examples. They are fairly easy to stitch. There are two major difference between this type of stem and a normal patch stem. The first difference is that we trim the seam allowance on the first side of the stem to 1/4". That is wider than normal. The second difference is when we QuikPrep baste the second side. For a double-sided narrow stem the second side is not QuikPrep basted until after the first side is appliquéd and the seam allowance has been trimmed.



1. Trace one side of stem.
2. Trim seam allowance to 1/4".
3. Appliqué the trimmed side of stem.
4. Pull back the appliqué fabric to trim the seam just stitched.
5. QuikPrep baste the second side of the stem.

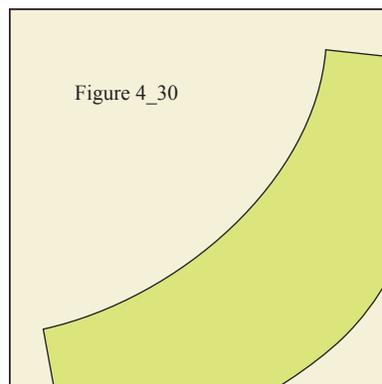
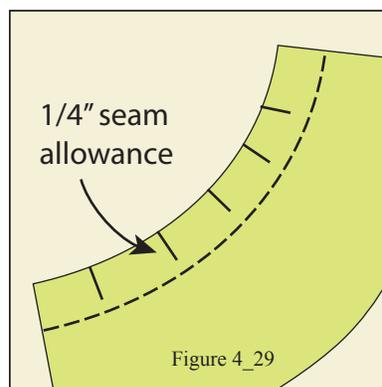
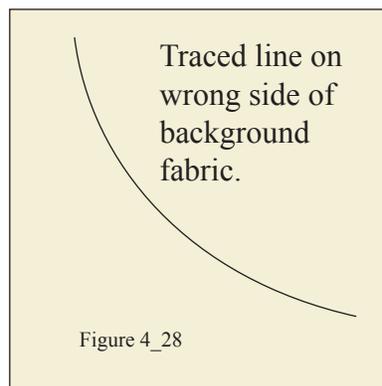
6. Trim the seam just stitched.
7. Appliqué the second side.

Follow along with me by selecting one of these patterns to make as a sample. Cut a 6" background square.

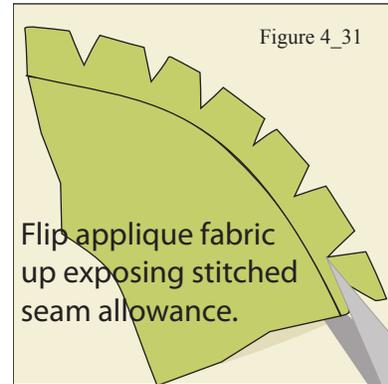
Step 1: Trace the stem on to the wrong side of the background fabric. Place the appliqué fabric using the pin method of placement and QuikPrep baste the inner curve.

Step 2: Now flip to the front and relieve the seam allowance if it was an inner curve. (Figure 4_29) Use your serrated scissors and trim this seam allowance to 1/4". This is wider than normal but it will give us more to hold on to when we are ready to trim this seam allowance in step 4. If it is an outer curve, trim the seam allowance to less than 1/8".

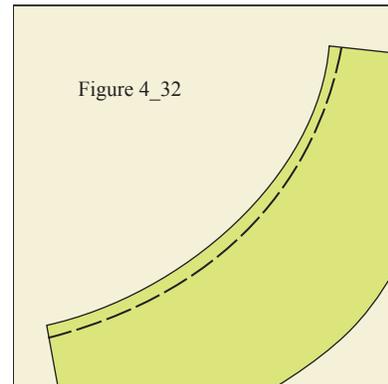
Step 3: Appliqué the edge. (Figure 4_30)



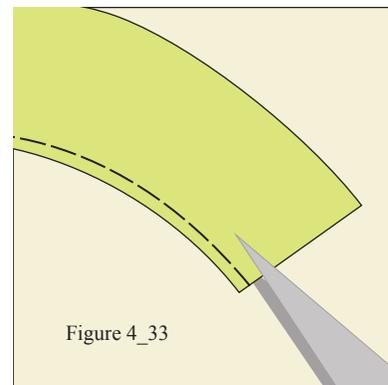
Step 4: On the front, pull back the appliqué fabric exposing the seam allowance just turned under. Trim this seam allowance as narrow as possible using your serrated scissors. It must be trimmed until it is less than the width of the finished stem. In this case, the seam allowance must be trimmed to less than 1/8". (Figure 4_31)



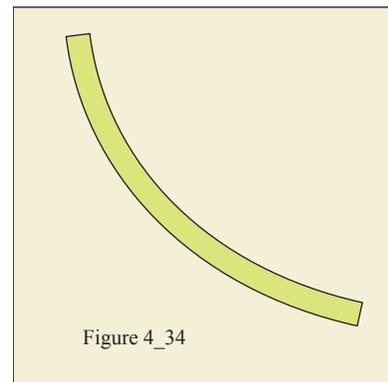
Step 5: Flip to the back side and QuikPrep baste the second side. When done, the front side will look like Figure 4_32.



Step 6: Flip to the front. Using your serrated scissors, trim the seam allowance to less than the width of the finished stem. In this case, the seam allowance must be trimmed to less than 1/8". You can't cram a 1/4" seam allowance into a 1/8" stem. It's scary but cut that seam allowance slightly less than 1/8". (Figure 4_33)



Step 7: Use your appliqué turner or cuticle stick to turn under the seam allowance then appliqué as usual. Figure 4_34 shows our completed stem.



Top Tip

Trim the seam allowance on a skinny stem to less than the width of the skinny stem. A 1/8" skinny stem must have its seam allowances trimmed to less than 1/8".

Skinny Free-Style

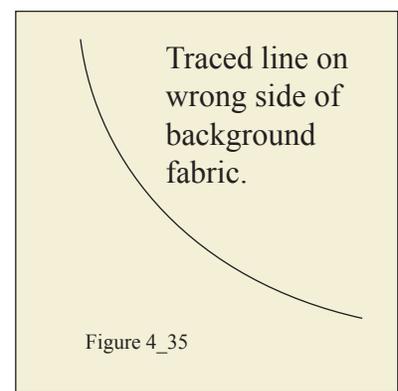
The skinny free-style stem is the narrowest of all. And like the double-sided narrow it isn't difficult to do. The gals in my workshops have repeatedly declared it to be the easiest technique they have learned.

There is one important trick to creating an ultra-skinny stem. Begin with the very best quality 100% cotton. It needs to be firmly woven and fine to the touch. It should not feel thick and coarse. Remember, the better the fabric, the skinnier the stem.

1. Trace one side of stem.
2. Trim seam allowance to 1/4".
3. Appliqué one side of stem.
4. Trim the seam just stitched underneath the appliqué fabric.
5. Cut seam allowance for second side.
6. Appliqué the second side.

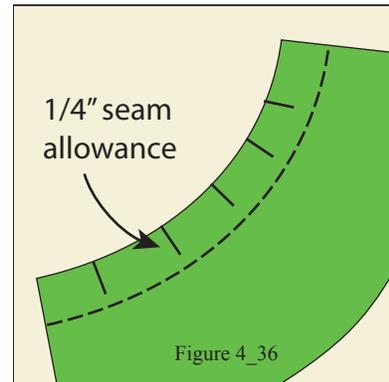
You won't believe how easy this is until you have tried it. Cut a 6" square of fabric and follow along with me.

Step 1: Trace one side of the stem onto the wrong side of the background fabric. Either side works OK although

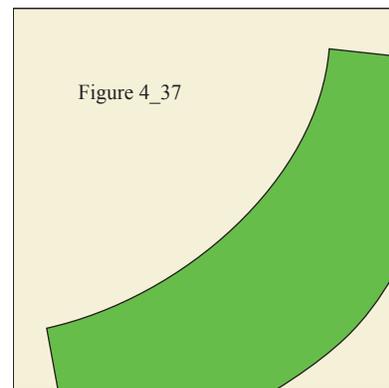


trimming the inner curve seam allowance after it is stitched is more easily done if the inside curve has been appliquéd first. This isn't always possible. For the stem in Figure 4_35 either edge will work. Place the appliqué fabric using the pin method of placement and QuikPrep baste the pencil line.

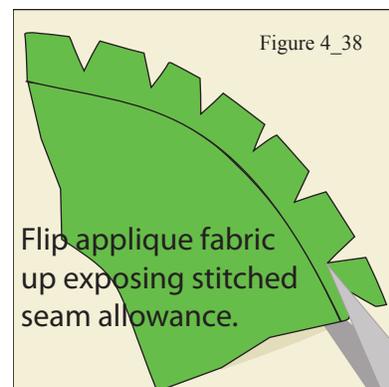
Step 2: Now flip to the front and trim the seam allowance on the edge just QuikPrep basted. (Figure 4_36) Trim this seam allowance to 1/4". This is wider than normal but it will give us more to hold on to when we are ready to trim this seam allowance in step 4. Relieve the seam if an inner curve.



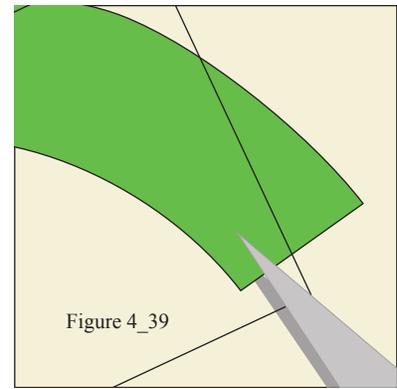
Step 3. Appliqué the first side.



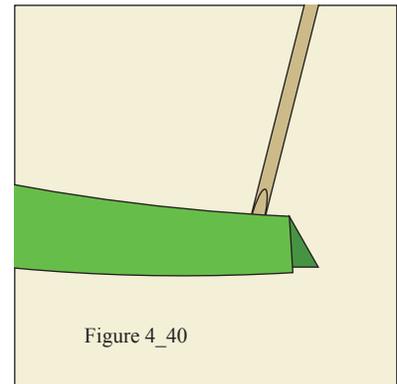
Step 4: Now pull back the appliqué fabric exposing the seam allowance just turned under. Trim this seam allowance as narrow as possible. It must be trimmed until it is less than the width of the finished stem. In this case, the seam allowance must be trimmed to less than 1/8".



Step 5: Cut the seam allowance for the second side. Eye-ball it. If we want a 1/8” stem we will need to leave a 1/16” seam allowance. That means we need to eye-ball and cut about 1/16” away from the appliquéd edge. Yes, it is scary. That is why we are practicing on a 6” square of fabric rather than on an actual project.



Step 6: Using your appliqué turner or cuticle stick, turn under and appliqué the second side. The seam allowance that you are turning under will probably be up against the first side that was stitched.



I believe that an appliqué turner or cuticle stick is essential to be successful creating the skinniest stems. The use of either of these tools reduces fraying of the appliqué fabric. If you have tried making skinny stems in the past and have not been satisfied with the results, try again using either an appliqué turner or a cuticle stick.

