

Lesson 1

Equipment and Tools

You will need the following:

- Your eyes
- Pattern
- Fabric
- 100 wt. Silk thread for appliqué, 5-7 shades of taupe, 1-spool black, 1-spool white
- 50 wt. or heavier thread for basting
- #10, #11 or #12 needles for appliqué (I love Clover Black Gold Needles

Appliqué/Sharps

- #5, #6, or #7 needle for the QuikPrep Stitch
- Embroidery scissors with a sharp point that cut to that point
- Serrated scissors
- Thimble
- Pins
- Toothpicks
- Cuticle Stick (wood with point at one end and cuticle pusher at the other)
- #2 pencil
- An inexpensive Bic pen (for working on dark fabrics)
- Light box (optional)
- Throw pillow
- Mylar™ heat resistant circles
- Circle template

Wow!!! That's not a very long list. Not only that, with the exception of silk thread and an cuticle stick you will probably have most of these items on hand. What could be easier?

Let's take just a minute to elaborate on each of these items.

Your eyes

Your eyes are the most important tool you have in your tool bag. Your eyes will tell you how your appliqué is looking as you go along. There will be no surprises when you finish your project if you have been looking at it as you go along.

I'm amazed as I teach workshops at the number of appliquéers that don't look at the edge of their appliqué patches as they appliqué them. They concentrate on turning the edge under, but don't look beyond the area that they have just turned under. They concentrate on doing the applique stitch properly, but don't check to be sure they aren't stitching in "pokies".

Using this one tool – your eyes – properly, will improve your appliqué more than any of the other techniques that I can show you.

Golden Rule of Appliqué

Your eyes are your most important tool.

Pattern

A specific pattern may have tweaked your interest in appliqué. It may have been an appliqué quilt made by a grandmother or aunt. Or you might have seen an appliqué

quilt at a quilt show that tugged at your heartstrings. Or possibly an appliquér in your quilt guild has made a quilt that entices you. Whatever your motivation, you will need to select a pattern. You may need to “work your way up” to the design that you would most like to make, developing the skills necessary to make that quilt as you go along.

As you begin your journey, you will need to select an easy pattern. Many patterns will be marked as either “easy”, “intermediate” or “advanced”. Select a pattern that is in your skill level. If the pattern has not been rated, study it. Easy patterns will have

- medium to large pieces
- mostly curves (either outer curves or inner curves)
- no more than 1 inner point on an individual patch.

“It’s such a lovely pattern but those just aren’t my colors.” “Why can’t I ever find a pattern as nice as this in my colors (or style)?” You’ve heard these comments at quilt shows just as I have. What these potential quilters don’t understand is that almost any pattern can be made in a variety of styles and colors. There are exceptions to this, of course. Art Nouveau patterns will lose their “art nouveauiness” if made in 1950’s fabric but may still be a lovely quilt.

Floral quilts will look lovely in almost any color. It isn’t even necessary to stay within the color range of a specific flower. For example, we think of irises as purple, yellow, rust or possibly pink. If you want a red quilt, red irises can dance across your bed. Are you uncomfortable with this? Next time you are in a quilt shop check out the florals. You will find a floral print in many color-ways. I’ve seen some beautiful florals in browns and blacks. Not your traditional colors.

Having trouble selecting a color scheme? Select a print fabric that you absolutely love that is the perfect colors for your project. Pull your colors from this fabric. You don't even need to use the floral itself in the quilt. It will have served its purpose in providing your color scheme.

Don't be limited in your pattern choice because of color concerns. Let your imagination run wild and indulge in a pattern that you like even though your color choices may be unique.

Top Tip

Not for beginners: You will occasionally find a pattern that

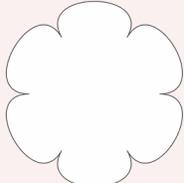


Figure 1_1

is rated "easy" that has this shape in it. The 6 inner points make this a shape for intermediate or advanced appliqué.

Fabric

For beginners I would recommend a good quality, soft, 100% cotton fabric. This fabric should be firmly woven and have a high thread count. Pull some fabrics from your stash or head to your local quilt shop. Check several fabrics by rubbing the fabric between your thumb and first finger. As you check out these fabrics you will begin to notice a difference in them. Some are smooth and light-weight. Some are heavier and coarser. We will use the smoother, lighter-weight fabric for appliqué.

For experienced appliquéers I would encourage you to experiment with other fabrics such as silks, brocades and lamés.

Not all fabric is created for applique. A good applique fabric will have a high thread count and will be soft. We will make it even softer by washing it before we use it. Washing removes any excess sizing and dyes. It will leave your fabric soft and pliable. The seam allowance will be easier to turn under and manipulate. You will have greater control of that seam allowance.

A washed, soft, pliable fabric is the first step in reducing pokies. Pokies are the sharp points that sometimes develop along the edge of our applique. Fabric that is stiff has a tendency to fold into pokies.

At my house, all 100% cotton fabric, when first purchased, makes its first stop at my washing machine. Only after it has been washed and pressed does it enter my stash or is used in a quilt.

Large yardages of 100% cotton fabric can be washed in your washing machine. I put like colors in my washing machine, throw in a color catcher or dye magnet, set on a delicate, gentle cycle with hot water. I do not use soap unless the fabric is soiled. When the washer is done the fabric goes into the dryer. Personally I don't use a fabric softener nor a dryer sheet. I try to catch the fabric before it is completely dry as this makes it easier to iron the fabric. I use a "cotton" setting on my iron, when pressing. My fabric is now ready to use.

I like to soak small quantities of 100% cotton fabric such as individual fat quarters in my sink in hot water. Soak all fabric for at least 10 minutes to release any excess dye in the fabric. Then rinse under warm water until the water runs clear. Place the fabric in

a soft, terry towel, roll up and gently wring to remove out any excess moisture. Hang over a towel rod to dry. When dry, press with a hot iron.

Appliqué Thread

There are two thoughts in the appliqué world about thread. There are those who use 100 wt. silk thread and those that use a 60 wt. or finer 100% cotton thread. Those who use the cotton thread believe that cotton thread should be used on cotton fabric and silk thread should be used on silk fabric.

I, personally, rarely use anything but 100 wt. silk thread. This thread absolutely “melts into the fabric. It is strong, fine and invisible in our project. The exception, for me, is when I work with satins, brocades, lamés or other specialty fabrics. In these cases, I experiment with other threads to find the thread that shows the least.

A good selection of neutrals will allow you to stitch almost any color. To begin I would recommend 5-7 spools of taupe. The lightest taupe should almost be white. The darkest will be a very dark brown. Add 3 to 5 spools in varying shades between these two. You will also need one spool of black and one of white. As time goes on, you will want to expand your thread selection by adding 2 or 3 shades of gray. If you really get into appliqué, as I am, you will probably want every color of silk that is available. Thread can be as addictive as fabric.

When it is time to choose a thread for your applique, audition several threads by laying them across your fabric. Select the one that is the hardest to see. If it appears that more than one thread will work, select the darkest of the two.

Personally, I use two silk threads. One is Superior Threads Kimono Silk the other is YLI 100 wt. silk. Both are beautiful threads that will produce lovely appliqué.

If you haven't already purchased your silk thread, I want you to do so immediately. Your success with the exercises in future lessons will be dependent upon your using the proper thread. Yes, I know. There is always someone who thinks they can use the same thread that they use for piecing. This is not true. The look of fine hand-appliqué can only be achieved with the use of the proper thread. It needs to be a very light-weight, thin thread. I would recommend either 100 wt. silk or 60 wt. or finer 100% cotton thread.

When I first started teaching workshops, I asked the students to bring a spool of 100 wt. silk thread for their appliqué. It didn't take me long to learn that very few actually went to the trouble of finding this thread and bringing it to

class. The results were very disappointing to the students and to me as they struggled to make fine points with thick, heavy thread. Their appliqué wasn't very successful.

Now I provide the proper thread in a kit that I prepare for my workshops. I also provide the proper appliqué fabric and needles. As my husband, a woodworker, would say, using the proper tools for a job insures the successful completion of that job.

Top Tip

Using the proper tool for a job helps guarantee the success of that job.

VERY IMPORTANT

Purchase the following thread:

5-7 spools of 100 wt. silk thread in a variety of taupe shades from very light, almost white to vary dark, almost black.

1 spool of 100 wt. black silk thread.

QuikPrep Thread

QuikPrep thread should be 50 wt. or heavier. It really doesn't matter as to the type of thread. It can be polyester thread, 100% cotton, a blend of these two or almost any other type of thread. I've used hand quilting thread, upholstery thread as well as general sewing thread.

I love to use up my old thread from the days I made my kids clothes. I do test my thread before using. Some of my old thread is also cheap thread that will leave fibers in the fabric. Before selecting a spool I first thread my needle with a 6-8 inches of the proposed thread. I then take a stitch or two in scrap fabric and pull the potential thread all the way through. If little fibers are left in the scrap fabric, I throw the spool out. Otherwise I'm ready to use it for my project.

Keep two spools of QuikPrep thread on hand at all times. One spool should be a light color that will show up well on dark fabrics. The other should be a dark color that will show up well on light fabrics.

Appliqué Needles

Needle selection is very important in hand appliqué. We spend many hours holding a needle. A good needle will:

- produce beautiful stitches.
- be very fine (thin).
- be comfortable to use.

In the past much beautiful appliqué has been produced using a straw needle. Straw needles, with their extra length, made it much easier to roll under seam allowances. However, mastering a straw needle took many hours of practice. If you have mastered

the art of using a straw needle, that's great. QuikPrep Appliqué can be done using straw needles. It is not necessary to give up your straw needles.

For those of you who have not used straw needles, you will not need to master this tool to do lovely appliqué. Nancy Kerns introduced me to the appliqué turner (cuticle stick). This tool is the ultimate tool for turning under seam allowances. With this tool it is no longer necessary to use a long needle to roll under seam allowances.

I prefer a short needle for the same reason we use a short needle when hand-quilting. We are better able to produce short, fine stitches with a short needle.

However, our appliqué needle needs to be finer than our hand-quilting needle. For hand-quilting we want a very strong needle that won't bend as we push through multiple layers of fabric and batting.

For appliqué we want a very fine needle that will not distort the edge of our fabric or our points as we pull the needle and thread through our appliqué fabric.

For beginners I would recommend that you start with a size 10 between needle. As you move from beginner to intermediate appliqué you should consider moving to a size 11 or 12. I, personally, love Clover Black and Gold Appliqué/Sharps. These can usually be found at your local quilt shop or they will order them for you.

QuikPrep Needles

For our QuikPrep stitching needs, we will need a larger needle. Really the only requirement is that the eye of the needle is large enough to easily take the Quik Prep thread that we have selected.

Personally, I usually use a size 5, 6 or 7.

Scissors

I keep two pair of scissors on a lanyard around my neck. **Embroidery shears** with a sharp point that cut all the way to the point are a staple that I have used for 50 years. About 5 years ago I discovered **serrated scissors**. Wow!!! Serrated scissors will grab and hold your fabric as you cut your seam allowances. They make it much easier to produce nice even seam allowances. Either a short 4” pair or a medium 6” pair will work best.

Thimble

Thimbles are also personal. Some like a metal thimble. Others like leather. You may use the thimble of your choice for your hand-appliqué.

If you have never used a thimble, I would encourage you to do so. They will protect you from sore fingers and you will be able to stitch for longer periods of time. Try a variety of thimbles until you find one that works for you.

A good thimble will hold the end of the needle so that it doesn't slip off the thimble. For a metal thimble this means the end should be well dimpled and have a rim to prevent slippage.

Personally, I use a Clover “Protect and Grip”™ thimble. This thimble has a soft, elastic, rubbery-like material that grips my finger. I find it easy to use even if my nails are long.

Pins

I keep a couple of types of pins with my appliqué. I like a long (1-1 1/4”) pin to hold my appliqué fabric in place. A heavier pin, possibly with a flower head or a big, round head is perfect for my pin method of placement.

I do not use the short appliqué pins. They are just too hard for me to hold. Also if you carefully follow the instructions for pinning the appliqué patches in place, you will not have pins on the side of the fabric where you are working. That means you will not be wrapping your thread around the pins.

Toothpicks

Any round toothpick will do. You will want to keep a round one with your appliqué project. They aren't used a lot but are absolutely irreplaceable in certain situations. You will learn more about this later.

The flat toothpicks, while working for some of your appliqué needs, won't work for everything. You will want to stick with round toothpicks.

Appliqué Turner = Cuticle stick

This delightful tool will make turning the seam allowances of your appliqué a snap. Because of the width of this tool (about 1/8"), the end will spread your seam allowance as it turns it under. It is one of the best tools for eliminating pokies. We will devote a whole section on how to use this tool in later lessons.

The simplest way to get a large supply of appliqué turners is to buy a pack of wood cuticle sticks. I prefer those that are 4" – 4.5" in length.

#2 Lead Pencil

Our primary marking tool will be a #2 lead pencil. We will use it to mark our pattern on the wrong side of our appliqué fabric.

Pen for marking Glad Press 'N' Seal™

An inexpensive pen or any pen that doesn't smear is used to mark Glad Press 'N' Seal when working with dark background fabrics. Test your pen by drawing several lines

on a scrap of Glad Press 'N' Seal™. Rub your finger over one of the lines. Does it smear? Allow it to dry for 10 minutes. Rub your finger over another line. Does it smear? Don't use any pen that will smear after 10 minutes.

I have found that some of the most inexpensive pens – the kind businesses hand out as promotionals with their name on the side – often smear the least.

Light Box (optional)

You will need a good light source when tracing your pattern onto your background fabric. This could be a window, a glass-topped table or a light box. You can purchase a light box or you can make one from a light-bulb on the end of an electrical cord and a plastic box.

Throw Pillow

Use a throw pillow as an appliqué pillow. When I first started appliqueing in 1966, there was no one around to teach me. I almost always appliqued after work in the evening. My arms were tired because I spent a lot of time at a keyboard. I pulled a pillow over to use as a table or desk. It worked beautiful. I had a place to rest my arms as I worked. It also worked well as a place to park my needles and pins.

Just remember to let your family know which pillow is your appliqué pillow. You will occasionally “loose” a needle in the pillow. You wouldn't want an unfortunate accident if someone were to discover the lost needle when they laid their head on it.

You can also make your pillow more usable and identifiable by making and attaching a tool holder to it to hold your cuticle stick.