



Custom Longarm Quilting and Design by Judy Gucker
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HOW TO PREPARE YOUR QUILT FOR LONGARM QUILTING

Do not baste your quilt!

QUILT TOP

1. Pre-wash your fabric

- Natural fibers shrink, some more than others. Ask yourself, do you want the fabrics in your pieced and appliquéd quilts to shrink at different rates when your quilts are washed?
- Dye running is not a huge issue today with the use of Synthrapol as it keeps loose dye particles suspended in the wash water so dyes don't bleed into other areas. However, new batiks, imported fabrics and many dark fabrics may continue to bleed following a simple wash.
- New fabrics contain formaldehydes, dyes and oils that can rub off on your hands. If you have allergies, washing is especially important. [See how to wash cotton fabrics.](#)

2. Consistency is key. Use the same measuring device (mat or ruler), sewing machine and seam allowance throughout the whole quilt. Cut all your pieces with an exact ¼-inch seam allowance. When piecing, make sure you evenly line up the edges of your pieces and stitch a consistent scant ¼-inch seam. Do not work on more than one sewing machine on a single quilt. Check and double-check your seams. If the tension on your sewing machine is off or your hand stitching is loose or you haven't secured a seam, when the quilt is loaded onto the machine, a hole may show up. There is little we can do at that point; we may be able to carefully quilt over the area to minimize the hole. Neither of us wants that to happen.

3. Square up all blocks before sashing or sewing them together. If your blocks are meant to be the same size, be sure to trim them the same size. Blocks that are not square or are different sizes and forced together will not lie flat causing some blocks to be puffy once quilted.

4. After the body of your quilt top has been pieced and pressed, borders need to be applied so that your quilt top lies flat and is square. [See making and attaching borders.](#)

5. Clip any loose threads from your quilt. Trailing threads on the under-side of your top may show through, especially in light-colored areas

6. The top needs to be gently pressed with seams lying flat. This is especially important for stitching in the ditch. Be careful not to stretch as you press. [See pressing.](#)

7. If your quilt has a top edge, please identify it with a safety pin so designs are oriented correctly.

8. If the outside edge of your quilt top has bias edges or pieced seams, carefully stay-stitch ¼-inch from the edge of the entire top to prevent stretching and to prevent stitching from coming undone.

9. Do not embellish until after the quilting process.

10. In consideration for our other clients please use a sticky tape lint roller to remove any pet hairs from the front and back of your quilt top. If you are a smoker, please hang your quilt top and back outside to air.
11. Do not pin or baste.

BACKING

1. Although we seldom have tension issues we prefer that you choose the same or blending color thread for the top. We allow you to choose a different color thread for the back. However, *if you use a lot of solid fabric* in either the top or the back it is wise that your top and back threads blend or are the same color as it is impossible not to have an occasional pokie, when the thread peaks through to the other side. Please consider this when choosing your fabric. Also, if you simply want a pantograph or other edge-to-edge design, a print works best for the backing as we may secure the stitches with tiny back tracking which might show on a plain fabric. For custom level quilting, we always bury the thread as you would when hand quilting.
2. The quilt backing needs to measure 8-inches longer and 8-inches wider (4-inches larger on all sides), *after it's been squared up*, than your top. For example, for a 60-inch x 80-inch quilt top, the backing should measure 68-inches x 88-inches. We will not accept backings that are short.
3. Remove all selvages or they will shrink, drawing up the seams.
4. Seam quilt back with 1/2 -inch seam and press open.
5. To avoid an extra charge, make sure your back is cut square. **See squaring up your back.**
6. We prefer that you do not use a sheet for your back. Tight weave or heavy thread count can cause tension issues. Plus our needle size might break threads and cause holes. If you do use a sheet, you MUST wash it twice or more.
7. If you piece a back other than in strips, we cannot guarantee centering a design on the back. In the process of rolling a quilt onto the take-up roller there is generally some shifting. It is also difficult to guarantee that the back won't have puckers as a pieced backing can stretch in a different direction than the top which often cannot be seen until the quilt is removed from the frame after the quilting has been completed. Although there are methods for keeping a two-sided quilt aligned, you don't want to pay the price unless it's for a show quilt.
8. Piecing your backing can be economical and can be pretty, BUT you must cut the fabric along the grain lines. If you don't, places on the backing may sag, not visible when quilting, which can cause tucks to be quilted into the back of your quilt. Better yet, use a wide backing fabric, but beware, some out there may be inexpensive but their weave may be loose and stretchy which will sag on the longarm. We are Longarm Batik Associates with SewBatik. We have samples of the 104"/108" wide batiks that can be ordered for the backs of your quilts. For ordering information: **See Services & Pricing.**
9. If there is one, indicate back top edge with a pin.
10. Trim threads. Remove pet hair. Press.

BATTING

1. We stock batting. **See Services and Pricing.** These battings create excellent results in appearance, weight, drape and feel of the finished quilt. You may provide your own.
2. All batting is not equal. Batting is used in many industries. Thus, when you buy sale batting without a brand label, you're at risk that it may not be suitable for your quilt. It may even tear on a longarm machine. If the word "craft" comes before quilting on the label, pass it up; it's not worth the pennies you'll save. You have put a lot of time, thought, money and love into your quilt top, don't skimp on this very important ingredient. For the

“The Ultimate Batting Chart” go to: www.villagequiltworks.com/image_info/UlimateBattingChart.pdf . As the developers continue their studies, they will be updating this chart.

3. When choosing a batting consider the quilt’s intended use: Is it to be an heirloom? A wall hanging? A child’s quilt to be loved and laundered often? Do you prefer natural fibers? Is it for warmth? The choice you make will greatly affect the final appearance of your quilt.
 - Cotton lends a wonderful heirloom quality to a quilt. It’s breathable. However, it is much denser than other battings, should be given added care when being washed and will take longer to dry and if the batting hasn’t been pre-washed, even the bleached varieties will shrink some.
 - Polyester will give more definition to the quilting. It’s warm. It does not shrink, can be washed repeatedly and holds its shape. Polyester does not breathe and some tend to beard. It is not environmentally friendly: it is a petroleum product, is flammable, is derived from non-renewable resources, its production involves hazardous chemicals, it releases pollutants and CO₂, and is a major landfill pollutant therefore we recommend limiting its usage and suggest blends or other fibers.
 - Wool, like 100% cotton, is a natural fiber, which means the fiber breathes allowing excess heat to dissipate from the body. It’s warm in the winter and cool in the summer. It has a nice soft drape and is lightweight and washable. Some are of superwash wool, which eliminates most of the shrinkage. Wool does not compress or crease and a tumble in the dryer set on air only will bring back its fluff. However, like polyester, it is prone toward bearding.
 - Silk is luxurious and lightweight. However, it must be hand washed and laid flat to dry.
 - Corn and soy are new and yet to be tested by time. They appear to be more environmentally friendly and because they are natural fibers should breathe. They require special attention when being washed.
4. As with the backing, the quilt batting needs to measure 8-inches longer and 8-inches wider (4-inches larger on all sides) than your top.
5. Poor quality batting varies in thickness from thick to thin. As it may tear and because the finished results will be disappointing, We reserve the right to refuse any inferior batting. Our first priority is that you will be pleased with your quilt.

MAKING AND ATTACHING BORDERS

Do not believe the old adage, "It will quilt out." It more than likely will quilt IN!

When loading the components of a quilt to a longarm machine, first the back is loaded. Next the batting is basted, across the top, to the backing. Then the quilt top is centered and basted at the top and down the sides as far as possible before advancing the quilt. As the quilt is advanced or rolled the basting down the sides is continued. Therefore, **your quilt top must lie flat** otherwise puckers or pleats may be quilted into borders.

Do not cut the borders as sometimes directed in a pattern. The body of your quilt must be first pieced then measured for the border.

To make square borders and to prevent them from becoming WAVY:

1. We recommend that you cut your borders from the lengthwise grain of your fabric.
2. For side borders, it is generally recommended that you measure your quilt top body vertically down the center. However, we recommend that you measure in threes places and determine the average length. Cut two borders that length. Fold each border end to end 2 or 3 times (depending on the size of the quilt) and finger press the fold. Mark each fold with a pin. Fold the quilt top body the same way and finger press the fold at the edge.

Mark each fold with a pin. Unfold both the top and borders. Matching the fold/pin marks, pin the border to the top, right sides together then stitch the borders to the top. You may need to ease in some fullness. Press the seam allowances, usually away from the center.

3. For top and bottom borders, follow the procedure above only take your measurements horizontally, including the side borders.
4. The above two steps can be done in reverse if you wish to apply your top and bottom borders before the side borders.
5. To miter corners, consult a quilting book.
6. If you have any questions or concerns about border attachments, please contact us.

SQUARING UP YOUR BACK

Once you have found that perfect fabric for your backing, purchase enough to allow for the extra eight-inches plus for the several inches you may lose in the squaring process. In order to avoid creating tucks or puckers during the quilting process, the backing must lay flat and be square for proper loading onto the longarm. **If we must square it, there will be an additional charge.**

If you cut two or more pieces of fabric and join them to piece a back, no matter how careful you are, it will need to be squared again. **Do not tear on the grain**, as that will distort the fabric. Even 108-inch fabric will need to be squared.

Squaring up the back:

1. Fold the backing in half, lining up the side edges. Holding the backing by these edges, check that the fold you made hangs straight. If the fold does not hang straight, slide the edges in opposite directions until the fold hangs straight. This will probably mean that the edges do not meet exactly. Smooth the fabric.
2. Take the fold and bring it to the edges. Check to make sure that the new fold hangs straight and adjust as needed. Smooth.
3. Continue to bring the fold up to the edges, adjusting as before, until the width will fit on your cutting surface. **Make sure that each layer of fabric is tucked snugly into the fold and all layers have been smoothed.**
4. Using the grid on your cutting mat, line up the fold straight along a line. Then, using a long ruler, lined up along a perpendicular line, cut one end using your rotary cutter. Repeat for the other end.
5. Next, folding the backing widthwise, repeat the process on each of the width sides.

You now have a square back!

PRESSING

Pressing is crucial, but this does not mean beating your fabric into submission. The mere weight of your iron and the heat will do the job. If you're new to quilting, it is probably wise if you do not use steam as it can cause distortion. If you are comfortable with your pressing skills, steam can be useful.

Most of us have been taught to press our seams toward the darker fabric. However, pressing a seam open creates less bulk at intersections. The choice to press open or to the side must be a conscious choice. If you're going to want stitch-in-the-ditch *do not* press your seams open. On the other hand, if you have many seam intersections, such as in many star patterns when four or more seams come together, or are working with flannel and that project will NOT be requiring stitch-in-the-ditch, we recommend that you shorten the length of your piecing stitch and press your

seams open. Thick seam intersections are sometime difficult to machine quilt and can cause a machine needle to break and quilting around them can leave an unattractive bump.

For backs, press your seam allowances open.

When matching seams, press the allowances in opposite directions. This prevents bulk, makes your quilt top lie flatter, and allows for accuracy in piecing.

HOW TO WASH COTTON FABRICS

- Individually machine-wash each color of fabric using ¼ cup of Synthrapol in warm water per washing machine load. We sell 4 oz. bottles of Synthrapol; ask for it when you come in. Unless your fabric is one piece, don't wash more than five or six yards per load.
- Rinse in cool water until it rinses clear. Spin out as much water as possible.
- Hang to dry or dry in a cool to warm dryer.

TIP: To prevent large pieces of fabric from tangling, unfold the yardage. Then, at a selvage edge, fan fold, back and forth, in about 18-inch widths. Using large safety pins (diaper pins work well if you still have them), pin every 6-inches at the selvage. After washing, shake out holding the pinned edge, shake out again after drying and smooth the fabric. You will suffer no tangles and twists.

Remember, it's not a quilt until it is quilted.