

Embroidery Necessities

You probably already have most of the necessary supplies for hand embroidery if you have basic sewing tools and supplies. There are some wonderful new threads and some interesting new tools on the market today for hand embroidery, but the basic needs are simple: needle, thread, cloth, something to use to transfer the pattern onto the fabric and a sewing machine to complete the projects.

Let's explore some of the products available in these categories and how to choose what best meets your personal requirements. Check the Sources section on page 47 for information on where to purchase these supplies.

Hand Embroidery Threads

Whatever threads you choose to embroider with, always buy good quality because you want something strong and colorfast for all your lovely work.

Stranded Cotton Floss

Embroidery floss is inexpensive, widely available in a myriad of colors and easy to use. It comes in a *skein*, a coil of thread or yarn, and has six strands bundled together that can be divided so that you can stitch a thin or thick line. Most embroidery is worked with two or three strands or just one for fine detail.

To use stranded embroidery floss, cut off an 18-inch length from the skein and slowly pull one strand from the bundle. Pull off as many strands as required, one at a time. Then recombine them and thread them through the needle. This process results in a flatter, smoother stitch than just pulling 2 or 3 strands off the bundle at once.

Pearl Cotton

Pearl (or perle) cotton is a non-separating, twisted thread with a pleasant sheen. It comes in a variety of thicknesses; the lower the number, the heavier the thread. Size 8 is probably easiest for a beginner to use and is comparable to two strands of cotton

floss. Sizes 5, 12 and the newer 16 are also useful to collect for creating different looks.

Cotton Petites

Cotton Petites™ is a new product that comes on a spool, so it is easy to use and stores neatly. It is a 12-weight cotton thread, available in lots of colors. One strand equals two strands of embroidery floss.

Other embroidery fibers on the market include wool, rayon, silk, metallic and more, but they are a little more difficult to use and are not featured in the projects in this book.

Needles

A good needle for embroidery has a very sharp point to pierce the fabric and an elongated eye to accommodate the threads. Buy a package of good quality assorted crewel or embroidery needles; the higher the needle number, the finer the needle. If you have trouble threading your needle, try a larger size (smaller number).

An inexpensive needle threader is a good purchase. It has a wire loop that you push through the needle eye. You can easily insert the threads through the loop and then carefully pull the loop back out of the eye, and it will pull the thread with it.

Fabrics

You can embroider on just about anything you can get a needle through, but most stitchers prefer good quality woven cottons and linens or woven or felted wool.

The projects in this book include embroidery on cottons, recycled denim and wool felt. If the item you are embroidering is going to be washed, you should prewash the fabric.

Design Transfer Tools & Techniques

Before you start your embroidery project, you need to transfer the design onto your fabric. Try each transfer tool and technique, weigh their pros and cons, and then choose what works best for you.



Light Box

A light box is a great help when tracing embroidery designs directly onto light-colored fabrics. A window on a sunny day is a good substitute if you don't have a light box. Just tape the design to the light box or window, cover with the fabric, taping it in place, and trace with one of the pens or pencils described below.

Air- & Water-Soluble Pens

Lines marked with these inexpensive pens will come out when washed or just spritzed with water.

Always test these pens on your fabric before using them. Sometimes it can be difficult to completely remove the lines.

Never iron your work until you have completely removed any marks. Heat can set the marks and make them permanent. Even the heat of a light box can set them if you leave it on too long. I know this because it happened to me. I didn't realize it until all the embroidery was complete and I found I could not remove the lines that were not covered by stitches (and I do tend to ad-lib a bit with my designs).

Another disadvantage of these types of marking pens is that they fade, sometimes before you can finish your work, so you may have to re-mark areas.

Permanent Pen

Permanent ink pens, like the popular Micro Pigma, come in colors and very fine tips. They do a nice job of making a clear, fine line to follow, but it is permanent, so you have to completely cover the lines with your embroidery or the lines will show.

Iron-On Transfer Pencils

To use these pencils for transferring, trace the design onto tracing paper. Then place the paper on top of the

fabric, marked side of the paper to the right side of fabric, and iron the paper. The design will transfer to the fabric, just like using a purchased iron-on design.

This method can be useful for thicker fabrics that you cannot see through to trace on directly, but the lines are permanent and the design has to be reversed before tracing.

Heat-Sensitive Pens

Heat-sensitive pens like the FriXion pen by Pilot are a recent addition to the market. They come in several colors and write just like a regular ballpoint pen. The marks do not fade and are easily removed with heat—just a touch of an iron or hair dryer takes the marks off.

The marks are “dormant,” however, and will return if the fabric is exposed to very cold conditions. This can be an advantage if you accidentally iron your piece prematurely—just pop it in the freezer to restore the lines!

The chemical can be washed out as well. Since this is such a new product and no one knows yet what, if any, damage may result from having fabric exposed to this chemical for a long time, I would not recommend using it to embroider an heirloom christening dress. But for everyday use it is a wonderful tool!

Mechanical Chalk Pencils

A slightly more expensive alternative, mechanical chalk pencils, such as the Bohin brand, come with waxy chalk cartridges in several colors. These pencils make a very fine line (.9mm) which is both washable and erasable using the fabric eraser that comes with the pencil.

Transfer, Graphite or Dressmaker's Carbon Paper

These products come in tissue-like sheets with color on one side. To use them for transferring designs, place the fabric on a smooth, hard surface. Top with the paper, color side down, and then the design. Use a stylus or ballpoint pen to trace over the lines, which will then transfer to the fabric.

The sheets come in different colors, including white for marking dark fabrics. They are easy to use and you do not have to reverse the design. The lines can be rinsed out. Remove the marks completely before ironing.

Tissue Paper

To me, this is a last-resort method that I only use to transfer designs to thick and/or textured dark fabrics that would be difficult to mark with any of the other methods. It is fairly time-consuming but it leaves no marks on the fabric and is accurate.

Trace your design onto tissue paper and baste this paper onto the right side of your fabric. Embroider through the tissue paper and fabric, following the pattern lines. When finishing, carefully tear away the tissue paper, using tweezers to remove any little bits that remain.

Cardstock Templates

This is a method that I use occasionally when I can't see through my fabric to trace and only when the embroidery design is simple.

Trace the motif onto paper, adhere this paper to cardstock and cut out. Place the template onto the fabric and trace around it with one of the transfer pens.

Other Tools & Aids

Sharp Scissors

You'll need small scissors for snipping threads and larger scissors for cutting the fabric. To keep them sharp, do not use them for cutting anything but fibers. Cutting paper dulls scissors quickly.

Embroidery Hoops

A hoop is used to maintain a good, even tension when stitching. It holds the fabric taut and most people find that it makes embroidery easier. Some, however, feel that a hoop gets in the way and prefer to stitch without one. I nearly always use a hoop, except when stitching on felt or other thick materials.

Hoops now come in plastic and wood (the old metal hoops have a tendency to leave stains on the fabric).

To use a hoop, place the fabric over the inner (small) ring and then attach the outer ring by pushing it over the edges of the inner ring. If necessary, turn the tension knob to enlarge the outer ring and then tighten it again when the fabric is in place.

If possible, use a hoop that contains the entire design. If the design is large, work one section and then move the hoop to prepare the next area. Two sizes of hoops will meet most of your needs: a 4- or 5-inch hoop is good for most small projects and an 8-inch hoop for larger designs.

Lightweight Fusible Interfacing

Fusing a piece of lightweight interfacing to the back of a design gives the fabric more body and stability and makes it easier to maintain an even tension while stitching, especially if not using a hoop. In addition, it helps to hide the knots and any traveling threads on the back.

Fuse the interfacing before tracing the design if you are using a pen with ink that either erases with heat or that sets with heat!

Use interfacing when working a padded satin stitch. Cut out the motif shape and fuse it to the right side of the fabric. Stitch over it to achieve a slightly dimensional effect.

Doodle Cloth

It is nice to have a cloth handy to audition a new stitch or thread before committing it to a project. Use a fabric similar to what you will be working on and just play with it. You can use a fabric pen to jot the stitch name and threads used so it becomes a permanent stitch journal.

Good Lighting

This is so important (and the older your eyes are, the more it helps!). Use daylight rated bulbs in lamps placed behind your left shoulder if you are right-handed.

Iron, Ironing Board & Towel

Pad your ironing board with a towel before pressing your completed stitchery to avoid flattening the stitches.

Choose a heat setting suitable to both the fabric and thread. If several temperatures apply, always use the lowest setting.

Place the completed piece facedown on the padded ironing surface. Cover the piece with a lightweight, white damp cloth.

Lightly press the embroidered area by lifting and replacing the iron in a new area. Never drag the iron across the embroidered area.

Lay work flat to dry completely.

Basic General Sewing Supplies & Tools

We have provided a wide range of projects, from sweet to whimsical, traditional to contemporary, and from very easy to a bit more complicated to showcase your embroidery skills. Check your general sewing supplies against this basic sewing supply list to have what you will need to complete the projects.

Basic Sewing Supplies & Equipment

- Sewing machine in good working order with zigzag or overedge stitch capability.
 - A walking foot is helpful for stitching through multiple layers.
- Matching all-purpose thread
- Hand-sewing needles and thimble
- Straight pins and pincushion
- Seam ripper
- Removable fabric marking pens or tailor's chalk
- Measuring tools:
 - tape measure
 - variety clear sewing rulers
- Pattern tracing paper or cloth
- Point turner
- Pressing equipment:
 - steam iron and ironing board
 - press cloths
- Scissors:
 - fabric shears
 - pinking shears
 - paper scissors
- Seam sealant or no-fray solution

Optional Supplies & Equipment

- Serger
- Fabric glue
- Fabric spray adhesive
- Rotary cutter, mats and straightedges
- Pressing hams/sleeve rolls

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