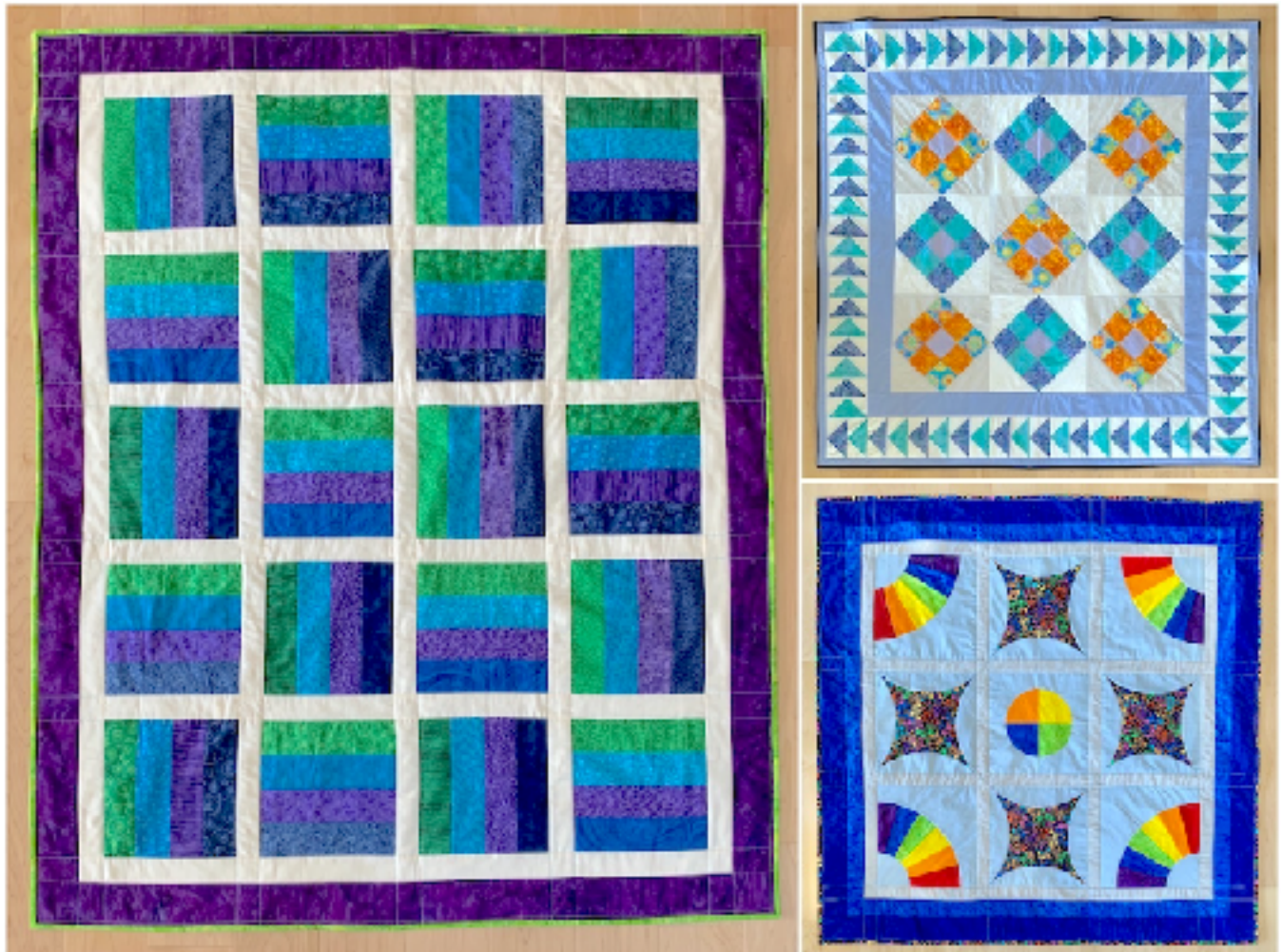


Beginner's Guide to Quiltmaking

by Diana Rehfield



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I have loved working with fabric since I took a sewing class in junior high school. At that time, I made everything from men's shirts to ice skating dresses. Then I went off to college and didn't have time to sew for a few years. I took a quilting class in 1982 but, for some reason, it didn't stick. Then I took another quilting class in 2019 and this time it really stuck! I've been making quilts ever since, and loving it. I love the colors, the designs, and the satisfaction I get when I complete a new quilt.

People ask me what I do with all the quilts I make, which comes out to about one every two weeks. I keep my favorites, give many to family and friends, and donate the rest to people in need.

I started keeping a notebook in 2020. I wish I had started at the beginning of my quilting journey. In the notebook, I write the name of the pattern, if there is one, the name of the fabric, if known, and notes I take as I go. I also include a photo of the finished quilt. Since I give so many away, I like having a photo to remember quilts I have made but no longer have in our home. I also keep track of the number of the quilt, that is how many I've made up to that point. I have no idea why I do that but I do.



Quilt Types

There are many types of quilts. Here are a few that I especially like.

Medallion: These quilts are made from the center out, adding rows around the center as you go. I have made a number of panel quilts, which include a large center panel with borders around them. Once I started a medallion quilt with a kitchen towel with a cat on it that I thought was cute, and added borders that included cats in different colors and designs.



Appliqué: These quilts include smaller pieces sewed onto larger pieces. I made this quilt, which is called “Looking Out”, designed by Fredrica Calvert. The cats, mice, birds, butterflies, moon, sun, and star are all made with the appliqué technique.



Sampler: These quilts include a number of different block designs. I made this quilt with block designs from the book “Block by Block” by Beth Donaldson. I highly recommend this book for learning how to piece these blocks and more.



French Braid: This quilt type is meant to mimic the French Braid hairstyle, in which sections of hair are woven together from the crown of the head to the nape of the neck. This is one of those quilts that is easier to make than it looks like it would be. It does, however, take some time to piece the braids. I find this quilt design very relaxing to make.



Rail Fence: This is an easy quilt to make for a beginner because there are few seams to match. This is the first quilt I made! The design is from the book “Start Quilting” by Alex Anderson, which I highly recommend for new quilters. I made the first two projects in the class I took and then I made the rest of the projects in the book on my own and they were a wonderful learning foundation for me.



Nine Patch: A type of patchwork quilt that includes blocks made up of nine square patches. This is another easy quilt to make and the possibilities are endless with different colors and layouts.



Paper Piecing: This quilt technique uses an image on paper to add pieces to a block in a specific order. The animals and birds in this quilt are all made with the paper piecing technique. This is different from English Paper Piecing, in which pieces are stabilized with paper and then sewn together.




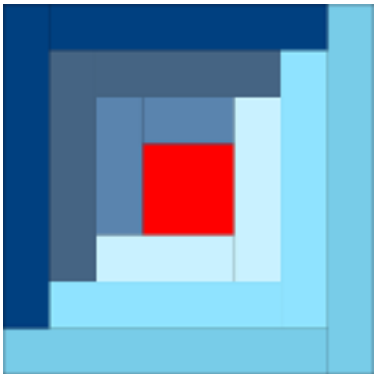
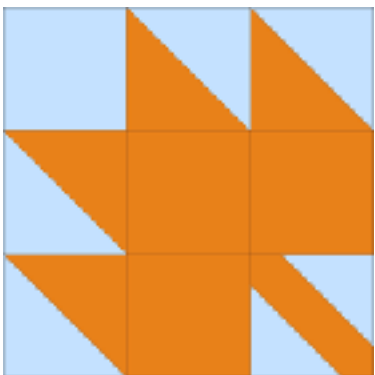
One Patch: This quilt type includes blocks that are all the same type, such as hexagon, triangle, or square. In this case, each block is a parallelogram.

This instance of a one patch quilt is called a chevron quilt. The pattern is similar to stockinette stitch in knitting and herringbone stitch in beadweaving.



Common Blocks

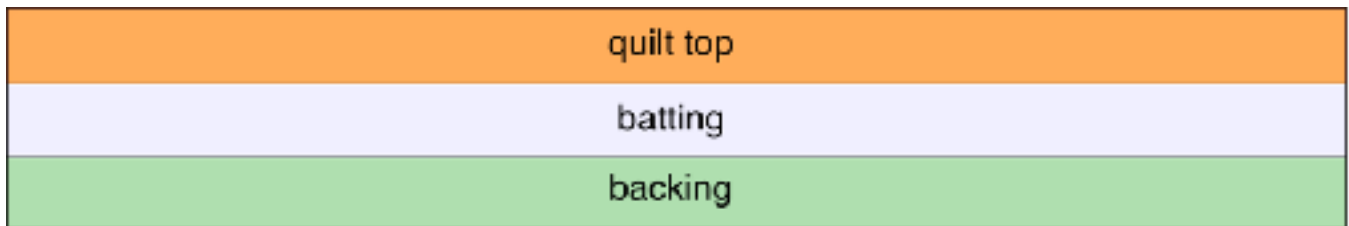
There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of different block designs. Here are a few of my favorite common blocks.

Block Name	Image
Flying Geese	 A quilt block pattern featuring four teal vertical bars on the sides and four triangles in the center, each with a different color: yellow, orange, red, and dark red.
Log Cabin	 A quilt block pattern depicting a cabin window. It features a central red square, surrounded by light blue and dark blue blocks, with a dark blue border.
Maple Leaf	 A quilt block pattern featuring a central orange star shape formed by four triangles, surrounded by light blue blocks.

Block Name	Image
Card Trick	 A quilt block pattern featuring four triangles in the center, each with a different color: yellow, purple, orange, and light purple.
Nine Patch	 A quilt block pattern featuring a 3x3 grid of squares. The center square is teal with a pattern, and the other squares are orange and yellow.
Drunkard's Path	 A quilt block pattern featuring a central circle divided into four quadrants by a blue path. The quadrants are orange and blue, with a patterned orange background.
Grandmother's Fan	 A quilt block pattern featuring a central yellow semi-circle, surrounded by orange and yellow rays, resembling a sun.

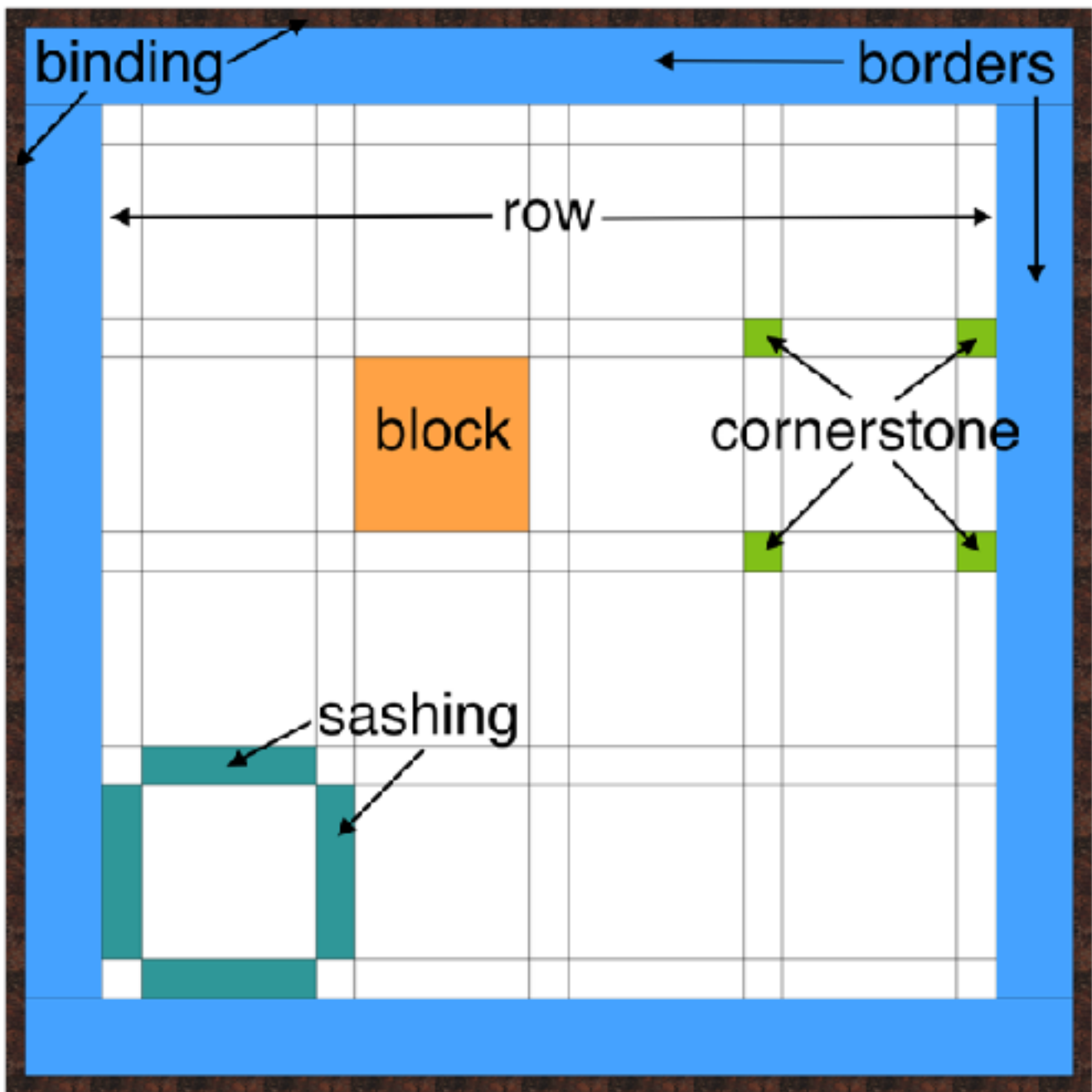
Quilt Anatomy

Quilts are made with three layers. This is the **edge** view:



- **quilt top:** Usually pieced, sometimes embroidered. Many designs and patterns are available. You can, of course, also create your own design. This is the front of the quilt.
- **batting:** Made of cotton (my favorite), polyester, wool, silk, bamboo, or a blend of two or more of these materials. The batting type determines the warmth, drape, breathability, and weight of the quilt.
- **backing:** Can be all one piece or pieced. Fabric for backing often comes in 108 inch width. My favorite backing is a full-size cotton sheet. I recommend that you do *not* use a microfiber sheet and they are difficult to work with for sewing.

This is the **top** view of a quilt showing various parts:



Quilt sizes can follow a standard size (e.g., queen) or a size that fits your quilt design. For example, I most often make lap quilts or quilts that lay on top of my bed but not over the sides and bottom. Common standard sizes are:

Type	Width (inches)	Height (inches)
Baby	30-34	40-55
Crib	35-50	45-60
Lap	45-60	65-76
Twin	54-68	84-100
Full or Double	70-84	80-100
Queen	76-90	96-108
King	92-108	90-108
California King	100-114	102-116

Quilt Construction

Quilts come in many different designs but they all have some steps in common:

1. You can do one or the other of these steps first, or both at the same time:

- A. **Pick a design for your quilt.**

This may be a pattern from a book, from the internet, or a design you create yourself.

B. **Pick fabric for your quilt.**

If you have been quilting or sewing for a while, you may have what is called a *fabric stash* (that is, fabric you have on hand that is not already set aside for a project). You may be picking some or all of your fabric from your stash or buying it. When I see fabric I really like but don't yet have a project in mind for it, I buy 1-1/2 yards. That seems to be enough for most projects, in combination with other fabric. Most quilt patterns specify how much fabric you need of each color.

2. **Piece the quilt top.**

This is the part many people enjoy the most. It's your chance to get creative with color and design.

3. **Sandwich the layers.**

This is also called basting the layers together. At this point, you will pin, spray, or stitch the layers together using a long stitch. My preferred technique is pinning using the pool noodle method, which I will describe in detail in the next chapter of this book.

4. **Quilt the sandwich.**

There are three main types of quilting, which is the term for stitching together the quilt top, batting, and backing layers. The technique you pick for quilting your sandwich is a personal decision. Many people love swirls and lots of quilting for all areas of the quilt. I prefer straight lines and less quilting. Less quilting creates a softer quilt and I feel that it allows the fabric and design to shine more than lots of quilting.

- *Domestic sewing machine quilting.*

This is easier if you have a sewing machine with a larger throat, the opening to the right of the part of the sewing machine that houses the needle. You can:

- Stitch straight lines, such as *stitch in the ditch*, which is stitching in the seams between blocks.

- Stitch lines across blocks, vertically, horizontally, and on an angle, especially the diagonal.
- Do curved stitching if you go slowly and have patience.

If you do not have a sewing machine with a larger throat, *quilt as you go (QAYG)* is a good option. Using this technique, you make a quilt sandwich out of each block and then sew the blocks together.

- *Free motion quilting (FMQ)*, either on a domestic sewing machine or a long arm sewing machine. Long arm machines have a sewing machine head, fabric rollers, a worktable and a heavy-duty metal frame. They are usually quite large (at least 10 feet long). Long arm machines are excellent for outlining objects on your quilt and creating repetitive designs.
- *Hand quilting*.
This is the traditional method for quilting, done with a needle and thread, with or without a hoop or frame. I don't have the patience for hand quilting now but I have a feeling I might have the patience eventually.

5. **Bind the quilt.**

This step encloses the edges of the quilt sandwich so there are no exposed edges left. I will describe the steps for binding your quilt in detail in the next chapter.

6. **Photograph the quilt.**

This step isn't strictly necessary but I think it's a great idea. I use my cell phone and it takes good photographs.

7. **Wash the quilt.**

This gets rid of the chemicals in the fabric manufacturing and also gets rid of the majority of dye bleeding that will happen, if any. I put three or four Shout Color Catcher® sheets in the washer with my quilt and I wash and dry the quilt on warm.

Notes: Many quilters like to add a label to their quilt. I did it a few times when I started but, to be honest, I'm just too lazy so I don't do it anymore. A label can add meaning to the quilt and, assuming your quilt lasts for many years, provide good information to future owners of the quilt.

Tools and Supplies

There are a few tools you need to get going and there are additional tools that are nice to have but not necessary at the start. I define tools as buy once and keep using and supplies as buy, use, and buy again.

Tools

- **Sewing machine**

This is necessary unless you plan to hand stitch your entire quilt. I assume you have a sewing machine and know how to use at least its basic features in this book. The only stitch you absolutely need for quilting is straight stitch. However, I also use zig-zag stitch to sew together leftover pieces of batting.

It's not absolutely required, but I highly recommend a **walking foot** for your sewing machine. It really helps keep layers from shifting, especially during quilting. I leave my walking foot on my sewing machine all the time.

All seams in quilting are 1/4 inch unless otherwise specified.

You generally don't need to backstitch in quilting because you almost always end up crossing over a seam with another seam. When you know that won't be the case, like in quilting your layers together with lines that do not go all the way to the edge, then you need to do a couple of backstitches to lock down your stitching.

Caution: Be very careful with sewing machine needles. They are sharp! I put used needles in one of the old needle cases and mark the case with an X. Keep needles away from children and pets. They can be swallowed and that can cause a lot of damage to the child or pet.

- **Sharp scissors**

You need at least one pair. Optimally, you will have a small pair, like my

favorite, Karen Kay Buckley 6-Inch Perfect Scissors



and a larger

pair, like my favorite, Kai® 5210 8-inch Dressmaking Shears



- **Quilting ruler, 6 by 24 inches**

You may end up with many quilting rulers, but this is the one to buy first. You can use it for cutting with a rotary cutter (more below) or marking straight lines for cutting. I also use it to fold up yardage I have purchased before putting it on my shelf.

- **Straight pins**

When I first started making quilts, I used the straight pins I had on hand thinking there wasn't much difference in straight pins. I soon found that there is a huge difference between pins! My current favorite pins are Dritz® 3005 Quilting Pins, 1-3/4-Inch. They are a good length, good sharpness for cotton fabric, and hold their shape well. They make pinning much easier than the pins I used to use.

I also really like using a wrist pin cushion. The pins don't scatter and they are easy to pull out for use and put back when I'm done with them.

Caution: Keep pins away from children and pets. They can be swallowed and that can cause a lot of damage to the child or pet.

- **Bent safety pins**

Similarly, I thought all safety pins were the same when I first started quilting. Wrong! Find what is comfortable for you. My favorite is Dritz® Quilting 3032 Curved Safety Pins, Size 1. They are just a bit over 1 inch long. They are perfect for pin-basting your quilt sandwich.

- **Rotary cutter and mat**

A rotary cutter (a hand-held device with a round blade that rotates as you move it) and mat are not required but are definitely useful. A rotary cutter makes cutting fabric faster and often more precise than hand cutting. I recommend a OLFA® Rotary Fabric Cutter 45MM and the biggest mat you can afford. Mine is an OLFA® 24" x 36" Double-Sided, Self-Healing Rotary Mat.

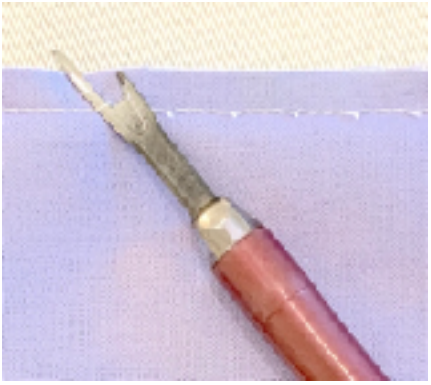


Very important notes: Rotary cutter blades are *very* sharp. Use caution with them at all times. It goes without saying but I will say it anyway: keep rotary cutters and blades away from children and pets.

- First, if your cutter does not automatically close when you put it down, always close it before you put it down. Before I started doing that, I got a few nicks but luckily no major cuts. A Fons and Porter Klutz Glove can definitely help keep your hands safe, especially while you're getting used to using a rotary cutter.
- Second, when using your rotary cutter with a quilting ruler, always take an extra beat to make sure your fingers are well out of the way of the rotary cutter before you start cutting. And keep paying attention until you are done with your cut. I have heard of some serious accidents that happened when people were not so careful.

- Third, change your rotary cutter blade when cuts don't complete as cleanly as they should, even with appropriate pressure on the cutter. Be *especially* careful when handling the blades. I put an X on used blades with a Sharpie® marker and keep them in an old blade container until it's full.

- **Seam ripper**

In a perfect world, there would be no need for a seam ripper but yeah, I need one and I have one. Get one that is comfortable for you to hold. I have the one I got when I was 12 years old and I still love it. My favorite technique for using a seam ripper is:

1	Pick out one stitch about every 1/3 inch on one side.	
2	Turn the work over and use the seam ripper to lift up on a group of stitches.	
3	Using your fingers, pull out the thread pieces on the rest of the seam on that side.	

4	Separate the fabric pieces and use your fingers to pluck and discard the remaining thread pieces if there are any.	
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- **Iron**

If you have one already, it's probably fine. Many quilters recommend always running your iron dry (without steam on) and spraying on water or starch as needed when pressing. One new development in irons happened between the 1970s when I started sewing and when I started quilt making in 2019, an iron you can lay down on its face and the faceplate pops back up when your hand is not in contact with the handle. Very useful!

Important note: When ironing any part of your quilt, be careful not to stretch the fabric. It's best to press and lift and not swirl when ironing.



- **Sewing clips**

Sewing clips help keep fabric in place both for binding and also for long seams you would normally pin. The ones I have are called "MumCraft Multipurpose Sewing Clips with Tin Box Package". I like and use them quite a bit.



- **Kwik Klip®**

Not necessary but great for safety pin basting your quilt. I used to stab my left hand often before I started using the Kwik Klip. I use the tool in my left hand (I hold the pin in my right hand) and no more stabbing!

Supplies

- **Fabric**

As discussed earlier, you will buy fabric for your project and you might also buy fabric for your stash. You need fabric for your quilt top and your backing.

Quilting cotton fabric is most commonly sold in 44 to 45 inch widths.

Fabric yardage is typically sold in these increments:

Yards	Inches
1/4	9
1/3	12
3/8	13-1/2
1/2	18
5/8	22-1/2
2/3	24
3/4	27
7/8	31-1/2
1	36

You can buy fabric by the yard or in pre-cuts such as these (assorted colors and designs):

Name	Size (inches)	How Many Per Package
Fat quarters	18 by 21	10
Jelly roll	2-1/2 by width of fabric	40
Layer cakes	10 by 10	42
Charm packs	5 by 5	42
Honey buns	1-1/2 by width of fabric	40

Note: I rarely pre-wash fabric. I do for yardage when it's a really vivid color that I think may bleed, especially hand-dyed batik fabric. I never pre-wash pre-cuts like jelly rolls because they lose their shape when washed before sewing.

- **Batting**

Batting comes in different materials, as discussed earlier, and can be purchased by the package or the roll. When you first start quilting, you will probably want to buy by the package until you find your favorite batting. Then it might make sense to buy it by the roll. Although it can be pricey, in the end it's less expensive than buying individual packages plus you end up with many less extra pieces.

- **Backing**

Backing is a large area of fabric that covers the back of your quilt. It can be:

- pieced from fabric you have on hand
- cut from 108 (or similar) inch wide fabric that is made for backing
- cut from a bed sheet, such as a full-size flat sheet

- **Thread**

I use either, white, cream, grey, or black for piecing. I'm only fussy about thread color for quilting, when I try to pick a color that will not stand out unless I want it to. For example, I once made an autumn quilt that had a black background and I used orange thread for quilting, intending it to show up as a contrasting color.