

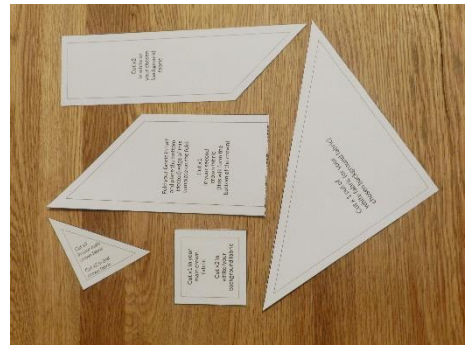
Prints to Polka Dots

SHARING OUR PASSION FOR FABRIC

Piecing Your Quilt Blocks – Top Tips

Block Pattern/Templates Tips

- If you are using one of our block patterns - Print it directly onto card. Your pattern pieces will be easy to trace onto your fabric and over time you will build up a library of reusable quilt block templates.
- If you are creating your own block patterns - Draw your block pieces directly onto template plastic or card and you will have pattern pieces you can use time and time again. Don't forget to include your seam allowance!
- Write the names of each block on each piece, together with the total number of pieces needed for the pattern – 'kings crown, 1 of 4' etc... and if appropriate the seam allowance to use.



Preparing Your Fabric

- Most quilters do not prewash their fabrics, preferring to wash the fabrics once the quilt is finished, any shrinkage adds that slightly crinkly, aged, feel to your quilt.
- Spray all your fabrics lightly with starch before you start. The starch will help preserve the shape of the fabric pieces whilst you sew them, and will help seams to lay flat when sewing pieces together (you can buy specialist quilting starch but we think the one you get in the local supermarket works fine).



Your Sewing Machine

Invest in a quarter inch sewing foot. Standard feet are 5/8ths of an inch wide, and it might not seem that reducing your seams down by just 1/8th of an inch will make a big difference, but when you are sewing a lot of small pieces together (piecing them together) you will be surprised how quickly your blocks shrink into the seam allowance – for example if you sew a square made from 2.5" squares, and you sew rows of 5 blocks, that extra 1/8th of an inch will add up to over half an inch by the time you get to the end of the first row!



Getting Started

- Once you have starched your fabrics and cut your shapes out, it is time to layout your block. Don't panic if it looks like some pieces are too large or too small, it is all to do with the number of pieces making up each part of the block and accommodating their seam allowances. If you are following a pattern, the likelihood is that this difference will disappear once you start sewing all the parts together.

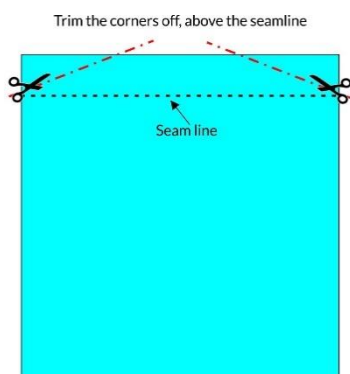


- If you are using one of our block tutorials there will be detailed instructions on our blog, showing you the order in which to sew everything together. If all you have to go on is a picture of the block, working out what order to sew the block in is simpler than you might think. Look at the block and divide it up into smaller squares, triangles and rectangles, each made of pairs of pieces (see example below).



Once they are sewn together arrange these larger pieces into squares, rectangles, triangles and rows made up of your larger sewn pieces, and sew these together. Keep repeating this process until you have a completed block.

- Each time you sew two pieces together trim the seam allowances as shown in the image below, this will help the seams lay flat and stop fabric bunching up at the corners.
- Once trimmed iron the seam allowance out, either to one side (the darkest fabric side) or equally onto each side, as in the image below.



- **IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT IRONING:** This rule holds true whenever sewing, but becomes critical when quilting, as the pieces of fabric are at their most fragile when cut on all four sides and you need them to hold their shape to produce precise blocks. The golden rule is that you should **PRESS** rather than push the iron. The act of pushing the iron back and forth across your fabric pieces **WILL** push the fabrics out of shape. Simply lift the iron up and down, across your shapes, to set the seams, and this will eliminate this problem. We also recommend using a pressing board rather than ironing board, as ironing boards have

spring built in, which when quilting, can push shapes out – pressing boards are cheap to make and convenient, as you can keep a small board next to you as you sew – see our blog for our tutorial.

Keeping Going

- We recommend keeping your block laid out on your sewing table, each time you sew two pieces together, place them back in your block to check everything is OK and identify which pieces need adding next, and where.
- Don't panic if your pieced shapes are perfectly square. It is very hard to maintain perfect shapes as you piece together, two triangles that start out looking perfectly shaped and equal in size, should turn into a perfect square, but you don't have to be very out, or push the iron very hard to push the fabric out of shape. Before you know it your square starts looking more like a diamond! Resist the temptation to bin it and start again, or to trim the shape back into a square UNLESS the shape is very wrong. Wait until you have sewn a number of pieces together, or if possible have formed rows, before considering trimming your shapes straight – or that quilt could turn into a cushion cover or even worse, a pin cushion!



Finishing Your Block

If your finished block looks less than square, don't be disheartened, simply place your block on your cutting mat and trim it back to your desired size.

The key to trimming your block is to getting it centred on mat first. Fold your block into quarters and lightly press, then place your block on your mat, lining the crease lines up with the vertical and horizontal lines on the mat. Work out from the middle, half the width of your block, and the point you reach is your cutting line, place your ruler along the line on the mat and trim. Repeat this process on all the sides.

By finding the middle and cutting equally on all sides, all your blocks will remain even, and if you are using the same block over and over by cutting the smallest block first and making the rest that size your finished quilt will look like it should always have been that size!



The yellow lines on the image above are the fold lines, which we lined up with the same line on the cutting mat at the top and bottom, left and right sides.

This block is 10" wide, so we counted out 5" to the left of the middle line and trimmed along the red line, and then repeated this on the other sides, always counting 5" from the middle line.