

## Appliqué

Appliqué means applying a shape of fabric onto a background fabric to make a pleasing design. Appliqué may be done by hand or by machine. There are many ways to accomplish this. Appliqué is used in quilt designs and for embellishing apparel or other items for home decor.

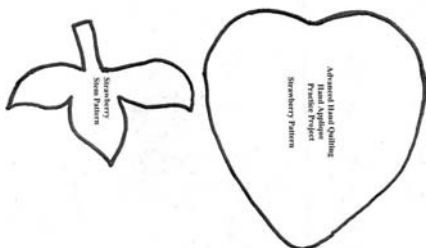
Designs for appliqué can be found in many places. Look for pattern inspiration in quilt books and children's books, such as coloring books, or be creative with original drawings.

### PREPARING THE APPLIQUÉ DESIGN

Whether you choose to appliqué by hand or machine, preparation of the motifs is quite similar. When planning an appliqué design with multiple pieces or layers, prepare the pieces and apply them from the background forward. Following are different ways to prepare an appliqué motif:

#### Making/Using a Template

After choosing a design, make a template for each part of the design. To do this, transfer each part of the design onto stiff paper, heat resistant plastic, or cardstock and cut out the actual size of the motif. Beginners should choose a larger design with few pieces such as the sample below (a strawberry).



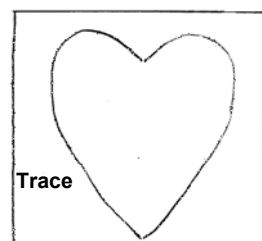
Trace around the motif lightly on the right side of the appliqué fabric with a sharp pencil. Cut out the motif, leaving a seam allowance beyond the pencil line. The seam allowance for appliqué can be as small as 1/8-inch for small pieces, and up to 3/16-inch for larger ones.

### Freezer Paper Appliqué

There are two methods for freezer paper appliqué. They will be referred to as *wax side up* and *wax side down*. Freezer paper can be purchased at a grocery store

#### Freezer Paper - Wax Side Up

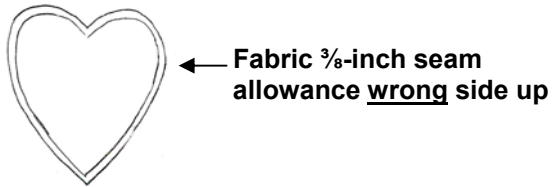
Place a piece of freezer paper over the appliqué design with the shiny side down. (The shiny side is the wax side.) Trace the appliqué design with a sharp pencil. Using paper scissors, cut out the shapes on the lines. *Never use fabric scissors/shears on paper as it will dull the blades.*



Freezer paper with shiny side down

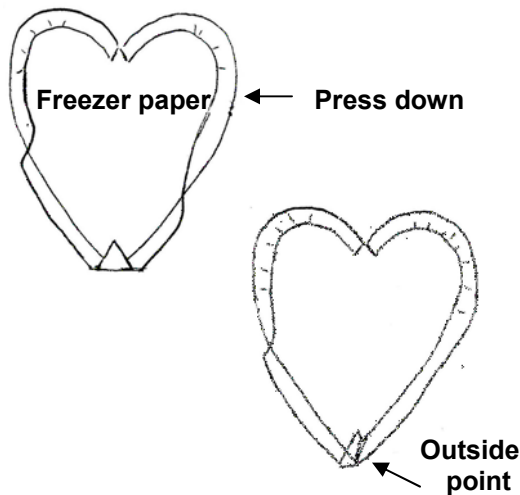
Using the freezer paper as a guide, cut the shape from the appliqué fabric adding a 3/8-inch seam allowance as you cut. Center the freezer paper on the wrong side of the fabric shape, shiny side up. Pin the paper onto the wrong side of your fabric. A good hint is to apply a little glue

stick to the dull side of the freezer paper before you apply it to the wrong side of the appliqué fabric. This will eliminate the need to pin.



Use a hot, dry iron to fold the seam allowances up and over the freezer paper.

The seam allowance will stick to the wax on the freezer paper and leave a sharp, crisp edge for stitching. If there is an inner point, you will need to clip the seam allowance. Also clip the seam allowances around sharp curves. For outside points, fold up the point of the seam allowance before you fold over both sides.

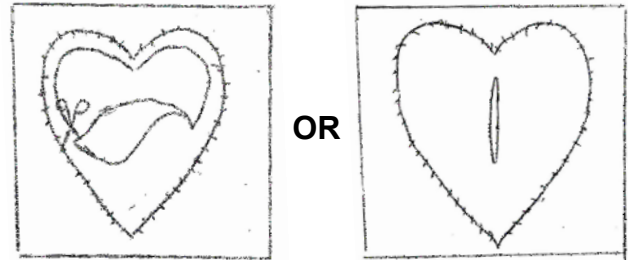


Place the prepared motif onto the background fabric and press. Again the wax will stick long enough to appliqué stitch around it.

Remove the freezer paper after the design has been stitched down. Cut a slit in the background fabric, behind the appliqué motif, and pull the freezer paper out. If it is difficult to get the paper out,

place a slightly damp cloth or towel over the entire motif. When the freezer paper gets damp, it will easily come out.

**Back of appliqué**

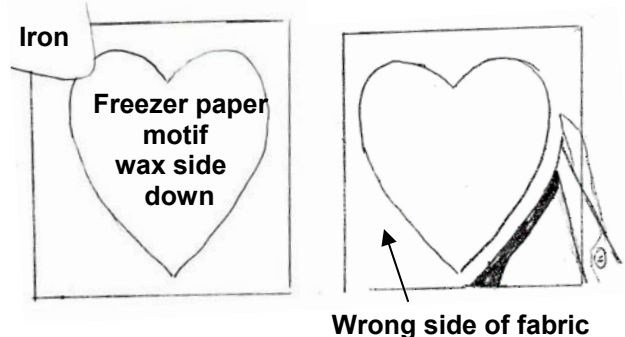


To reduce bulk, trim background fabric from under appliqué. This is especially important for a quilt top.

### **Freezer Paper Appliqué - Wax Side Down**

Place a piece of freezer paper over the appliqué design with the shiny (waxed) side down. Trace the appliqué design with a sharp pencil. Cut out the shapes along the lines - no seam allowances - using paper scissors.

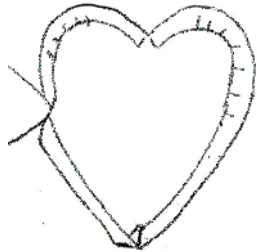
Place the freezer paper shape on the wrong side of the fabric with the shiny side down and press. The paper will stick to the appliqué fabric.



Cut out the shape, allowing a 3/8-inch seam allowance.

Clip inside corners and curves. Press the seams up and over the freezer paper, making a crease at the line of the motif. It

helps to add a small amount of spray starch to the seam allowances with a cotton swab. Do this, pressing with a pressing cloth on your ironing board, as the surface that you are pressing on may become scorched.



After all of the seam allowance is pressed and there is a sharp, crisp crease at the motif line, remove the freezer paper. Pin or use basting glue to hold the shape in place on the background fabric.

### Fusible Webbing

Another way to prepare the appliqué for machine stitching is to fuse it to the background. Fusible webbing is a quick and easy way to bind the appliqué design to the background fabric. Fusible webbing can be found at a fabric store or fabric department. Buy lightweight, sewable fusible webbing.

Trace the appliqué motif on the paper side of the fusible web. The finished appliqué design will be a mirror image of what is traced.

Cut around the traced design. Do not cut exactly along the lines of the design at this point. Follow the instructions that come with the fusible web. Fuse the web to the wrong side of the appliqué fabric, paper side up and web against the wrong side of the appliqué fabric. Cut out the design on the tracing lines and peel the paper off. The fusing web will stay on the wrong side of the fabric.

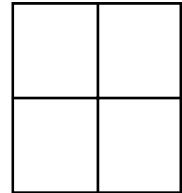
Arrange the appliqué motif on the background fabric, follow the manufacturer's instructions, and press with an iron. This will cause the appliqué motif to stick to the background.

Machine stitch or hand sew with the blanket stitch around the edges of the design, and add embellishments if desired.

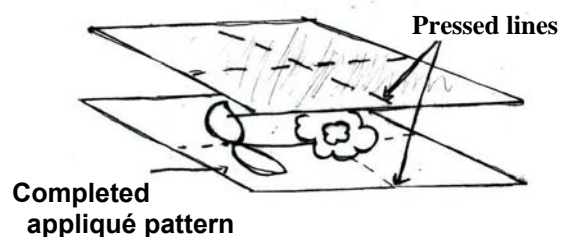
### PREPARING THE BACKGROUND FABRIC

Make the background fabric larger than required for the project. If a 16-inch square of background is needed, make it 18 inches. Cut the excess fabric off later.

Fold the background square in half and press. Fold it in half again the other way and press, making creases that cross at the center, and divide the square into quarters.



Center the complete appliqué pattern under the background fabric using the pressed background lines as a guide. Very lightly trace some of the pattern lines onto the background. Trace enough to make it clear where to place the appliqué motifs.



Position the prepared appliqué pieces on the background fabric using the markings on the background as a guide.

## HAND STITCHING

### Needles

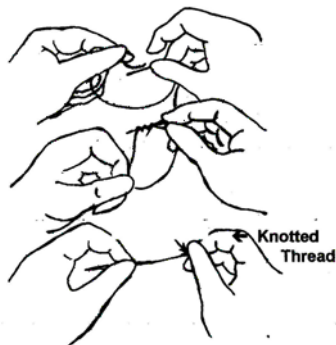
It is good to use a very long, thin needle (straw needle) to do needle turn appliqué. However, for beginners, a short, thin needle is easier to handle and can be used.

### Thread

Choose a fine cotton or silk thread that is as close to the color of the appliqué motif as you can get it. It is better to use one that is slightly lighter in color than to use one that is slightly darker. If matching is a problem, one strand of embroidery floss may be a choice.

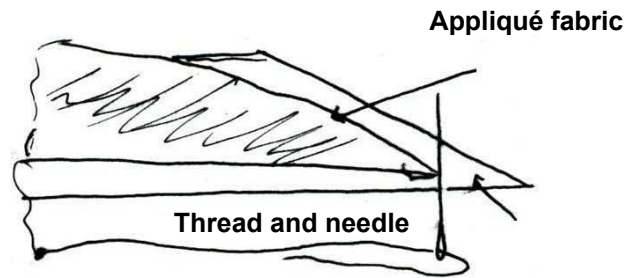
### Knot the Thread

Thread the needle, knot the thread. To tie a small knot at the end of the thread, place the end of the thread along the needle with its end pointing toward the hand. Pinch this end of the thread and the needle with the needle hand. With the other hand, wrap the thread around the needle twice. Squeeze the wrapped thread tightly with the pointing finger and thumb of the needle hand. Pull the wrapped thread to the end of the thread to complete the knot. There will be a little tail of thread below the knot that will need to be clipped off.



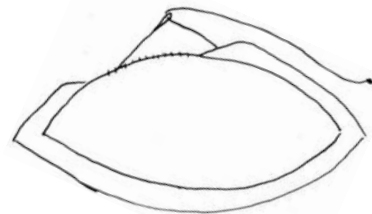
### Needle Turn Appliqué

Hold the background fabric with the appliqué in place with the non-sewing hand. Use the needle to turn under the seam allowance on the motif for about ½ inch along the appliqué pieces marked line. Pinch this turned-under seam allowance with thumb and pointing finger (same hand). Insert the threaded needle from underneath through the marked line on the background and at the starting place of the appliqué piece. The starting place should be on a straight side, not at a point. Catch the very edge of the fold of the appliqué with your needle and pull the needle through, giving the thread a gentle tug.



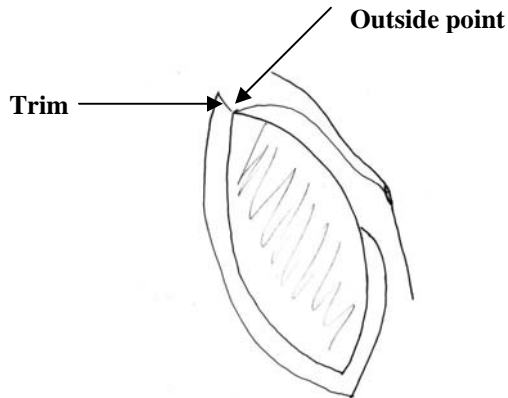
Reinsert the needle back into the background fabric as close to where it came out as possible. Pull thread all the way through until stitch is almost invisible. Underneath, insert the needle approximately ⅛-inch forward from your first stitch and repeat the appliqué stitch.

Upon getting to the end of the folded seam allowance, use the needle to turn under some more seam allowance and proceed with the next stitch.



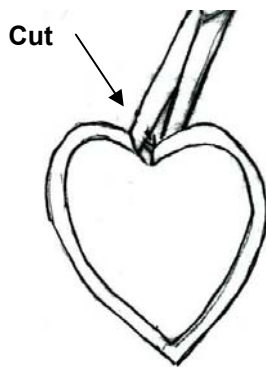
## Outside Points

Stitch all the way to the point. Leave the last stitch loose. Trim the excess seam allowance that sticks out from under the point. Turn the other side of the point seam allowance under with the needle and tug on the thread to make the point sharp. Stitch down the other side of the point.



## Inside Points

Clip to the motif line through the seam allowance on the inside point.



Stop stitching one stitch short of the inside point.

One stitch short  
of inside point



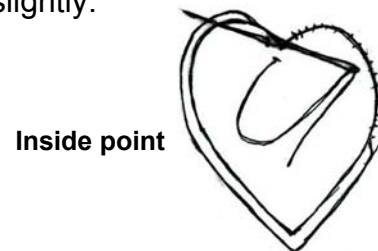
Turn under the seam allowance on the other side of the point. On the point stitch, take a deeper bite into the point of the appliqué piece with the needle.



Insert the needle back under the edge of the motif two or three threads.



Give the thread a gentle tug from below. This will curl the edge of the point under ever so slightly.



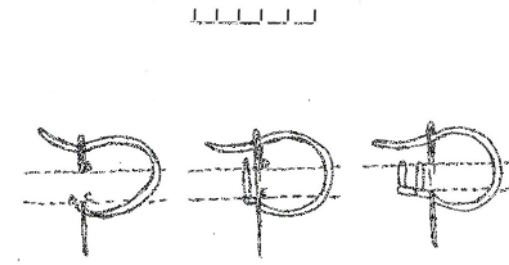
Take another small stitch at the point to secure the threads if it is needed. Continue to stitch as usual.

## Curves

Concave or inward curves need to be clipped before turning edges under. Convex or outward curves will turn easily when a line of gathering is done in the seam allowance and pulled up.

## Blanket Stitch Appliqué

The blanket stitch is a fun way to hand stitch the appliqué motifs. It is best used with fusible web.



## MACHINE STITCHING

Before beginning to machine stitch, it is a good idea to place a tear-away stabilizer between the back of the background fabric and the feed dog of the machine. This will keep the appliqué flat as it is sewn and the stabilizer will tear away after the stitching is complete.

If one is available, use an open-toed machine presser foot. It is much easier to see where to stitch with this foot.

Use a size 10 or 12 needle in the machine. Use cotton thread in the bobbin. There are many choices of thread to use on top. For a beginner, it is suggested that cotton thread matching the appliqué to be used. Decorative threads may be introduced later.

There are many machine stitches that can be used in appliquéing the design. Following are some suggestions.

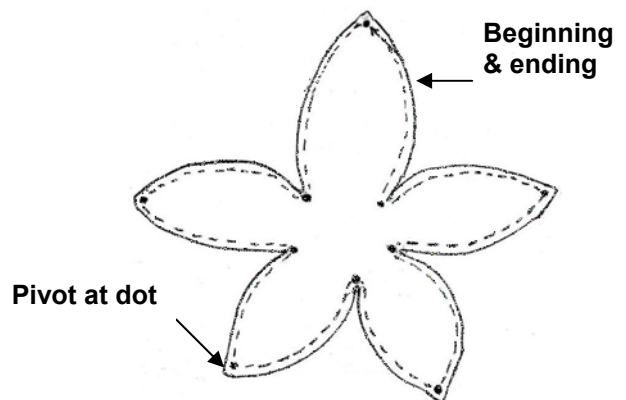
### Straight Stitch

Prepare the appliqué as described in the section **Preparing Designs for Appliqué**. Position the design on the background fabric as described previously. Remember to also use a stabilizer.

Set the machine for a straight stitch. Begin stitching on a curve of the motif.

Avoid starting at an inside or outside point. Set the stitch length at zero and make two to three stitches at the beginning of the appliqué to secure the line of stitches. Change the stitch length to 2.0 to 2.5 (mm), and stitch very close to the edge of the appliqué motif.

On the inner and outer points, position the needle down. Lift the pressure foot and pivot. Lower presser foot and continue stitching. To finish, reduce the stitch length again to zero for two to three stitches to secure the end of the stitching. Do not backstitch or overlap the stitches.



Straight stitch appliqué

### Satin Stitch (close zigzag stitch)

The satin stitch is a good method to use on raw-edge fused appliqué motifs. Change presser foot to a satin stitch foot. This foot has a groove on the bottom to allow for the wide stitching. An open-toed foot will also allow you to see the edge to be stitched more easily.

Use cotton embroidery thread and cotton thread in the bobbin. Be sure the color matches or complements the design. Use tear away stabilizer, as described.

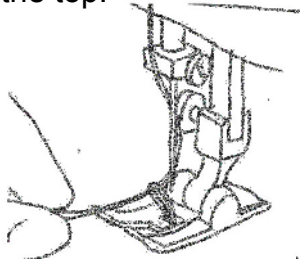
To satin stitch, the machine must be able to easily shorten and widen the stitch width. Practice on a scrap of fabric.

Shorten the stitch length until the stitches lay very close together. The stitch width should be set according to the size and dimension of the design. If the design is small, the satin stitch should be narrow. If the motif is large, the satin stitch can be wider.

### Satin stitch



Before positioning fabric under the presser foot, bring the bobbin thread to the surface of the machine. To do this, hold the top/needle thread and lower the needle into the machine. Bring the needle up again and gently tug on the thread to bring bobbin/lower thread loop to the surface. Pull the bobbin thread all the way out to the top.



Hold both threads with your left hand as you begin to stitch just for a couple of stitches to prevent loose thread ends from tangling underneath your stitching.

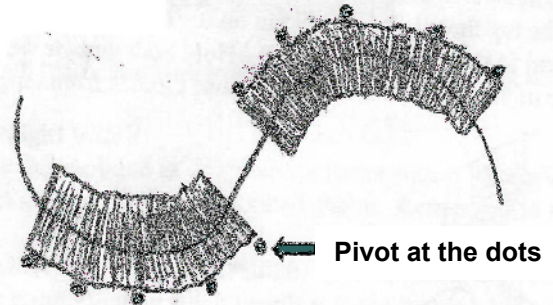
Position the work under the needle. Choose a beginning point very close to the edge of the appliqué motif. Do not begin on an inside or outside point, rather on a straight edge or a curve.

Insert the machine needle into the background fabric at the beginning point. Begin to stitch. One side of the zigzag/satin stitch should be just off the edge of the appliqué fabric and the other side of the stitch should be on the appliqué.

### Curves

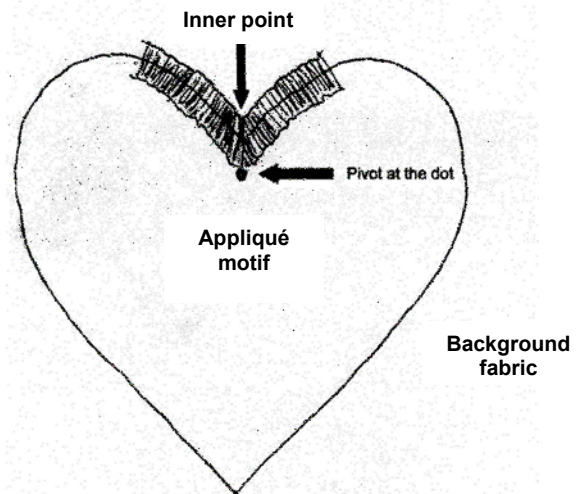
To pivot on the outside curve, put the needle into the background fabric. Lift the pressure foot, pivot, lower the foot, and continue stitching.

On an inside curve, put the needle down on the appliqué piece, lift the foot, pivot, lower the foot, and continue.

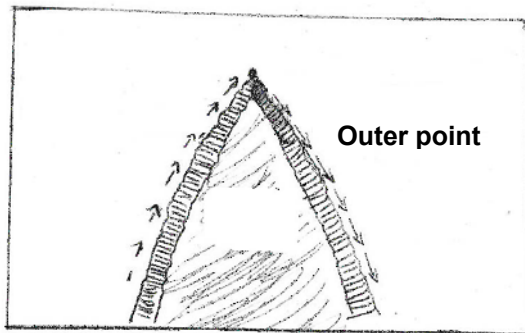


### Inner Points

Continue stitching beyond the point for as many stitches as your satin stitch is wide. Lower the needle, lift the pressure foot, pivot and continue down the other side. The point stitches will overlap.

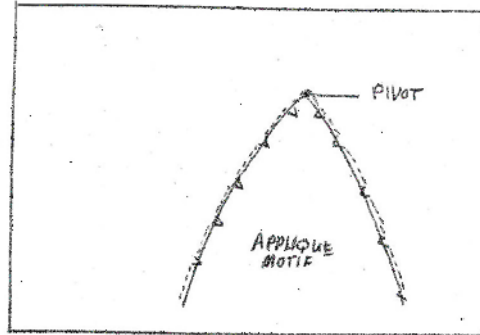


As you come to an outer point, gradually reduce the width of the satin stitch. Lower the needle at the point. Lift the pressure foot, pivot, start stitching with narrow stitches, and gradually increase the stitch width back to its original width.



curve or straight line (not on an inside or outside point). Stitch along the edge of the appliqué on the background fabric and the zigzag will take a very tiny bite on the fold of the appliqué.

To finish the line of stitching and “knot” threads, switch to a straight stitch. Make four or five small stitches back along the inside edge of the zigzag stitches. Clip the threads.



### Blind Stitch

The blind stitch is the closest stitch to the hand appliqué blind stitching. Use a size 10 to 12 needle and clear nylon thread for the bobbin and the needle. Clear thread is recommended for light-colored fabrics and smoke-colored thread for dark colors. Select the stitch on the sewing machine that does three to four straight stitches and then a zigzag stitch, as shown.



This stitch may be called the “blind hem stitch” in the machine instructions.

Adjust the stitch length to approximately 20 stitches per inch. The stitch width should be adjusted so that the zigzag takes a very small bite into the appliqué shape. (one or two threads)

Insert the needle alongside the appliqué but on the background fabric and on a

To finish, simply overlap the beginning stitches for about ½ inch. The stitches will be so tight and small that it will not be necessary to lock stitches at the end of the line of stitching.

### Blanket Stitch

There are other stitches that can be used to machine appliqué. One of the favorites is the blanket stitch (as shown below). The blanket stitch copies the look of the handmade blanket stitch used for hand appliqué. Many sewing machines have this stitch as a stitch option. Browse through the machine’s stitch options. Follow the machine manual’s instructions and experiment on fabric scraps. Machine appliqué can be fun and fast.



### References:

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 Karen Mikel, Kentucky Certified Master Clothing Volunteer  
 Judy Hetterman, County Extension Agent for Family and Consumer Sciences

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