

# Hand and Machine-appliqué Techniques

*Once you know the basics, it's easy to add your own touches to projects or create original designs of your own.*

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## HAND-APPLIQUE METHODS



**Traditional needleturn appliqué** – trace the shape lightly on the right side of the selected fabric and cut it out adding a  $\frac{3}{16}$ in seam allowance, then thread a fine

needle with one thickness of thread to match the appliqué fabric. Sweep the seam allowance under with the side of the needle and stitch the shape in place with invisible stitches through the fold. Areas overlapped by other shapes need not be stitched in place. This technique also works well for Broderie Perse in

which printed motifs are cut out and rearranged, then assembled in a new design.

**Paper-patch appliqué** resembles English paper-pieced patchwork in that the shape is cut out with a seam allowance and then tacked to a paper template before it is appliquéd with invisible stitches, refer to photograph 1. The tacking stitches and paper can be removed just before the whole shape is stitched down. Alternatively, the background fabric can either be trimmed away or slit behind the shape later.

**Fusible-webbing appliqué** is popular because it is quick, easy and almost foolproof. The main points to remember are:

- ◆ the shapes are reversed for tracing onto the paper side of the webbing
- ◆ protect both the iron and the ironing-board from the adhesive at all times, with paper, scrap fabric, baking paper or an appliqué mat – above and below the work
- ◆ select a thread type and colour – Perlé and stranded threads are the most common – and then choose a stitch. Blanket stitch, primitive straight stitch, running stitch and even chain stitch are good choices – match the stitch to the style of the project.

**Freezer paper** has one shiny side that gives a temporary bond with no residue and is extremely versatile.

Adapt the paper-patch method by fusing the paper shape lightly to the front of the selected fabric and cutting it out with a seam allowance, refer to photograph 2.



Photograph 1. Paper-patch technique.

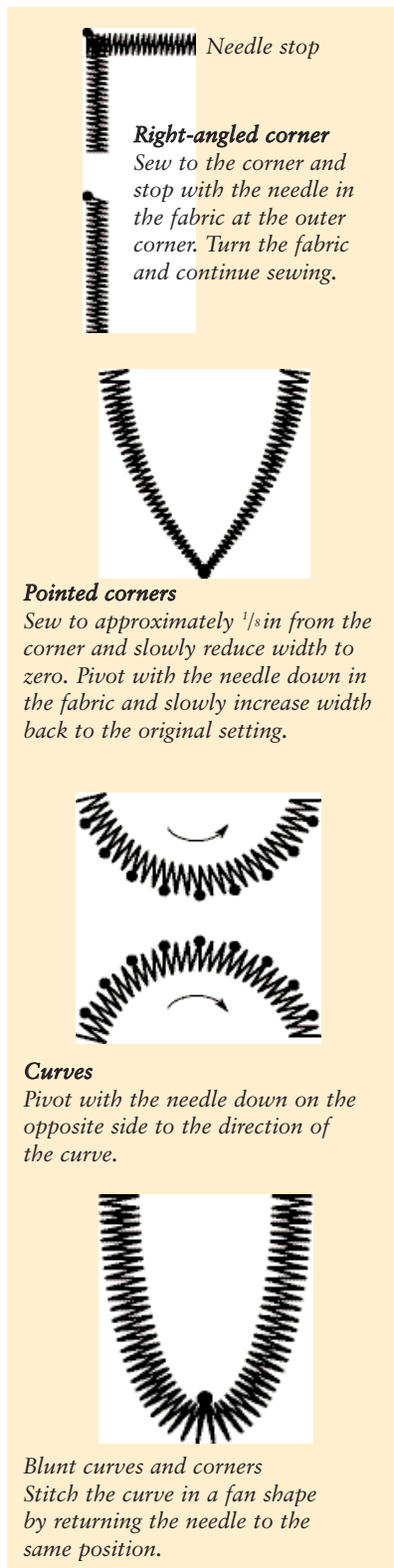


Diagram 1. Satin stitch allows for a neat, hard-wearing edge



Photograph 2. Freezer paper technique.

Then for stitch-free basting, remove the paper, place it behind the shape with the shiny side up and fuse the seam allowance only to the edge of the paper with the point of the iron. Stitch it invisibly in place and remove the freezer paper as for the paper-patch method.

You can also fuse the reversed paper shape to the back of the fabric and cut it out with a seam allowance, then use a glue stick sparingly to fuse the allowance in place. Remove the paper as for the paper-patch method.

For unmarked edges and easy paper removal, fuse the freezer paper to the front of the fabric and cut it out with a seam allowance, then needreturn the edge around the paper outline.



Photograph 3. How to achieve a perfect circle.

## MACHINE-APPLIQUE TECHNIQUES



**Fusible webbing**, as with hand-appliqué, provides a reliable result with minimal effort. Prepare the shapes and fuse them in place on the background as for hand-stitched appliqué.

Set the machine for blanket stitch if it is available – some machines also have a double-stitched variation that resembles hand-stitched *Perlé* thread. If your machine doesn't have one at all, however, experiment with the blind-hem stitch, and set it very short and quite wide. Choose a matching or contrasting thread colour as you would for hand-blanket-stitch, and remember to stop with the needle down to rotate the fabric for

corners and curves – which keeps the stitch looking continuous. Aim to have the stitching line flush with the edge of the shape.

Satin stitch forms a neat, sharp and hard-wearing edge, but always test it first on a scrap sample as each thread type gives different results. Aim for a close zigzag stitch that isn't too wide for the scale of the shapes, but if it is spaced too tightly, it won't advance smoothly, refer to diagram 1. Always use the embroidery foot specified and a new sharp or jeans needle to make an even line where the stitches aren't deflected by the fabric threads. For the top choose a matching or contrasting colour as desired and consider rayon machine-embroidery threads and metallics as well as the usual threads. Tighten the bobbin tension if

possible, loosen the top tension slightly and ensure that the bobbin thread isn't showing on the top on the sample before beginning on your project. Aim to have the stitch mainly on the shape and just falling off the edge onto the background. For tight curves, stop with the needle down on the outer edge of the curve, rotate the fabric a little at a time and continue stitching. As the fabric advances slowly with such close stitching, it should be possible to move it gradually around gentle curves as you stitch.

Explore the possibilities of other machine stitches. Ordinary straight stitch can work for some designs, fancy stitches like a spiky zigzag make a great edge for certain flowers and free-motion stitches of various kinds have enormous creative potential.

### VARIATIONS

- ◆ Trapunto is raised or padded appliqué made by slitting the background, filling the shape with polyester fibre and hand-stitching the opening closed. Cord can be threaded in narrow areas.
- ◆ In reverse appliqué (or Mola work), the design is formed by removing – and stitching – sections to expose the layer or layers underneath, rather than applying it on top.
- ◆ Hawaiian appliqué resembles a snowflake or paper cut-out and usually involves cutting the fabric then needleturning the edges as you go – some parts are reverse-appliquéd as well.
- ◆ Stained-glass and Celtic appliqué employ narrow bias strips either to edge the coloured areas or form knot designs respectively, see photograph 4 for an example. Most commonly, prepared bias strips are hand-appliquéd invisibly in place.

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- ◆ Carefully clip inner corners and curves within the seam allowance. Trim the seam allowances and fold them neatly for sharp outer points without too much bulk.
- ◆ Work appliqué stitches closer at points and tight curves.
- ◆ For a perfect circle, cut it out with a scant  $\frac{1}{4}$ in seam allowance and work a gathering stitch around the edge, refer to photograph 3. Then place a finished-size circle of lightweight cardboard behind it and draw up the gathers to fit. Press the shape well using spray starch, flip the cardboard out – for reuse – and appliqué it in the usual way. This technique can be adapted for curved edges such as the ends of Dresden Plate segments.



**Freezer paper** also has plenty to offer machine-stitched appliqué. Prepare the pieces as outlined previously. This time the machine is used to replicate invisible hand-appliqué.

Thread the top with clear or smoke monofilament thread and put regular thread in the bobbin. Set the stitch to either a fine blind-hem or narrow zigzag – but not satin stitch.

Experiment on a scrap sample to decide which works the best and adjust the stitch length and width to achieve the desired result. The stitch should just catch the fold of the fabric on one side and fall to the background on the other, giving an invisible effect that is almost indistinguishable from hand-appliqué.

**Lightweight interfacing** can be used to bag out the shapes. Trace the reversed shape on the interfacing, place it against the right side of the fabric and stitch right around the line with a short stitch length. Cut out the shape with a narrow seam allowance and clip any inner corners. Cut a slit in the interfacing only, use the blunt end of a satay stick to push out the edges of the turned shape gently and press it. Appliqué it invisibly in place by machine as before – or by hand if you prefer. This method is great for giving the shapes extra definition, controlling fraying on loosely woven fabrics and for adding opacity to shapes if a darker background fabric is inclined to show through the appliqué. Fine lawn gives even greater coverage. ■

*Photograph 4. Cooktown Orchid by Val Towill, Patchwork & Stitching Vol 4 No 3.*