

NEEDLES AND THREAD

Courtesy of the Quilting Board

Needles are sized with the smaller numbers signifying smaller needles. For example a [size 9 needle](#) has a smaller shaft with a smaller eye than a size 18 needle that has a larger shaft and a larger eye. As the size of the needle is increased the eye is larger so heavier threads can be used in larger needles. Machine needles come in sizes 9, 11, 12, 14, 16, and 18.

Regular size 50 thread can be used in almost all the needles available. 50 weight thread is probably the most common size available for regular sewing. Size 11, 12, and 14 needles are usually used for general sewing and patchwork piecing with size 40, 50 or 60 weight thread. These threads and a size 14 are recommended for machine quilting.

If you are using very fine lingerie thread you would want to use a [size 9 needle](#). And if you are sewing very heavy fabrics such as denim or heavy upholstery fabrics you would need to use a size 16 or 18 needle, but regular thread would be adequate for stitching. If you are machine quilting with a dense cotton fabric and a dense batting, you may find the size 16 needle keeps your thread from breaking.

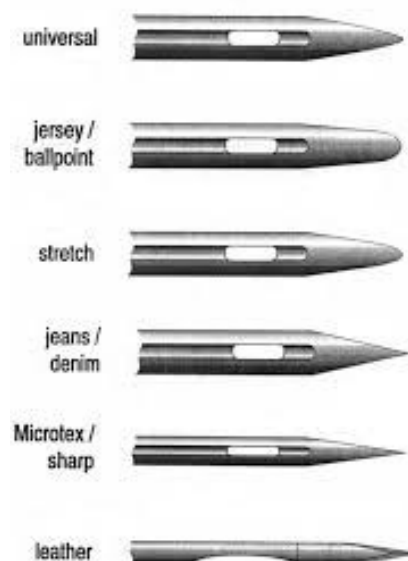
Needles come in two basic styles. There are Universal and Ball Point. Universal are best for woven fabrics as they pierce the fabric. [Ball Point needles](#) are best for knits because they actually go into the fabric between the yarns. [Ball point needles](#) are not recommended for machine piecing or machine quilting.

I recommend size 11 or 12 Universal needles with size 50 cotton thread or cotton covered polyester thread for piecing. For quilting I recommend size 14 Universal needles with cotton thread. Some battings need a size 16 needle and if you are stitching on denim you would want a size 16 or 18 or a special "jean's" needle.

When a [sewing machine](#) is making stitches the thread in the needle goes through the needle many times before it is actually made into the stitch. If the needle hole is too small for a specific thread, the thread will shred or break as it goes through the needle so many times as the machine sews. If the fabric or batting is too thick it will also cause the thread to shred or break.

There are special machine quilting needles available and a microtex needle that some say work better with specialty threads. If you wish to quilt and embellish with specialty threads, ask your [sewing machine](#) dealer for the best type of needles recommended for your specific project and brand of machine.

Regular universal needles in a size 11, 12 or 14 work well for machine piecing quilting fabric with size 50 thread and size 14 or 16 needle works well for machine quilting.



Buying Fabric for Your Stash

I recently read in a quilt book that a person who makes quilts buys a pattern and fabric and goes home and makes a quilt. A quilter buys fabric all the time just because she likes it. She also buys books, patterns and tools.

It is hard to decide for someone else how much fabric to buy. Many factors are involved. The obvious factor is how much money do you have to spend on fabric in a week or a month? If you have a certain budget and you wish to stay within those guidelines you will need to be aware of your fabric purchases and how you stand within your budget guidelines.

If you are a "scrappy" quilter you might buy quarter yards or fat quarters. A fat quarter is a quarter yard of fabric that is approximately 18" x 22". Since the fat quarter is almost a square many quilters find them more usable than a long quarter that is cut 9" x 44". I hardly ever purchase fabric in less than a half yard cut. I find quarter yards just aren't enough to do anything, yet many quilters only buy fat quarters.

If your style of quilting works with quarter yards the advantage is you can buy so many different prints if only selecting a small cut.

If you a fabric you like and think you will use it in a small project buy a yard or a yard and a half. A yard and a half is a good size cut to work into a larger project if there are five or six fabrics.

If you love a fabric, I would suggest buying at least three yards. With three yards you can cut four borders lengthwise -- 108" long x 5" - 6" wide and still have half of your fabric to incorporate into the block piecing. Buying four yards would add another yard for "insurance". Remember to cut your borders first because the piece left for piecing will be the full length of the fabric but only 18" - 24" wide.

If you really love a fabric, buy 6 yards or more. Six yards will make a backing for a large quilt or could be the main fabric in a queen or king size quilt.

When I see a fabric I really love, I have been known to buy the remainder of the bolt. Especially if it is a reduced or sale price! If you see first quality fabric that you really like, and it is 75% off don't hesitate to buy it all. I have had store clerks question me if I was sure I wanted all eleven yards of a beautiful Jinny Beyer stripe -- at \$2 a yard. Well yes! They may have most of their customers purchase fabric in quarter or half yard increments but when I see what I really like I don't hesitate to buy as much as my budget will allow. I have never been sorry.

When I am at the quilt store and decide I need two yards of a fabric and as they are measuring they realize there are two and a half yards on the bolt, I tell them I'll "take it all". Again, I have never been sorry to have extra fabric for any project. Sometimes what is left over is exactly what you need to make a "pillowcase" or bag for storage of your quilt. Sometimes the extra you purchase is necessary because you changed your mind on the pattern or made a cutting error.

I have wrapped a gift quilt in a series of pillowcases that coordinated with the quilt and they were greatly appreciated. So if you have extra fabric remaining you could make a pillowcase or two.

How To Make A Pillowcase

You will need 3/4 yard of fabric and 1/4 yard of contrasting fabric for the band OR 1 yard of fabric if you choose to simply hem your pillowcase.

Hemmed Pillowcase -- Fold 1 yard of fabric right sides together with selvages matching. Trim selvages. Stitch long side and one end using 1/4" seam allowance. Zigzag or serge seam allowance. On open end, press under 1/2" to wrong side, then press 4" under. Topstitch hem. Turn right side out and press.

Contrasting band Pillowcase -- Fold 3/4 yard of fabric right sides together with selvages matching. Trim selvages. Stitch long side and end using 1/4" seam allowance. Zigzag or serge seam allowance.

Prepare contrasting band -- Cut band fabric 8 1/2" wide and the same width as the pillowcase fabric -- trimming selvages. Stitch short ends of band right sides together using a 1/4" seam allowance. Press seam open. With right side out, press band in half forming a 4 1/4" loop. Stitch raw edge of band right side of open pillow case end. Zigzag or serge seam allowance. Press seam toward pillowcase. Turn right side out and topstitch on outside through the pillowcase fabric and seam allowances of band. Press.

Remember that adding fabrics to your stash is your quilter's palate. Everyone who participates in an art or craft needs to have materials available for inspiration and to use. Do not feel guilty if you have fabric in your stash that is not currently earmarked for a specific project. Sometimes it takes some time just "living" with the fabric and looking at it before inspiration strikes and you are ready to cut into it for a special quilt.