

The It's Okay If You Sit On My Quilt Book

by Mary Ellen Hopkins

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On My Quilt
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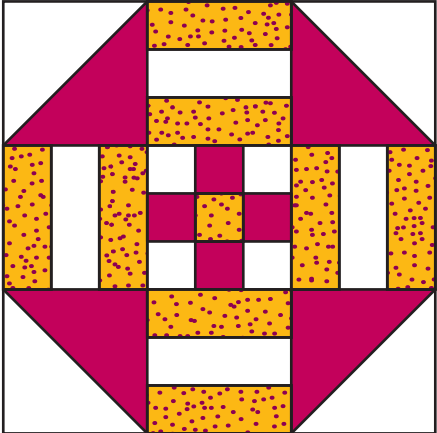
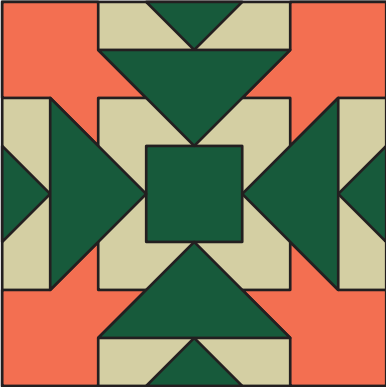
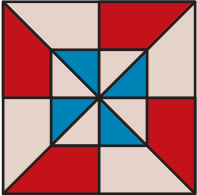
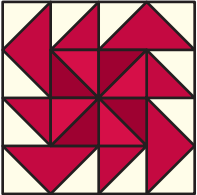
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This book is possible because David, Matthew, John and Barbara Hopkins grew up and left Mary Ellen with nothing else to do.

"Yes, I'll make you a quilt because I love you and yes, you can sit on the quilt!!!!!"

For my boys whose vans never seem to have a working heater, for my daughter who is currently supporting the nail polish industry while sitting cross-legged on the bed with her friends, and for my friends who drink cocoa in bed - yes, **it's okay if you sit on my quilt.**

Why? Because I've learned secrets about cutting and piecing that make it possible for me to make quilts in a fraction of the time you would expect without sacrificing design. In fact, when you finish this book I believe you will have so many exciting design and technique ideas that nothing will keep you from making quilts.

All of The Indispensable Patchwork Patterns in this workbook are made up entirely of squares, right triangles and strips.

Included are secrets about patchwork squares that no one ever tells you, secret ways to: look at them, use them, mark them, cut them, sew them, and set them.

One secret is that several have been redrafted and interpreted in squares and triangles, eliminating more difficult shapes so that our secret techniques can be employed.

This technique of designing quilts will especially appeal to you if, like me, you can remember third grade. Do you remember having a little resentment for the girl who could draw a horse? A perfect horse. Not just in art class, but on her notebook cover and scratch pads. Well, I remember and I also remember how excited I was when they handed out the graph paper and I started coloring razzle-dazzle geometric designs!

As we progress through this book, you'll be introduced to the joys of graph paper. This book is intended for you to actually work in and to add your own work pages. And I don't hold grudges. You're welcome to read on, even if you can draw horses.

Checklist on how to get that "Art School Graduate" look:

1. Put it on the diagonal
2. Use connector block
3. Remember the famous 9-Patch set up
4. Try positive - negative themes
5. Float
6. Clean - up
7. Add on to finish the design
8. Shade in as though it were one block
9. Barn Raising Set
10. Mirror Image

Before we begin, it is important to understand that the whole point of this book is to be able to apply artistic principles to create beautiful quilts without having to go to school to learn art theory - and to do it with ease! To this end, this book will demonstrate the principles listed above so you too can easily create wonderful designs to amaze your friends and relatives and leave them awestruck at your generosity when you give away those quilts which you "slaved over for months and months." Whatever you do, don't let them see this book! Now, let's get started!

Starting at Square One

First of all, let's get one thing straight. This is not a step-by-step "how to" quilt-from-beginning-to-end book. There are lots of those.

This is an *attitude adjustment* quilt book. Too many people think that a quilt must be painstakingly planned and drug out for years of piecing and perfect quilting. This is not to put down the masterpiece quilt. It's to say every quilt need not be one. So roll up your sleeves and start.

Why do we make a quilt?

1. To keep someone we love warm.

2. To create something of our own choosing. To say "This is ME!"

3. It's a reason to play with all those colors and patterns and designs we have floating around in our heads.

4. And let's face it - for those of us who are fabricologists, it's a chance to be with what we love.

5. It's just plain therapeutic. It's a pleasant pace to keep - your hands are busy, your mind is playing with design - and still you can watch television, talk with the family and not get mixed up.

6. And don't overlook the satellite bonuses - like being wined and dined by someone who wants you to make a quilt - and the fact that it does wonders for your reputation.

You do not need to be a sewer to embark on this road of love. If you are one of the many who definitely did not shine in Home Ec - not to worry. I consider sewing about 4th down the list of what you need to know. The sewing is simple - just sew straight ahead in a straight line using a simple running stitch. When you're on the machine, you really don't need to touch anything - just stitch straight ahead!

The traditional idea of quiltmaking is a cut-each-separate-piece and sew-each-separate-piece method. In this book we will introduce you to quick cutting, piecing before cutting, etc. I really can't believe that this is a novel way of piecing. In fact I remember my aunt doing some similar things. And take a look at Seminole patchwork - almost entirely based on sewing strips together, then cutting and resewing in a different arrangement.

I have a theory that our forebears learned quick techniques too, but perhaps the Puritan ethic made them keep it to themselves rather than "admit" to shortcuts. Busy work for work's sake just is not in scheme of things. (Does a tomato taste any better if you dig the ground with a stick instead of a shovel?) So I refuse to be intimidated by the idea that Grandma did it piece by piece and therefore it's better. I hope she really did know my techniques. If you feel the same, keep going.

Some common sense feelings about fabrics

About 100% cotton - well, I wish every print and every shade that I wanted to use would be made of cotton - it's so terrific to work with - but they just aren't. My first priority is for color, so yes, I'll use blends. Blends vary so much. Try to stay clear of the wibbly-wobbly ones, you have to slow way down on your sewing speed. However, there is one terrific dull gray green blend that wobbles as though it were alive, but I'll still hassle it because I'm in love with that particular shade. Experience is, to me, the best teacher. If you are having a particular problem, and one fabric is a blend, you may decide to change. It is more important to stay in the same **weight** of fabric. A heavier, coarser fabric will weaken the lighter fabric that it is seamed to. And yes, if you can, I really believe cotton is much simpler to

work with. It eases in patchwork better and the edges can be turned under easily for applique.

Pre-shrinking and washing all fabric first is, of course, the safest way to go. However, when I know I've got a top quality piece of goods, I've skipped this and not gotten into trouble. **But**, the selvage is always bad news. Never use it. The threads in the selvage are not always the same threads as in the fabric and they can draw up something awful. If I do want to shrink something first, I prefer to immerse it in hot water, blot it in a towel and iron it dry. That way it is a lot easier to mark and cut. It's not as limp as fabric that's had the full wash and dry routine.

The best way to store your fabric is by color. And all together. I have known women who will suspend shelves from their bathroom ceiling, just to be able to usurp the linen closet. Pin a long slip of paper to each piece of fabric stating the amount and then each time you use some of it, subtract the amount used. This is a habit you'll be thankful you started.

Do not store any of your fabric in plastic bags - you think you're keeping them dust free, but actually you're rotting them out. That fabric has got to breathe. Cover the stacks with old sheets, tablecloths or curtains instead.

Are you a compulsive buyer of fabric? So am I and I felt very guilty indeed, until I opened my quilt shop and found **hundreds of others** in the same club! Since there are endless ways of rationalizing this buying habit and since none of us feel the slightest inclination to overcome it - just carry on. I found the offensive position the best. Do not try to apologize or explain it - just raise you eyebrows and **assume** that your accuser is off beat.

Downhome tips on color

First of all I think color in quilts is virtually impossible to "teach". The color wheel doesn't really help when you're working with quilts. The color wheel has one solid chip of color next to another. Not at all what we do with printed fabrics. So over the years, I've developed some attitudes about color. I'd like you to consider incorporating them.

Forget about trying to match everything

Say, for instance, you're putting a little narrow green frame around the center of your quilt top. There is absolutely no need to match it to the shade of green that is the leaf color of one of your flowered prints. Instead it should be a green that looks good with the whole quilt. Stand back and put in some color that looks good with the whole quilt. Not all this little tiny-matchy-uppy.

Learn that clash is not always a negative word. Rusts, browns and golds are the safest combination. But to avoid the ho-hums, try to have one fabric that "clashes" - a wine or black for instance.

Within a color family, shades of red are the easiest to combine. That is, red with an orange cast can be used with a blue red, cherry red, etc. more easily than hues of other colors. So when I say all reds clash well, I hope you understand.

Blues are probably the most difficult hues to combine. You put a bunch of blues together and nothing happens. They seem to cancel each other out. I suggest going for a "prominent" blue look, while using other colors as well. Using a bit of purple, violet or mauve will add a lot of "color" to your blues. Navy is the easiest of the blues because it gives a more graphic look.

Contrary to popular belief, black is bright, gay and sparkling. Honest. It will perk things up like you couldn't believe.

A little piece of green will sure add some spark to almost any quilt. I've been quoted as saying, "Don't show me a quilt what doesn't have green, purple or black in it somewhere." Again I admit it's not orthodox color theory, but start looking. The easiest thing to have happen is that you'll get a boring quilt because you're afraid to try something different.

Trying to make a quilt for a certain room all the time can sure squelch you. Let go and just make a gorgeous quilt.

The Importance of Standing Back

When selecting fabrics for a quilt, it is always a good idea to keep moving back and looking at alternatives for a distance. Very few people see a quilt or a quilted project of any kind from 18". The effect of the combined fabrics from several feet away becomes crucial to the selection.

Both colors and patterns play tricks on your selection when you stand back. If standing back isn't convenient, at least squint.

Mixing types of Designs - Almost as Important as Color!

Much of the charm of quilts is the interplay of individual fabric designs. It is virtually impossible to categorize all fabrics into just a few types, but let's discuss some of the most common.

Small, dense designs

a. If the objects in a dense design are all one color family, they substitute well for a solid. They add variety safely. Be careful if the fabric is very dark with lots of white. It will look much lighter or "washed out" from a few feet away.

b. Small, dense designs with multiple colors take more thought and care. It's especially important to stand back. The colors may cancel each other out completely, or an unexpected color may dominate.

Random designs

Random designs are difficult to find, but wonderful to use. They don't allow the fabric to develop surprise secondary patterns. They don't get boring. Each small piece cut from a random design can look completely different. Small random designs make especially nice background fabrics.

Open and airy prints

These designs are usually a more delicate pattern, spread out but still connected with a thin, viny detail. They provide wonderful relief to other fabric designs.

Large designs

Anything between small and gigantic may classify as large.

a. A large, dense design is a very easy way to introduce many colors. The shapes are big enough to see each color separately. This allows you to emphasize a specific color with the other fabrics you choose.

b. Large airy designs with lots of background color between motifs become the same as gigantic prints.

Gigantic designs

To many quilters, any design element larger than 3" is gigantic. I like large designs for the very same reason most people don't use them. Cut into small pieces, a gigantic design can cut into many different colors and patterns. It's like creating your own random designs! Used throughout a quilt, the fabric ties the quilt together, but adds so much movement!

Special Fabrics

Pindots & Polkadots

Pindots and polkadots are not the same thing. Pindots are so small, you can't measure their diameter. Pindots, or microdots, have become a mainstay in the last few years. They may well be used as a solid with more interest. However, from 10 feet away, the dot is usually not visible.

Polkadots come in every measurable size. Generally, the smaller they are, the easier they are to use.

Checks, Tattersalls, Plaids & other Geometrics

When small, these can be a neat, tailored little pattern that really catches the eye. They can be used to highlight a certain section of a quilt pattern. Generally, the larger they are, the more unwieldy to use.

Stripes

Recognizable stripes can often be used very effectively as borders or to add dramatic movement to a quilt design. The excitement they can add when well-used makes the extra thought worthwhile.

Non-recognizable stripes are those fabrics that have designs in a row. Sometimes, this only becomes visible as you use the fabric. A printed "in a row" pattern can often be used like a subtle stripe but can also mar a quilt if not cut carefully.

Remember - mixing types of designs is probably just as important as color in quilt design. The easiest trap is to use all tiny prints.

Getting Ready to Mark and Cut — Quick Style

Before I indulged in the acrylic rules, I bought large poster boards (22" wide at stores that carry office supplies) and cut them precisely and carefully into the width of strips I needed. If you're not accurate here, you're dead. These strips wear down and must be remade often. You'll see why we need these later.

For all my marking, I use (hold your breath) a black thin-line Bic ball point!! The scissors cut right through this tiny thin line - it disappears and being able to **see** that line makes cutting more accurate.

I only mark the light fabric, then slip the **dark** fabric underneath and cut all at once. I always mark with another piece of fabric underneath so it won't wobble on the table top.

A decent pair of sewing scissors will cut through 4 thicknesses with no problem. If you're hooked on this stuff, you might consider going for the big time. A really good pair of scissors will cut 6-8 thicknesses with no distortion. Now slow down when you're cutting and look to see if the bottom layers are distorting. If they are, start pinning here and there. Hold your scissors straight up so you don't cut at an angle.

Some markers (I use the term "markers" rather than "quilters" because you may be lucky enough to hook someone else around you into being the "marker" - a plea of helplessness works great with most men) are able to use the horizontal templates in conjunction with a cutting board marked in one-inch lines. Test yourself first. Personally, I don't do well at all on it.

And yes, I cut strips on the crosswise grain.

A super alternative to scissors is the rotary cutter. (If you haven't seen one, it resembles a pizza cutter.)

Along with the rotary cutter you will need a cutting mat and at least one clear acrylic rule marked in 1/8" increments. (A 6" x 12" Salem Rule is an excellent choice.) Make sure the cutter edge is next to the rule when cutting. Get a good demonstration and you'll see the benefits of the rotary cutter if you are making lots of strips.

About Sewing

Usually your sewing machine foot is about ¼" from the edge of the fabric to the needle so all you'll need to do is line up the edge of the foot with the edge of the fabric. If your machine's foot isn't ¼", not to worry as long as you use the same foot for the entire quilt so all the seam allowances are the same width. Your presser foot is your PPM, Personal Private Measurement (discussed on page 10).

Set your stitch slightly larger than you use for ordinary sewing. I like it about ¾ of the way to "basting" or 8-9 stitches per inch.

I sew all my seams with natural colored thread. It's stronger because there's no dye in it. If you buy it by the cone there is a tremendous saving.

I never back stitch. You will always be crossing a line of stitching with another line. It's just too time consuming, and miserable to rip out.

About Ironing

Ironing a lot is great. It will keep your work neater, cleaner and more accurate. A terrific investment is a light iron. Try to find one light enough and small enough to use on a stool placed near your seat or the arm of an overstuffed chair. Wherever possible, seams should be ironed to one side, towards the darker fabric. There are still times when only opened seams will work.

Remember, you are all powerful with that hot iron! It is possible to iron a perfectly cut square of fabric into a lopsided parallelogram, never to be square again. **Don't iron aggressively! Just press.**

Feel Free to Change Your Original Plan

While I don't push long drawn out plans for a quilt, everyone has an idea or a sketch or graph paper design when they start a quilt. Remember, it's not binding.

If you've gotten carried away with too wild of a color scheme in your blocks, change your game plan a little bit and tie the whole thing together with matching window pane strips.

You've made just 4 blocks and don't want to do anymore? Put the 4 together and use them for the center of a medallion quilt.

By the way, medallion quilt tops are grand for tablecloths. Use flannel for the inside layer and you'll have a minimum of quilting to do.

Center of the medallion not too red-hot? Use it on a table where there's always a centerpiece sitting on top of it.

Get the message? **Always** use something you've done **somewhere**.

Don't despair because there is no more of a certain fabric available and you didn't get enough. So one block will have to be different - big deal. You can always say you wanted that one block to symbolize something in your life.

Some people call it Fudging It, Winging It, Flying by the Seat of Your Pants. I like to think of it as flexible, open to new ideas.

It also keeps more people you love snuggled under quilts and cuts your flop count to zero.

Glossary

Fabricologist - one who collects and understands fabrics

Muckle - to mix up fabrics

PPF - Personal Private Friend

PPM - Personal Private Measurement

PPP - Personal Private Pages (which you're certainly going to have, aren't you)

PPR - Personal Private Rule

PPT - Perfect Pieced Triangle

PPV - Personal Private Variation

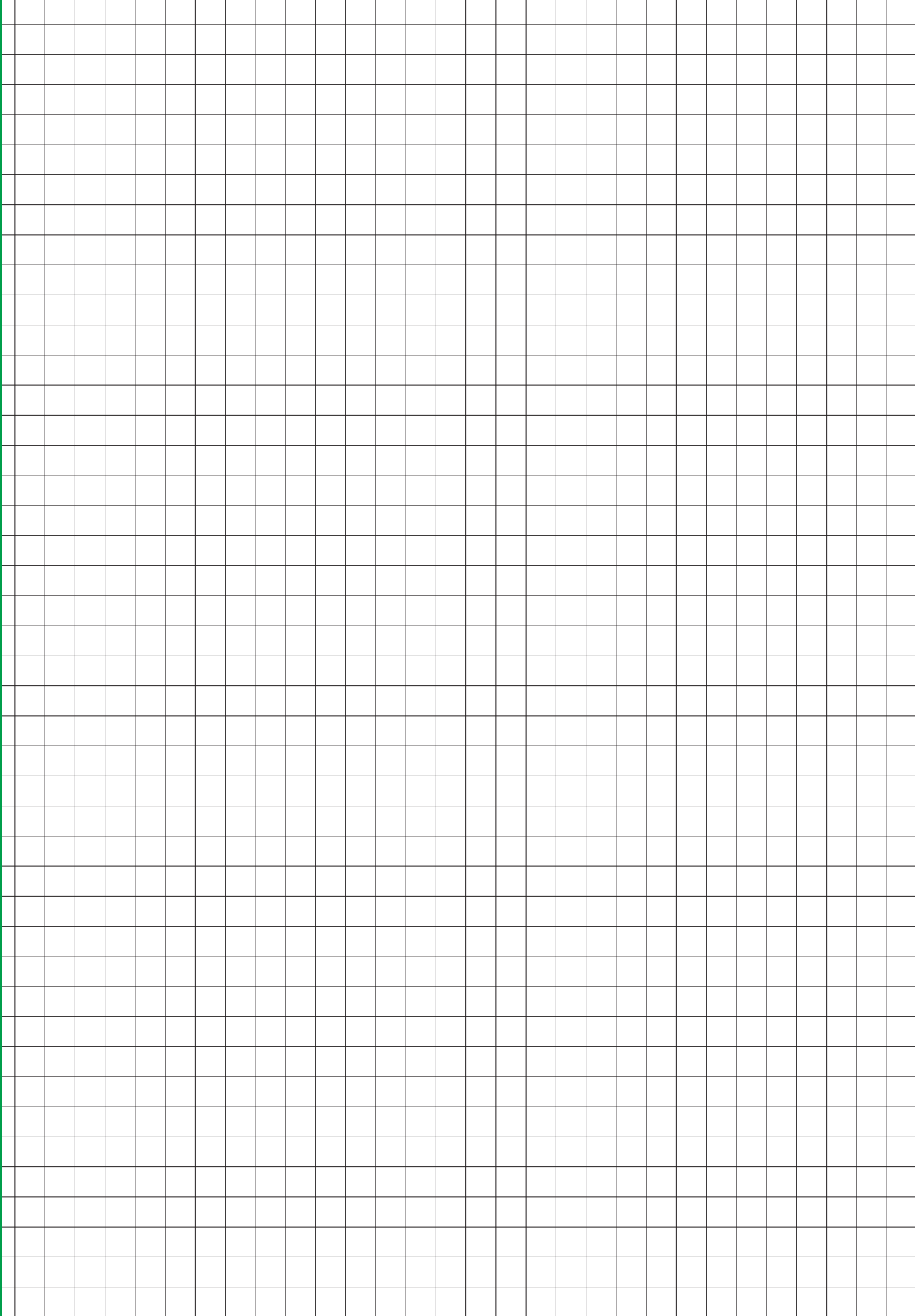
Whomp - To cut segments with a rotart cutter

Whizzy Whacker - Rotary Cutter

How to See and Use Patterns Here



How to See and Use Patterns Here



Lots of patterns that are traditionally made up of parallelograms, trapezoids and other shapes can actually be broken down into just squares and right triangles, simply by super-imposing a grid over them.

The whole trick is either in your mind's eye or by little dotted lines super-imposed in a grid over the pattern.

How to Mark, Cut and Sew Your Perfect Pieced Triangles the Accurate and Hassle Free Way

Without having to mark the dark fabric, first determine what size you want the finished size of this unit to be.

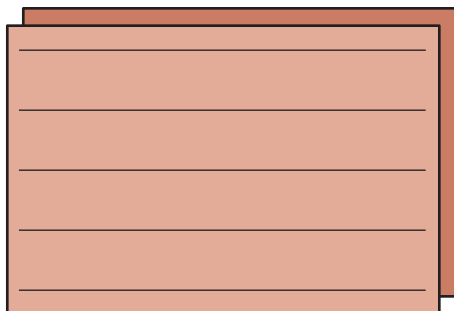
Example: 1½" finished square



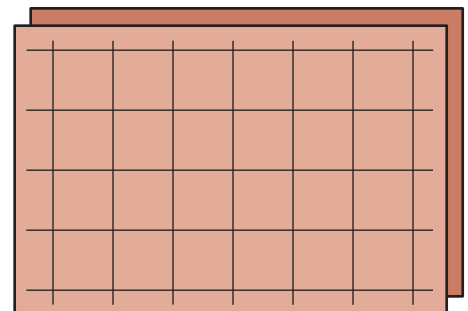
Now add one whole inch to this desired finished size, which would make it 2½".

Lay two different fabrics right sides together, lighter colored fabric on top. it's not good to use pieces of fabric larger than 18" x 22", because it gets too unwieldy. We quilters call this size a fat quarter. A fat eighth would be 18" x 11", which is the size I always use.

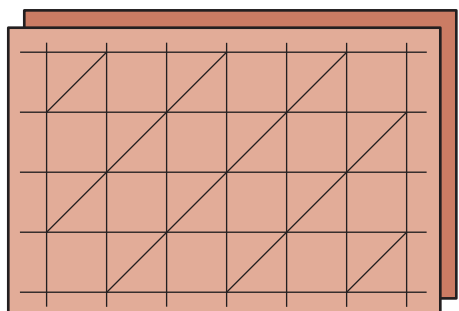
Using your Salem Rule and a fine-line black ballpoint pen, mark a 2½" grid of squares on the light fabric.



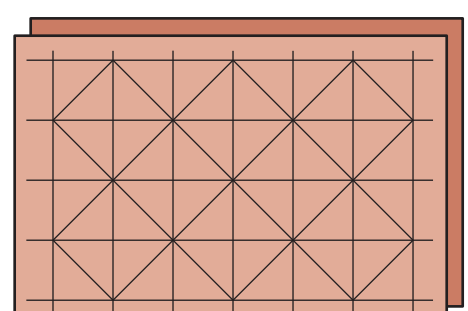
Step 1:
Draw horizontal lines.



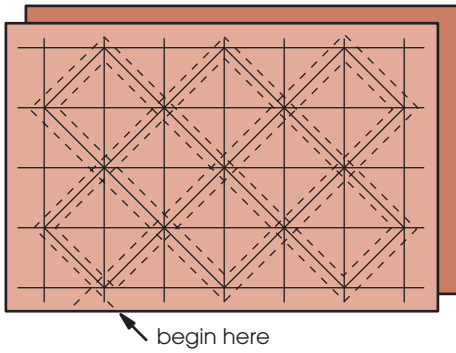
Step 2:
Draw vertical lines



Step 3: Draw diagonal lines in every other square starting in one corner.



Step 4: Now draw diagonal lines in opposite direction in empty squares that are left.

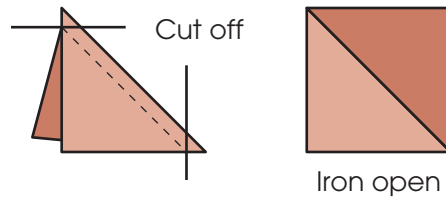


Step 5: Stitch in one continuous line using the same side of your presser foot all the time. This helps solve the problem of touchy tension and clears up one - directional fabrics.

Bonus: No stitches in the corners of cut triangles!!

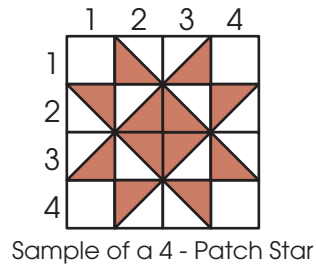
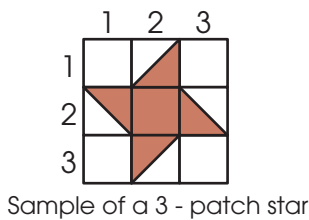
There is just no way around it, these seams are going to have to be pressed before you use them! Ironing them open is a drag, but for some patterns you'll have to, otherwise you'll get too many thicknesses at one point. But for 75% of the patterns, ironing the way the fabric wants to go is what you'll do.

Press the drawn and stitched triangles before cutting. Cut on all the drawn lines. Before opening and using, be sure to clip the corners off. If you don't, this excess will drive you crazy!



The Grid

What do we mean by the "Grid"?



Graph paper lines are a grid. The pattern is counted by the number of squares across and the number of squares down.

I like working on four squares to the inch graph paper. If copying white graph paper with blue lines on a copy machine, the graph lines will drop out.

Each square on the grid (or graph paper) will be either a solid square: 

Or a right triangle: 