

Sew Fresh Quilts – Top 10 Tips for Quilters

Introducing Week 1 of the Top 10 Tips for new Quilters - Fabric & Thread



Quality Cotton Quilting Fabric:

Three elements are used to determine the quality of cotton quilting fabric: the thread count, the quality of the threads/yarns used, and the finishing processes.

Fabrics with a higher thread count are smoother to the touch and last longer. Think of when you look for new bed sheets. A higher thread count equals more comfort and durability. Good quilting fabric has a thread count of at least 60 threads per inch each on the crosswise and lengthwise grains.

Fabric quality is also determined by the diameter of the yarns used, the size of the cotton filaments and the length of the cotton staple. These threads/yarns should be even in thickness and have fibers that are at least 1/2" long.

High end quilting fabrics use quality dyes and go through several finishing processes to set these dyes. For this reason, quality quilting fabrics are not likely to result in colours bleeding when put through the wash cycle.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?

At the beginning of my quilting journey, my frugal nature and inexperience resulted in my purchasing a lot of lower quality fabrics from "big box" chain stores. Much of that fabric was either thin, stiff or had bumpy threads. I always prewashed my yardage, so never had an issue with bleeding. Over time, I began to purchase more fat quarters and precuts and quit prewashing. Experience with fabric helped me to learn what the better quality fabrics felt like to the touch and how they looked. Even how nice they smelled!

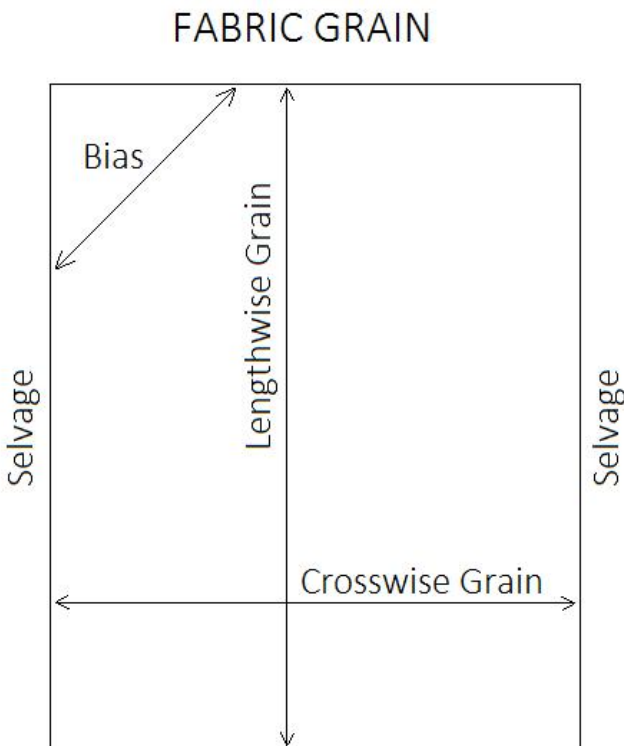
Do I still love the quilts I made at the beginning? Of course! But now I only buy high quality quilting fabric because I know it will last longer, be softer to the touch, and provides me with better value. That is not to say I will no longer buy fabric from the "big box" stores. I watch for sales, always check the label on a bolt of fabric to ensure it is made by a reputable company, and use my experience to ensure it is a good buy.

Fabric Grain:

Fabric grain refers to the way threads are woven. Fabrics are woven in two directions. These are referred to as the *lengthwise* and *crosswise* grains. However, there are three types of fabric grain.

Lengthwise grain (warp), also known as *straight of grain*, runs parallel to the selvages. It is the strongest grain and has very little stretch, making it great for borders.

Crosswise grain (weft), also known as *cross grain*, runs at a right angle to the selvages. It has a little more stretch than the lengthwise grain.



Bias grain runs on a 45-degree angle to the selvages and has the most stretch. Be careful when handling pieces cut on the bias. Strips cut on the bias are used for binding curved quilt edges such as scallops. Bias strips are also used to make stems for applique.

SUPER TIP: Have you ever purchased a length of fabric that was all wonky when folded with selvage edges together? To straighten fabric before cutting hold the selvedge edge in one hand and the cut edge in the other. Give it a tug! This helps to straighten out a piece of fabric.

To prewash or not to prewash? That is the question...

Today's quality quilting cottons have made prewashing a thing of the past. It is no longer necessary to prewash your fabrics before use in order to prevent the dyes from bleeding into adjacent fabrics. However, to be safe, it is always a good idea to use a product like Shout Color Catcher or Dr. Beckmann - Colour & Dirt Collector. These sheets look a lot like a fabric softener sheet used to eliminate static in the dryer, but are instead thrown into the washing machine with your quilt for it's first washing. The sheets trap all dyes in the wash water and prevent them from bleeding into your quilt. Another great product to have handy when washing your quilt is a bottle of synthropol. After washing your quilt, if you see some bleeding, you can instantly rewash with some synthropol and the bleeding comes out.



Quality Cotton & Polyester Threads:

Well, here again, quality is the main point. After all the work that goes into making a quilt, you want the thread to hold up to the wear and tear of use. Both in the piecing and in the quilting. Cheaper is not better.

Cotton or Polyester?

This will be a personal choice. And it will depend largely on how well it works in your sewing machine.

Cotton thread is a spun thread. It is made by spinning lengths of fiber called staples into plies. The plies are then twisted together. Measured by thread count number and plies, the thread count is the thickness of each strand and the ply tells you how many strands are wound together to make the thread. General cotton sewing thread is typically 50/3, where the thread thickness is 50 and there are 3 strands of thread woven together make the plies. The higher the first number the thinner the thread.

Quality cotton thread uses long staple fibers and is mercerized. This results in a smoother thread which is less linty, gives it strength, and helps the dye absorb properly. However, cotton will wear more than synthetic threads and isn't as colorfast.

Polyester thread can be spun or continuous filament. Although spun polyester is made in the same way as cotton thread, it is a synthetic blend which is stronger and stretchier and has little or no lint. Monofilament thread is even stronger and is made from one continuous filament. Polyester threads come in a variety of weights. A greater weight number indicates a thinner thread. Typically, you would use a 40 weight for embroidery or quilting.

Cotton vs. Polyester

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| - better for use in heirloom quality quilts because it will wear at the same rate as the fabrics | - stronger - more durable - colourfast - not linty |
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WHAT DO I PREFER?

I only use polyester thread. Gutermann and Superior Threads are my threads of choice. I prefer polyester because it has a higher tensile strength and is less likely to break. It is strong, durable, and colorfast and is less linty than cotton. I use a white Gutermann thread for piecing and often also use it for quilting. But when I really want the quilting to stand out and shine, I turn to my collection of Superior Threads. I love my Magnifico and Fantastico threads.

