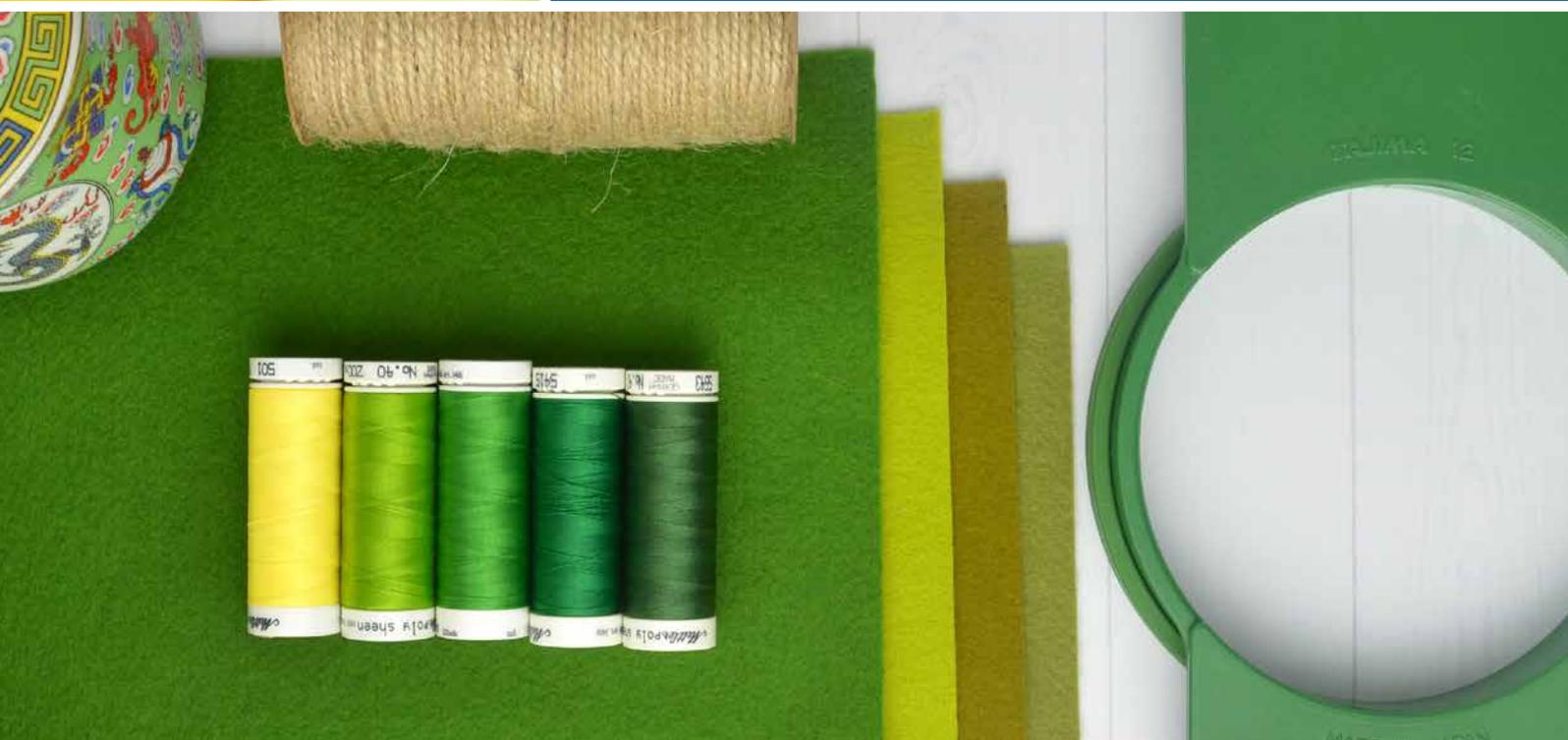




Hatch[®]
by WILCOM[®]

The Essential Guide to
**MACHINE
EMBROIDERY**





Hatch[®]
by **WILCOM**

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Choosing the Right Fabric for Your Embroidery

1



Guidelines to fabrics that are the easiest or best to embroider for great results

When you start out in machine embroidery there are so many different supplies you need to be looking at, it can easily get overwhelming. In this chapter we shed light on the different types of fabrics you can use. We also give you some guidelines to which fabrics are the easiest or best to embroider to ensure great results right from the start.

First Things First

We cannot repeat and emphasize often enough that the final result of your embroidery project depends on a number of factors. You need to ensure that you select the right needle, fabric, stabilizer to suit the size and stitch density of your embroidery design. We dedicated complete chapters to needles and stabilizers, so in this one we will focus on the other factors. For a great outcome you also have to make sure that your embroidery machine is well-tuned, set at the appropriate needle and bobbin tensions and you need to use the right settings in your embroidery software.



image: GaGa Fabric & Accessory / Aliexpress

Choosing the Right Fabric for Your Embroidery Design

When choosing your fabric, you need to consider the weight of your embroidery design. The fabric needs to be strong enough to hold the design. Looser fabrics are less able to hold the threads. If you want to use a specific type of fabric, you need to select a design that is suitable for the weight of that fabric. The 'thread count' of the fabric refers to the fabric's weave and determines the ability of the fabric to permit a needle to thread through it without difficulty.

Go Natural

Natural fabrics with a tight weave create a strong base for embroidery and are the easiest to embroider. Because the fibers run horizontally and vertically, the needle can easily penetrate the material. Fabrics such as cotton, linen, silk and wool support decorative stitching well.

Quilting or Quilter's Cotton

It is a light fabric that comes in a large variety of colors. It is best to use simple and open designs when embroidering with quilter's cotton. It is very versatile and great to use in projects like placemats, table runners, wall hangings and of course quilts.



image: dontlooknow.typepad.com

Hanky Linen

Commonly used in Australia, this material is a beautiful fine and lightweight linen/cotton blend with small slubs throughout. It is great for embroidery when using the correct stabilizer.



Silk

A popular choice of fabric by many embroiderers for its beautiful sheen. You might think it is a delicate fabric, but silk actually provides a good, crisp and strong base.



Terrycloth & Waffle

You can create beautiful personalized gifts by embroidering monograms on bath robes and towels. The key with these textured fabrics is to use a water-soluble topping on the top of the fabric and designs with solid fills to avoid the stitches getting lost in the texture.



images: baltic-flax.com & bumblebeelinens.com

Linen

A lovely natural fabric. It is lighter, more textured and stronger than cotton. Linen is considered the strongest of natural fibers and wears extremely well.



Wool

It is a great choice to use either in woven or felted format. Felted wool does not fray, so you can just cut the edges. It offers depth without swallowing the thread.



Unusual/Difficult to Embroider Materials

There are a number of different materials that people experiment with and the results are often striking. Embroidering on burlap/hessian, toilet paper, straw placemats and hats, vinyl and even balsa wood, you can create something truly unique.

Working with Fabrics in Hatch Embroidery Software

Hatch Embroidery software has a great feature for working with fabrics called Auto Fabric. You can set it up before you begin and it will make adjustments to the density and other settings that can be affected by the different fabrics so that it stitches out better.

You can find it in the *Customize Design Toolbox*

- Customize Design
 - Design Information >>
 - Background and Display Color...
 - Auto Fabric...
 - Auto Start and End...
 - Adjust Stitch Spacing...
 - Select Thread Charts...
 - Threads >>
 - Match All Design Colors
 - Insert Design...
 - Cycle Used Colors
 - Color Wheel...
 - Optimize Color Changes...

When you click *Auto Fabric* a dialog box opens that allows you to set your fabric.

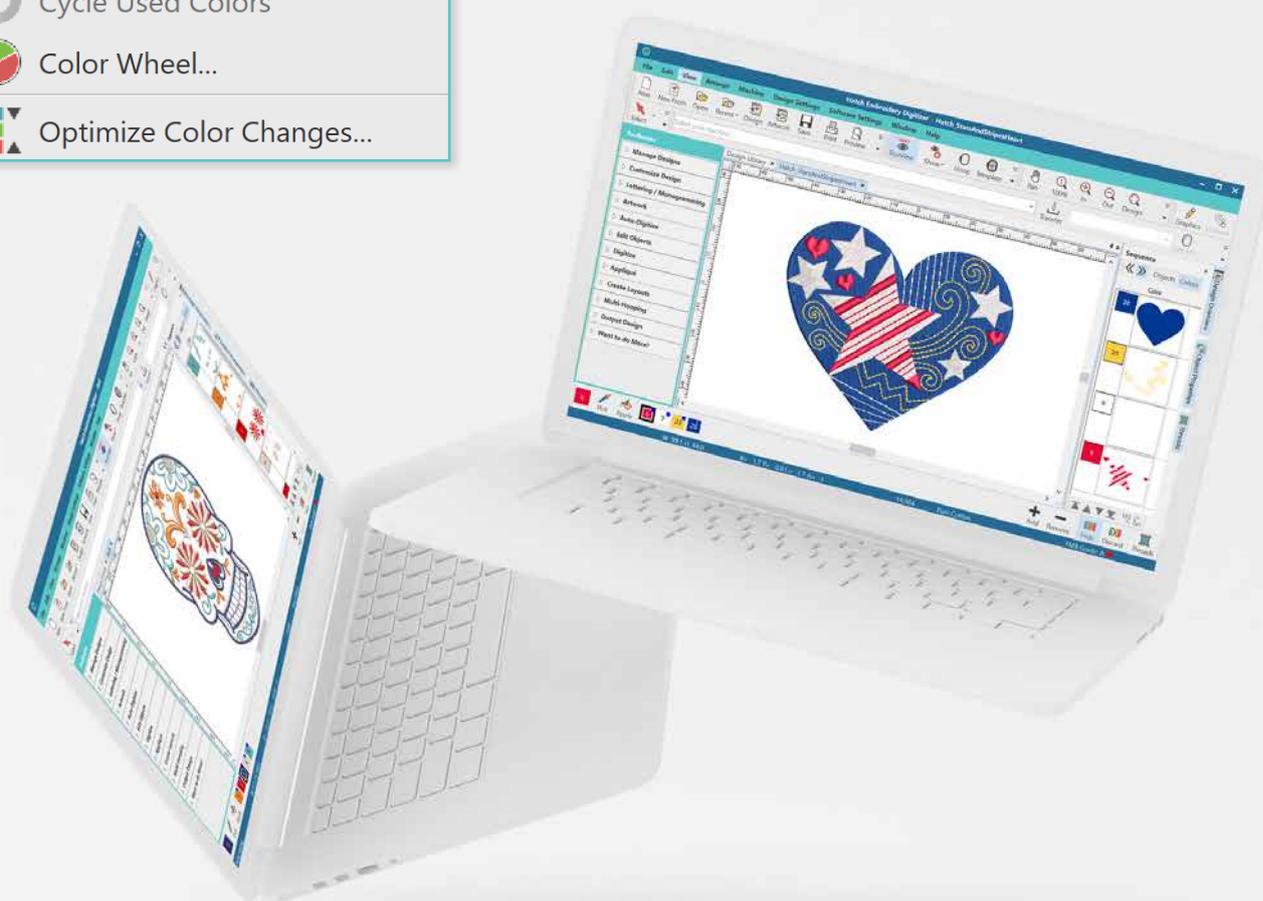
The 'Auto Fabric' dialog box is shown with the following settings:

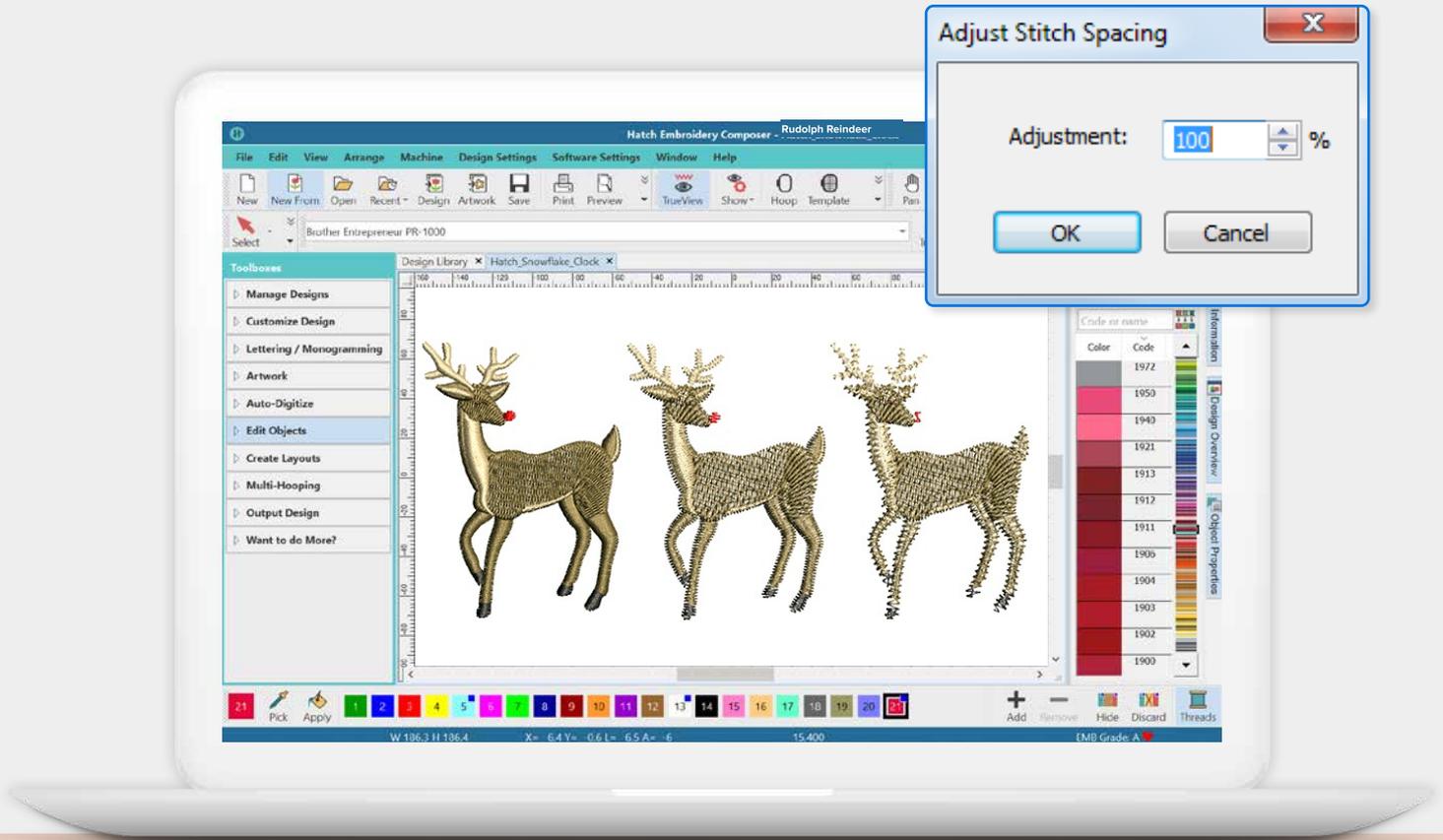
- Apply auto fabric
- Fabric: Pure Cotton
- Required stabilizers: Topping: Backing: Tear Away x 2
- Buttons: OK, Cancel, Save, Manage...

It will even give you a recommended stabilizer to use and if suggested a topping.

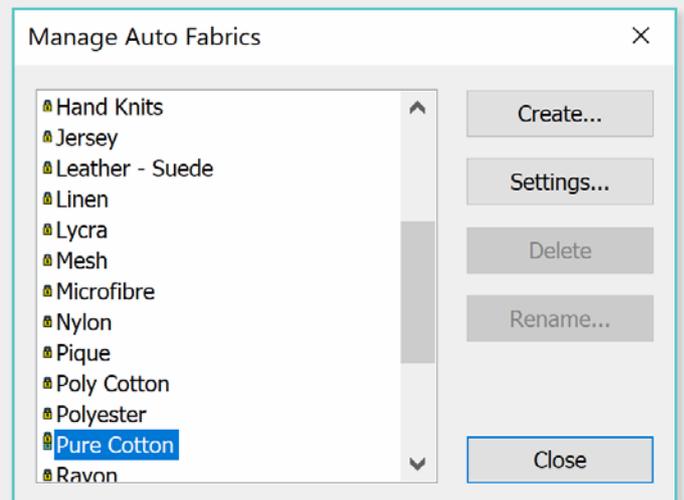
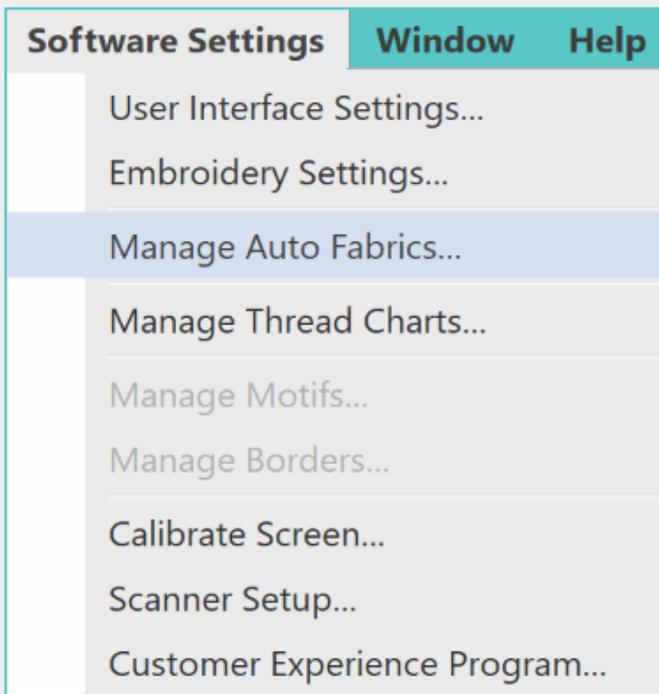
The 'Auto Fabric' dialog box is shown with the following settings:

- Apply auto fabric
- Fabric: Terry Toweling
- Required stabilizers: Topping: Solvent Film Backing: Tear Away
- Buttons: OK, Cancel, Save, Manage...





The software also allows you to manage your own fabrics. You can create your own, or if you find that you want different settings for your fabric, you can change that under the Manage Auto Fabrics feature. You will find this under Software Settings > Manage Auto Fabrics.



You may need to change stitch density in order to stitch on a different fabric or with a different thread. Hatch Embroidery software lets you change the density of most stitch types across the whole or selected parts of a design.

Choosing the Right Threads for Your Machine Embroidery Projects



The right thread will ensure your embroidery design is the best it can be!

The types of threads you will use for machine embroidery for are a little different to those used for hand embroidery. Machine embroidery threads come in many different materials, ranging from rayon (the most popular) to silk and to polyester. There are also less conventional threads like mylar, metallic and “special-effect” threads. Read on to learn about which threads will suit your embroidery best!

Weight and Strand Count

The weight or size of your thread plays an important role in the final outcome as well as its compatibility with the fabric you are embroidering on. The rule of thumb is simple: the higher the number, the finer the thread. Different types of threads (explored further later) will usually have different limitations on how fine or heavy they can go. For example, cotton threads are available up to 100, whereas rayon typically does not go higher than 40. Threads also generally consist of multiple strands being twisted together. To find out the strand-count you need to look at the number next to the weight, which tells you how many strands. For example, 80/2 would mean that the weight is 80 and the thread consists of 2 strands. When choosing the size of your thread, it is best to consider the fabric you are embroidering on. What size threads were used? What kind of fabric is it? Is it stiff or flexible, and does it stretch? Finer threads (60 and up) are best for lighter or more delicate materials. Thicker threads are best suited to heavier duty pieces like upholstery. Another important thing to note is that different machines are suited to different types of strands, so as a final step, make sure your thread is compatible with your machine.



Rayon

Rayon threads are the most popular for any type of embroidery, hand and machine. Rayon has a high, reflective sheen and is readily available. Rayon is the preferred thread type as it performs very well; its durability and versatility (it is available in many sizes) make it perfect for the rapid push and pull of machine embroidery.





Polyester

Polyester threads are also a popular choice as they function and look similar to rayon. They do not have as high a shine as rayon however they do have a similar durability as they are not prone to fraying, shrinking or stretching. One specific feature that makes polyester an attractive option is the fact that the color does not fade even when it comes in contact with bleach, making it a great option for material that requires frequent washing.



image: punchwithjudy.com.au

Wool

Wool and other heavy-duty threads are perfect for heavier materials such as tapestries and furnishings. Wool threads come in a variety of different sizes, with Persian wool being the thickest and crewel wool being the finest. Wool threads are especially suited to crewel embroidery projects. Typically, wool is not one of the more popular types of thread, but if you are working with quite a hefty material, you may need to turn to a wool thread.



Image: OliverTwistsFibres (Etsy)

Cotton

Cotton threads are a little less popular than polyester or rayon, as the threads are very soft and tend to be a little bit more fragile. However, this does not mean cotton is less useful than rayon or polyester! The delicacy of cotton threads makes it fantastic for finer material as the threads come in finer weights, leaving less distress on your delicate fabrics. Cotton threads also have a flatter, matte finish, so if your preferences lean away from the glossy sheen provided by rayon, silk and polyester, cotton may be for you.



image: EverythingIndian (Etsy)

Silk

Silk threads are the number one choice when embroidering on delicate, luxury fabrics like silk and satin. Unsurprisingly, silk can be less durable than rayon but it is by no means a flimsy thread type. Silk holds up surprisingly well (basically as well as polyester!) especially when used on corresponding silk fabrics. However, it is quite costly and nowhere near as readily available as some others, but you'll get a sheen that is unrivalled by any other thread!



Metallic and Mylar

Metallic and Mylar threads are less common thread types, often used more to create accents or embellishments. They require a specific type of needle. This is because they do have a tendency to break, especially when used with a high speed embroidery machine, so extra attention needs to be given to these threads. However, for those who are looking for a little something extra, they add a sparkle to your designs like no other thread, and are well worth the effort if you are looking for a little glamour!



image: Noxton.com

Special Effects

These threads are often acrylic or woolen and are most known for their unique aesthetic. These are used primarily for costume purposes as opposed to utility, with many special effect threads containing glow-in-the-dark technology or changing colors under different lights. These types of thread are probably the hardest to come by, and you would most likely need to place an order with speciality stores online.

Bobbin Thread

Designed specifically for use with machine embroidery, bobbin thread is a lightweight thread that has the durability of rayon and polyester. It can easily withstand the rapid movements of your machine. Again, bobbin threads are very versatile and come in a variety of different sizes. It is often recommended to pair your bobbin threads with another complimentary thread of the same weight.

Conclusion

With all the different threads out there today, you will no doubt be able to find one that suits your needs! Remember that finding the right thread is just as important as finding the right needle and can make or break your final embroidery project, so it is key to always choose the best materials and tools for your specific purpose. However, as usual, embroidery is not always about getting things perfect in one go! Be prepared for some fairly extensive trial and error but learning to embrace the experimental part of embroidery is one of the best parts!

Every hobbyist who appreciates the fine beauty of embroidery will appreciate how Hatch Embroidery software has revolutionized enjoyment of this long-time, honored craft. With a user-friendly and intuitive interface and top technology, it leads the way for creating memorable and professional looking embroidery creations.



Here are a few advantages you get with Hatch Embroidery software when it comes to threads:

Hatch Embroidery lets you sort your threads by color, code, color name, or brand!

Can you use any of your threads with Hatch Embroidery?

Hatch includes over 85 thread brands. If you do not find your own thread brand, you can create your own thread charts.

Do you have several brands of thread that you use?

No problem! You can combine thread charts to create your own.

You have purchased a design and it came with the wrong thread brand?

No worries! You can simply select your thread brand and click "Match all".

Have a certain set of colors that you want to use over and over for special projects?

Hatch Embroidery has you covered! You can select these threads to make your own color set.

Want to change the color in the design?

It's so easy with Hatch Embroidery. Just a click and you have your new color applied!

Do you have a thicker thread that you want to use?

Hatch Embroidery allows you to select the object or whole design and adjust the density (spacing) to allow for the thicker thread.



Choosing the Right Needles for Your Machine Embroidery Projects

3



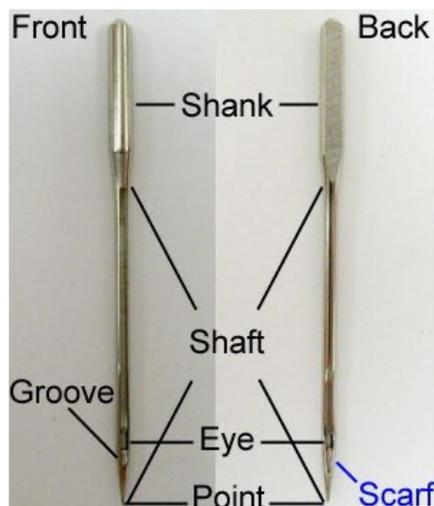
All the basics you need to know about machine embroidery needles

Needles are an absolutely pivotal aspect of machine embroidery. Choosing the right needle out of a seemingly endless amount of choice and confusing information on the internet gets overwhelming very quickly! We put together a quick guide to give you a clear picture of the most important things you need to consider when shopping for embroidery needles for your projects.

Before buying your machine embroidery needles you need to look at the specifications of your embroidery machine and consider the type of fabric, stabilizer and thread you are going to be working with. These are the main factors that determine the size and the point of the embroidery needle for your project. By using the right needle you will eliminate thread breaks and your embroidery design will run smoother and look cleaner and crisper.

The Anatomy of Machine Embroidery Needles

Machine embroidery needles have a flat side and a round side so that they fit properly into the machine. The various parts of the needle are called shank, shaft, eye, groove and point. It is useful to take into consideration the different parts of a needle, and how each part works, when deciding which needle to use for a specific project.



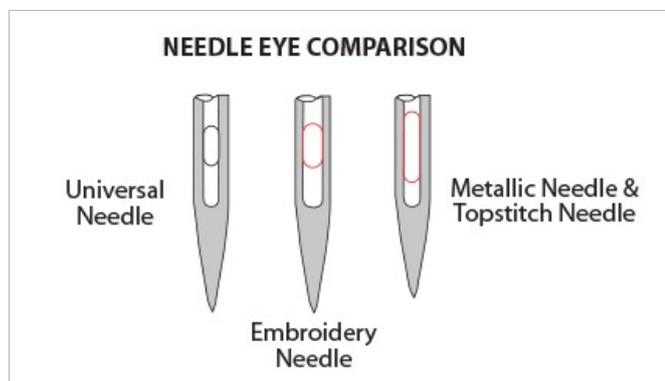
What to Look out for When Researching for Information on the Internet?

There is a lot of information available on the internet on needles. What we noticed the most when browsing around, how difficult it was to clearly differentiate which part of the article was talking about needles in general, machine embroidery needles or sewing machine needles. So it is essential that when you are making decisions about what size needle to buy, you always check that the advice given is purely for machine embroidery needles.

So What is the Difference Between Machine Embroidery Needles and Sewing Needles?

There are needles made specifically for machine embroidery, we will refer to those as embroidery needles or needles throughout this chapter, and there are sewing machine needles that can also be used for machine embroidery if needed. More on this later.

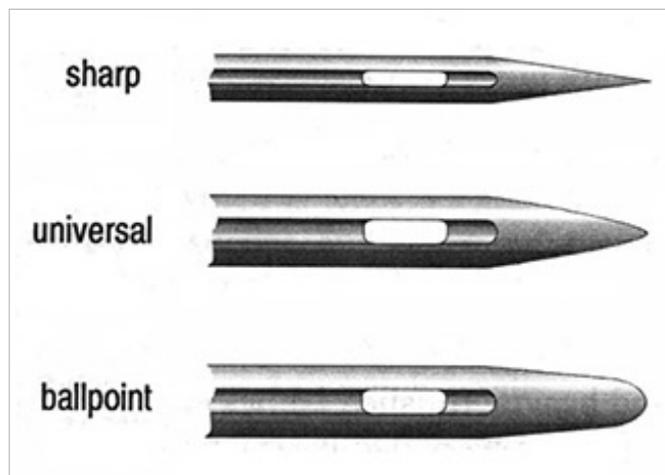
Although both can be used for machine embroidery, the main difference between embroidery and sewing machine needles is the shape of the eye and scarf. Machine embroidery needles have a longer eye and a specially-shaped scarf to suit the more delicate embroidery threads and not to break or fray them.



More on Machine Embroidery Needles

Point

The most commonly used embroidery needles have a universal point, which means a slightly rounded tip that sits between the sharp and ballpoint type points. The universal point suits most kinds of fabrics and stabilizers in general. One of the exceptions to this is, if you are using a very fine stabilizer such as the water soluble stabilizer that looks like a plastic film, you need to use a sharp point needle, so it can penetrate easily through the stabilizer, without ripping it.



Size

Embroidery needles vary in size between 7-11 (US) or 70-110 mm. The lower the number, the finer the needle. The size of the needle you will need to go for depends on the kind of fabric, stabilizer and thread you are using for your project and the stitch density of your embroidery design.

Type

If your project requires heavy duty needles, your best bet is titanium. If you are using dense or tough materials or embroidering large designs, these needles can penetrate through the fabric without the point and surface quickly losing their original shape and dimensions. They on average last 3 to 5 times longer than regular chromium plated needles.

Choosing the Right Needle Type for Your Machine

The very first thing you need to do before you start shopping for embroidery needles is to look at the user manual of your embroidery machine and find out what type of needle it will fit. The shape of the shank of the required needle can vary depending on the brand of your machine, so checking this first is very important.



Choosing the Right Needle for your Embroidery Project

Before embroidering you need to consider the specifications of your embroidery machine for the needle, the weight and the weave of the fabric, the type of the stabilizer and thread you are going to be working with and also the density of your embroidery design.

A Few Examples:

The general rule is to use a larger needle for heavier fabric such as canvas and a smaller for lighter fabric such as batiste. Small letters would require smaller needle with a sharp point. Embroidering on dense fabric such as leather or suede would require a sharp point titanium needle.



What If My Project Requires a Ballpoint or a Sharp Point, but I Cannot find Such Embroidery Needle?

As I mentioned before, you can use sewing machine needles for machine embroidery too. But because the eye on sewing needles are shorter, what we usually recommend is going up a size. So if your embroidery project requires a size 70 embroidery machine needle, you can use a size 80 sewing machine needle instead. It is all about ensuring that the thread fits “comfortably” through the eye.

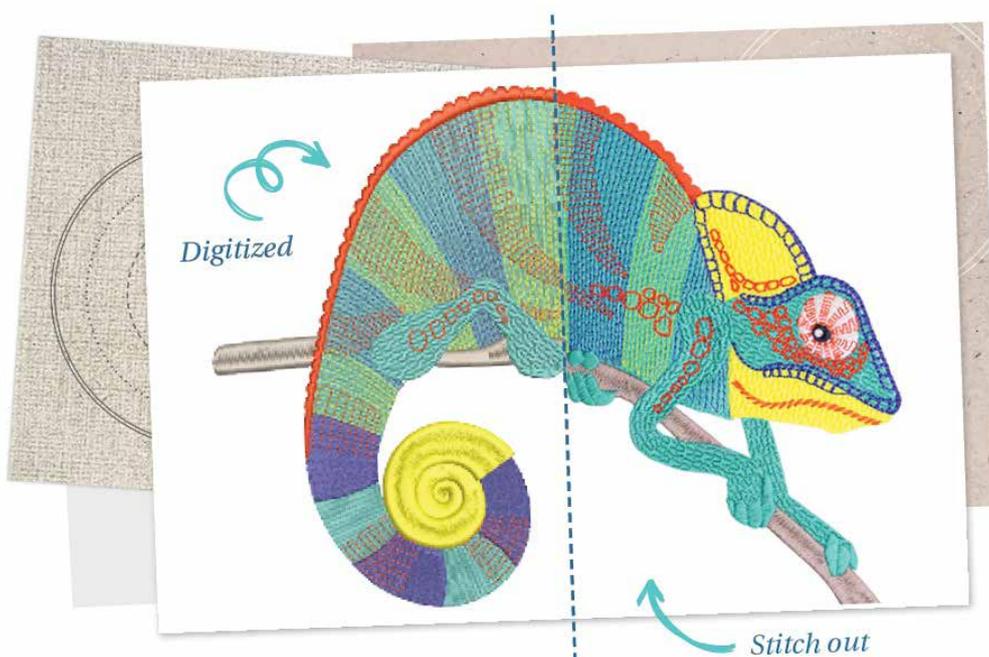
Important Things to Take Into Consideration

When you change:

- The needle size or the eye size of the needle, you are changing the tension on the top thread.
- The needle size, you are changing the relationship of the needle scarf to the hook point.
- The needle point, you are changing the way the needle penetrates the fabric.

Best Advice

As there are hundreds of variations to embroidery projects depending on the factors you need to take into consideration (fabric, stabilizer, thread and stitch density as discussed above), there are no exact rules as to which needle is the best for your specific project. The best advice is to keep a variety of needles on hand to experiment and always do a test run before embroidering.



Taking the Headache out of Embroidery Stabilizers

4



The perfect guide to choosing the right stabilizer for your embroidery projects

Choosing stabilizers can be tricky. Make the wrong choice and your final stitch-out could end up completely different to what you planned! That is why we put together an overview on the different types of stabilizers and which one to choose for your embroidery projects.

What is a Stabilizer?

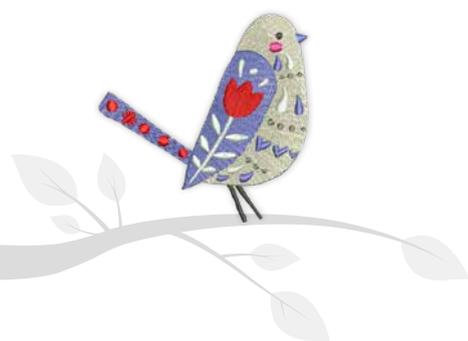
Stabilizers are often stiff sheets placed over (topping) or, more frequently, underneath (backing) your designs. In this article we cover the three main types of backing type stabilizers (cut-away, tear-away and wash-away) as well as two additional stabilizers that are a little less universal (heat-away and spray-on).

Stabilizers help minimize a variety of issues including, but not limited to; puckering, stretching, uneven lines, crooked or mismatched stitching and sinking. This happens because many materials, cloth materials especially, can easily shift and bunch up as they lack the stiffness of other materials, like leather. This leaves a wider margin for error, especially if your fabrics are lighter. Placing a stabilizer underneath your fabric cuts down this movement and gives you a more steady canvas to work on.



Backing vs Topping Stabilizers

Backing and topping both fall under the category of stabilizers for machine embroidery and are just what their names suggest. Topping is typically placed over your design with the main purpose of preventing stitching from “sinking” into your fabric. Generally topping is only used with fabrics that are more “stitch absorbent” or textured, and they typically come in wash-away and tear-away types. Backing, on the other hand, is recommended for every fabric, with very few exceptions. Backing helps your fabric maintain its physical and structural integrity while being embroidered, and also allows your designs to keep their shape after being laundered. The focus of this blog post will be on backing stabilizers.





Determining Which Stabilizer to Use

Before starting you will need to consider the type of fabric you plan to embroider, specifically fabric stability, fabric density and stitch density. These three factors are the most important when selecting the right stabilizer. With denser stitch counts, the stabilizer needs to be sturdier. The less stable the fabric, the more stability you will need. The heavier the fabric, the heavier the stabilizer ought to be. Some fabrics may require two stabilizers, some may require none. Standard fabrics will usually just require one type of stabilizer. Your embroidery fabric is always your starting point so make sure you do your research on what stabilizers are compatible with your fabric.



Tear-Away Stabilizers

Tear-away stabilizers are a great, cost-effective option and are the quickest and easiest to remove. They are simply adhered to the back of your embroidery design during embroidery with stitches, and then torn right off. These are best used with a sturdier fabric as the act of tearing may be a little bit harsh for more delicate fabrics. They do not provide as much support as cut-away stabilizer, and you would not hoop them as they are quite rigid. Instead you can slide them under your hooped fabric after you attached the hoop to your machine. Tear-away stabilizers are categorized by weight, as most stabilizers are, so when you are working with heavier fabrics, a heavy weight tear-away stabilizer is required.



Cut-Away Stabilizers

Cut-away stabilizers do not get totally removed upon completion, instead the excess is trimmed and the stabilizer stays attached to the fabric. They are quite versatile and are great especially for delicates, with the exception of silk. They are an absolute must with stretchy or knit type materials. Many people prefer cut-away stabilizers for garments, because there are no jagged edges that can irritate the skin. For sheer or loose-knit materials use a polyester or nylon mesh cut-away stabilizer. These are made specifically to be invisible through sheer fabrics.



Wash-Away Stabilizers

Water soluble stabilizers are less universally used than cut-away or tear-away stabilizers. They are known for their flexibility, transparency and water solubility, so they are best for cases where your project requires no traces of the stabilizer to be left after embroidery. They are often considered the perfect 'invisible' stabilizer, and are mostly used with either more delicate, sheer materials, pieces that require constant wash-and-wear and stand-alone lace designs.



Heat-Away Stabilizers

One of the go-to stabilizers for fussier fabrics, heat-away stabilizers is perfect for pieces that are too delicate for tear-aways, too sheer for cut-away and non-washable lace. There are two types (woven and filmy backed). The woven stabilizers will flake off with heat and the filmy stabilizers will dissolve completely. Like wash-away stabilizers, heat-away stabilizers are less universally applicable than the standard cut or tear-away stabilizer as they do not provide as much support.



Spray-On Stabilizers

A modern type of 'invisible' stabilizer, spray-on stabilizers are used to stiffen fabric temporarily without the use of any additional material. Spray-on stabilizers are perhaps one of the most convenient types, however, it is important to note that they are best suited for lighter, non-stretch fabrics that have less need for serious stabilization. Many embroiderers also avoid spray-on stabilizers when it comes to expensive materials, like raw silk, but this is simply an extra pre-caution.

Practice Makes Perfect!

The one thing you need to do over and over again is practice. It is not unusual to use the wrong type of stabilizer at first (if you didn't – congratulations are in order!). I suggest keeping a notebook and pasting good and bad samples and making notes as you complete your projects as to what worked and what did not. It will take some getting used to, and remember, repetition is the key to getting it right in the end!



Understanding Thread Tension

5



Don't let your threads play tug-of-war, take time to understand how it works!

As an embroiderer you want to achieve beautiful end results, no matter if you are doing it as a hobby, semi-professionally or professionally. There are many factors that can have an influence on how your embroidery looks like when it comes off the machine. We have talked extensively about choosing the right fabrics, threads, needles and stabilizers previously.

In this chapter we explain how thread tension can effect the final result of your machine embroidery. We also show you how you can check if your machine is set to the right tension by looking at your embroidery and how to adjust your top thread to ensure great final results.

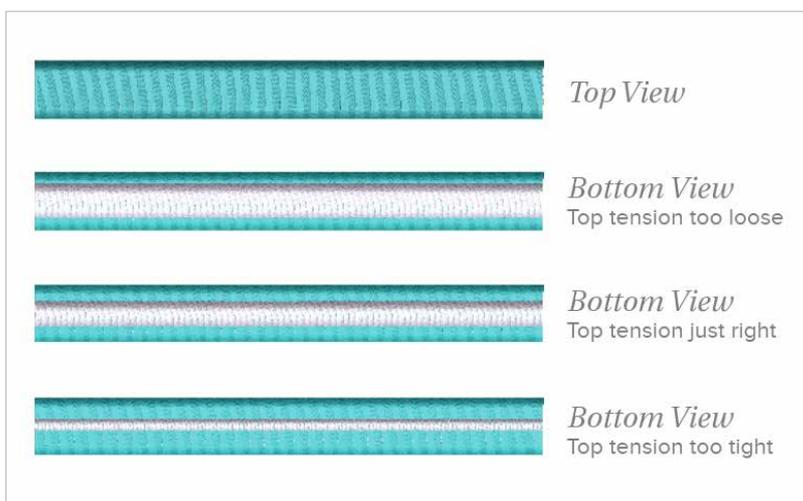
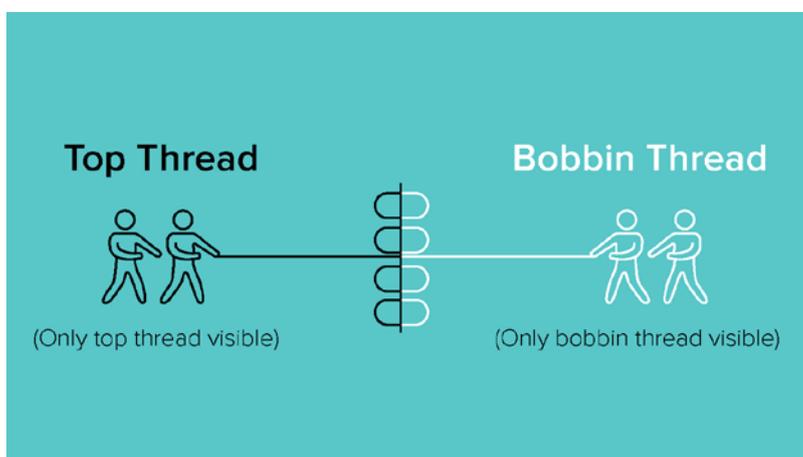
Top Thread vs. Bobbin Thread

To understand thread tension, first you need to understand how the the two threads, your bobbin thread and your top embroidery thread work together. Watch this great video below that demonstrates really well how a sewing machine works. It is exactly the same with your embroidery machine.

This infographic (on the right) also shows you the relationship between the bobbin thread and the top thread. Imagine it as if the two threads were playing tug-of-war. It is not a bad thing though. In order to form a lock, both of the two threads need to be slightly tense, but there has to be an optimum balance between the two.

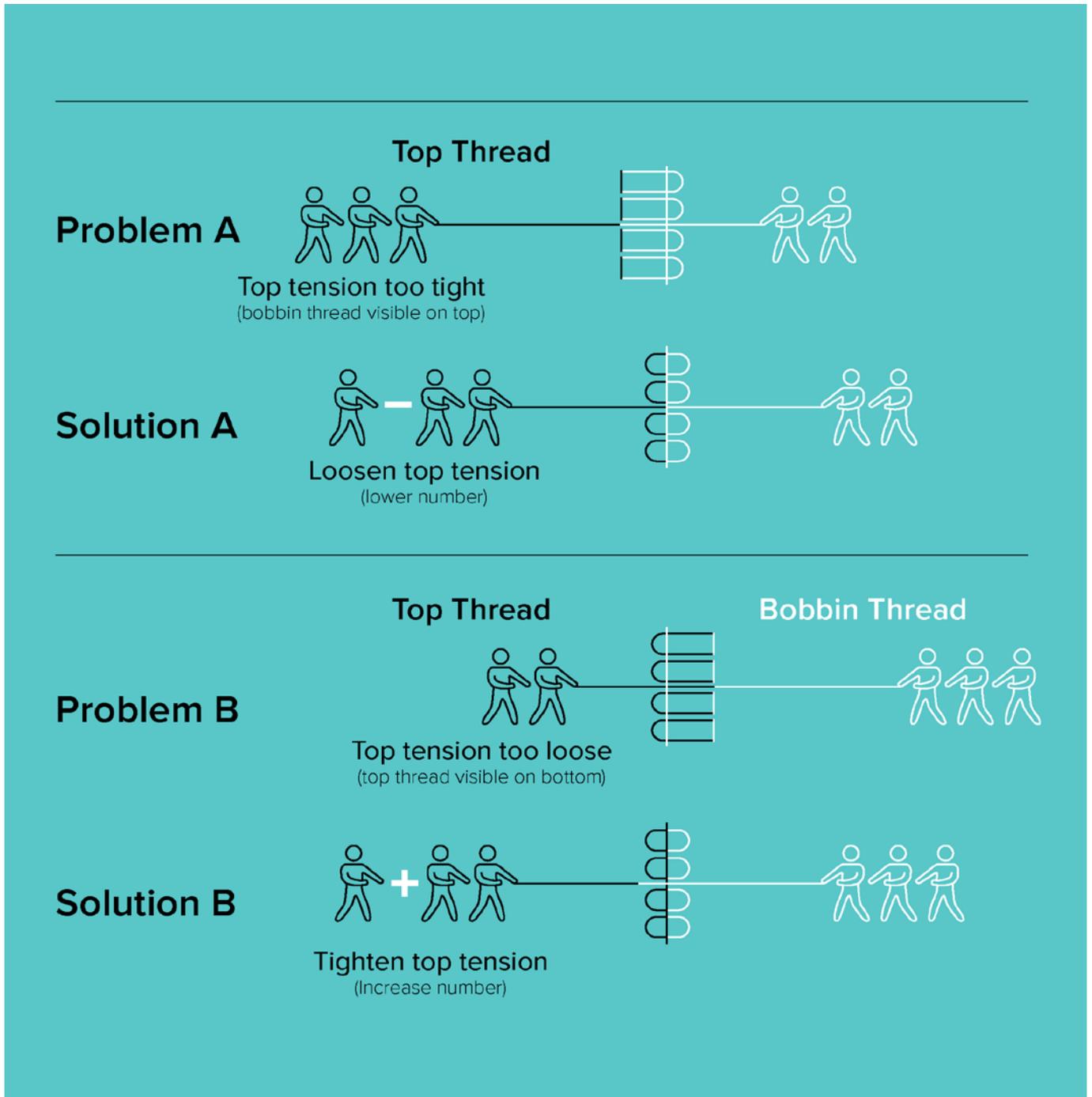
How Can I Tell if My Thread Tension Is Right?

Once you have done your test stitch-out, you need to have a look at the back of your fabric and check how much of the top thread was pulled through it. The result will indicate if the tension of the top thread is too loose, too tight or just right.



How to Adjust Thread Tension on My Machine?

When you checked the back of the fabric on your test stitch-out and you noticed that your top tension is either too loose or too tight, you need adjust the top thread tension using the dial(s) on your machine. Although it is possible to change the tension of the bobbin thread, it is typically the tension of the top thread that gets adjusted and this infographic shows you how.

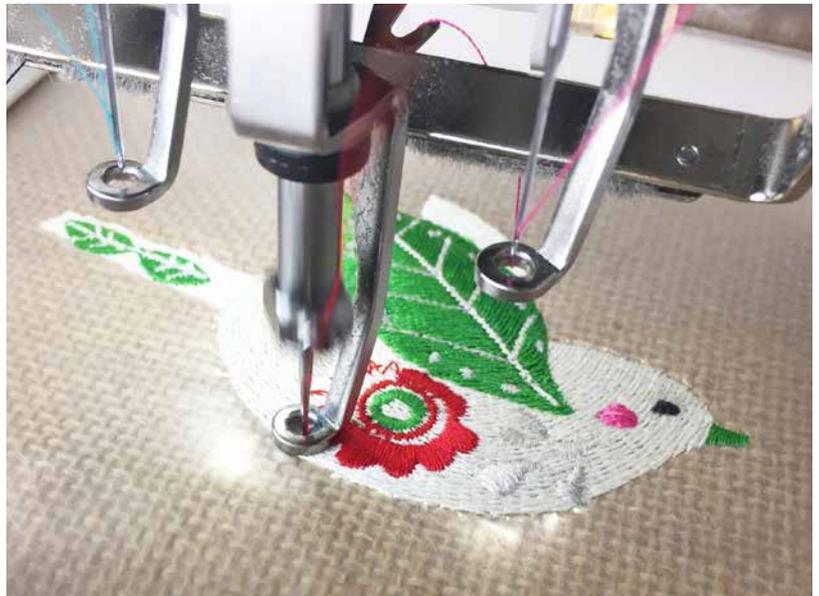


So to recap, the quality of your embroidery is influenced by the balance of the tension of the bobbin thread and the top embroidery thread. It is typically the top thread that gets adjusted to achieve the optimum balance and ensure that the 'tug-of-war' between the two threads is even.

Understanding thread tension is important because it also effects the pull of the thread on the fabric, which can cause distortions. In the next chapter, we will discuss this issue and how to use pull compensation to avoid that.

What You Need to Know About Pull Compensation

6



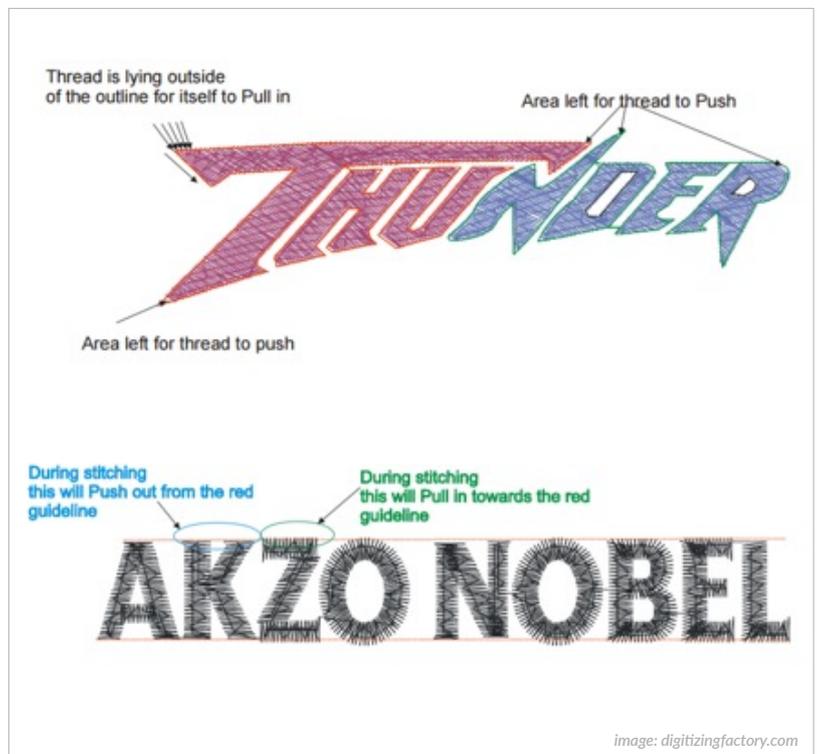
How to compensate for the push & pull effects of machine embroidery

As an embroiderer you always aim for the best possible end result. There are many factors that can have an influence on how your embroidery ends up when it comes off your machine. We have talked about choosing the right needles, fabrics and threads and about thread tension previously here on our blog.

In this chapter you will learn about the pull and push effects in machine embroidery and how to use pull compensation to achieve great results every time. As one of my very experienced colleagues always says: "Machine embroidery is not WYSIWYG." meaning that what you see on your screen is NOT what you get off your embroidery machine. Why is that? As we showed in last week's thread tension article, in order to create embroidery stitches your machine needs to form many-many tiny little knots where the needle penetrates the fabric and the bobbin thread and the top thread links together.

Push and Pull Effects

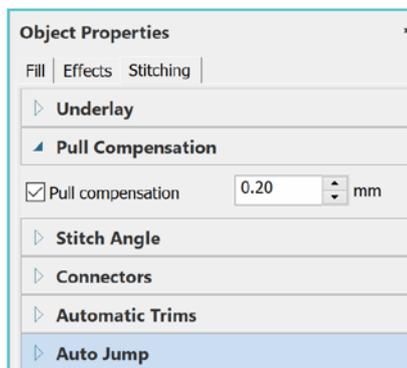
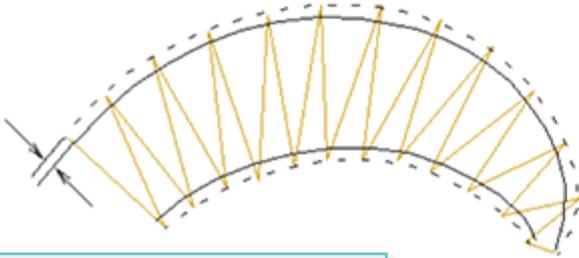
Because we embroider on various fabrics, which all have a natural stretch, there will always be some pull on your fabric as the hoop moves back and forth and the stitches are formed. This causes distortion and unevenness. The amount of pulling depends on a number of factors, such as the fabric you are using and how well you hoop it, the type of stabilizer you applied, the size of your design, the type of fill stitch and underlay stitching you are using. All of these together effect the outcome of your embroidery. During embroidery application, stitches pull the fabric in with the direction of the stitches. This can result in gaps in your stitch out. Also, in the case of an area of fill, the stitching pushes out at a right angle to the line of stitching, so the embroidery will end up further out then what it looks like on your screen. To compensate for the push and pull effects of machine embroidery you need to develop a certain level of digitizing experience.



What is Pull Compensation?

During the digitizing process you need take into consideration the natural pull effect and compensate for it, which means you need to add to the stitch length the same length of the expected pull.

Experienced digitizers can manually compensate for pull by overlapping objects as they digitize. Automatic pull compensation, however, counters the pull effect by 'overstitching' outlines of filled shapes on the sides where the needle penetrates.

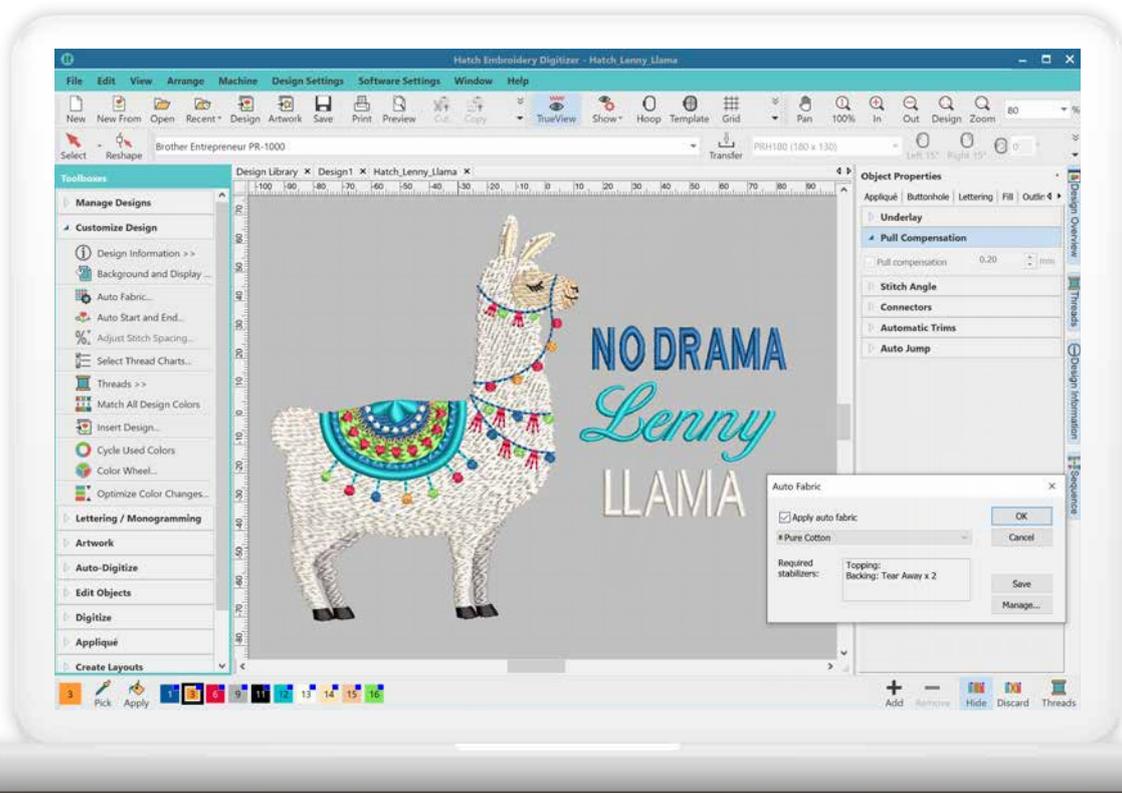


How to Adjust Pull Compensation

Your test stitch out will reveal any areas which would benefit from fine tuning the pull compensation. When you do a test stitch out and you notice that there is too much pulling on the fabric, you will need to adjust your software settings to compensate for the pulling. It is easy to see if objects that should be touching or outlines have gaps between them.

Check your software manual for adjusting pull compensation. Hatch Embroidery allows you to select the type of fabric you want to embroider on and it will set the recommended pull compensation for that specific fabric automatically. You are also able to manually override this by putting a value in. This means you can have different pull compensation for different objects in the design.

See the below screenshots to see how to adjust pull compensation in your Hatch Embroidery software.



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