

# *Stitch, Bake, Die!*

## CROSS-STITCH TIPS

©Lois Winston

Counted cross stitch is worked on Aida cloth, evenweave fabrics, vinyl Aida, and perforated paper. Pre-finished items such as aprons, bibs, towels, and afghans are also available. In addition, cross stitch is possible on ready-wear by using waste-canvas.

Cross stitch fabrics are available in many counts, colors, and fabric blends. The count represents the number of stitches per inch of fabric. Example: 14-ct. fabric has 14 stitches to the inch.

Counted cross stitch is worked from a chart. Each square on the chart represents a stitch. The symbols inside the squares indicate the colors of the stitches as noted in the color key for the design.

Choose a pre-finished item or select a piece of fabric at least 4" larger than the overall design. Most charts give the finished stitching size. You can also determine the finished size of a design by dividing the number of stitches for the height and width of the design by the number of stitches per inch of the fabric. Example: a design measuring 70 stitches high by 98 stitches wide will be 5" x 7" when stitched on 14-ct. fabric.  $70 \div 14 = 5$ , and  $98 \div 14 = 7$ .

Before beginning to stitch, finish the edges of loose weave fabrics to prevent fraying. You can do this by pulling a few strands of fabric to create a fringe, using a pinking shears, or applying a thin line of anti-fraying glue.

Locate the center of the chart by following the horizontal and vertical centering arrows across and down. To find the center of your fabric, fold the fabric in half top to bottom, then left to right. The folded point is the center.

The number of strands of floss and the size tapestry needle to use will depend on the count of the fabric. Always use a tapestry needle. An embroidery needle might pierce the fabric threads.

**5-ct. or 6-ct. fabrics:** #20 or #22 tapestry needle; 6 strands of floss for cross stitching and 4 strands for backstitching.

**8.5-ct. or 9-ct. fabrics:** #24 tapestry needle; 4-strands of floss for cross stitching, 2 strands for backstitching.

**10-ct. or 11-ct. fabrics:** #24 tapestry needle; 3-strands floss for cross stitching, 1 or 2 strands for backstitching.

**14-ct., 16-ct., or 18-ct. fabrics:** #24 or 26 tapestry needle; 2 strands floss for cross stitching, 1 strand for backstitching.

**22-ct. fabrics:** #26 tapestry needle; 1 strand floss for cross stitching, 1 strand for backstitching.

Begin stitching at the center of the fabric to ensure proper centering. Bring the needle up from the back of the fabric, leaving a 1" tail of floss. Holding the tail securely with your fingers, work the first few stitches over the tail to secure it. *Never knot the floss.* To end a thread, run it under several stitches on the back side of the work. Clip

close to the stitching.

The cross stitch is made by working across a row with diagonal stitches, then back over the row, crossing the stitches with a reverse diagonal stitch to form an “x”. Work all cross stitches in the same direction. The stitches are made over one thread of fabric on Aida cloth and over two threads on most evenweaves. Example: 28-ct. linen is worked over two threads to create a piece which is 14 stitches to the inch.

Some charts have fractional stitches, worked by stitching a partial “x”. A ½-cross stitch is one diagonal. A ¼-cross stitch is half a diagonal. A ¾-cross stitch is one diagonal and half the diagonal in the opposite direction.

Backstitching is indicated on charts by heavy straight lines. Work backstitching after all cross stitching is completed. French knots are shown by a dot at the intersection of four stitches on a chart. Work these last.

When stitching is complete, wash in cool water with a small amount of mild dish liquid. Rinse well. Roll in a terry towel. Gently pat dry to remove excess water. Never wring. Press face down on a towel.

### **Stitching with Waste-Canvas:**

Waste-canvas is a needlepoint-type canvas held together with sizing glue. It is available in several different counts.

Cut a piece of waste-canvas at least 1” larger on all sides than the design area. For lightweight fabrics or knits, apply iron-on interfacing to the reverse side of fabrics. Cover the edges of the waste-canvas with masking tape. Baste the waste-canvas centered onto the garment. Cross stitch the design through the waste-canvas and the garment.

After stitching, soak the piece in cool water to remove the sizing. While still damp, pull out the waste-canvas threads with a tweezers.

Have you ever accidentally stained a favorite piece of clothing? Instead of discarding the garment, use waste-canvas to stitch a design over the spot.

### **Stitching on Perforated Paper and Vinyl Aida:**

Perforated paper comes in 14-ct. Vinyl Aida, comes in 10-ct., 14-ct., and 18-ct. Both are available in a variety of colors. Stitch as you would on Aida cloth, omitting fractional stitches.

### **Stitching Tips**

Environmental laws regarding dyes have impacted the manufacturing of floss, resulting in some floss colors no longer being colorfast. To remove any dye left in the floss, soak the skeins in warm water before stitching. Roll the skeins in a towel to remove excess water and place the skeins on a towel to dry.

To help keep your place when working with complicated charts, insert the chart in a clear plastic page protector. As you finish stitching an area, cross out the completed section of the chart with a permanent marker.

Another tip for working with complicated charts: baste horizontal and vertical rows of sewing thread every tenth

stitch on your fabric to correspond with the darker tenth-row lines on your chart. When stitching is completed, remove the basting threads.

Attach large cross stitch charts to a metal cookie sheet with refrigerator magnets. The cookie sheet will keep the chart flat on your lap while you stitch.

If you find it difficult to work from a chart or book on your lap, try placing it on a music stand at eye level directly in front of you.

Most cross stitchers prefer to work without a hoop. Hoops can leave marks on the fabric which are difficult to remove. If you wish to use a hoop, choose one that is large enough to encompass the entire stitching area. Remove the fabric from the hoop when not stitching. Plastic hoops are preferable to wood or metal. Metal hoops can rust and have sharp edges which can snag and tear the fabric. Wood hoops absorb the oils from your skin, transferring them to the fabric. If you wish to use a wood hoop, wrap it with tissue paper or muslin before inserting the fabric. Dark colored cross stitch fabrics can be difficult to stitch on because they absorb light, making it difficult to see the holes in the fabric. When working on dark colored cross stitch fabric, place a piece of white fabric on your lap to help see where to place the needle.

Keep a damp sponge nearby when stitching. Run the floss over the sponge before separating the strands to make separating easier.

Another tip to keep floss from tangling while separating the strands is to attach a clip or spring clothespin to one end. As you separate the floss, the clip will spin, keeping the strands from tangling.

If your floss becomes twisted while stitching, it will appear thinner and not cover an area as well. In order to prevent this, work with short strands of floss, 15" to 18" in length. If the thread does become twisted, drop your needle and let it hang down. The floss will unwind itself.

Here's an easy way to anchor your floss when you begin to stitch, but it only works if you are using an even number of strands when stitching. Cut the floss twice as long. Fold the floss in half, and thread the cut ends through the eye of the needle. When bringing the needle from the back of the fabric to make the first stitch, leave a 1" loop. When you bring the needle back down to finish the first half-cross, push it through this loop. Pull taut, and your floss will be secured.

When stitching on perforated paper, use shorter strands of floss and a looser tension to keep the paper from accidentally tearing.

When stitching a piece that has large areas of solid color, stitch the outline of the area first. You can fill the area in without constantly referring to the chart. This is a good technique for projects you want to carry with you because you won't need to bring the chart or book along.

Another good idea for take-a-long projects is to stitch half the cross stitch throughout the project. Complete the stitches whenever you have a few minutes to stitch.

### **Storage Tips**

Store cross stitch books and leaflets in cardboard magazine holders. Separate the books by subject matter, such as Christmas, children's designs, florals, etc., labeling the front end of each holder for quick reference.

A handy way to separate and keep track of different sized needles for various projects is to stick them into small squares of the proper size cross stitch fabric.

Store skeins of floss in the clear pockets of baseball card protector sheets or wrap them on floss cards and store in the clear pockets of coin holder sheets. Keep the sheets in a loose-leaf notebook.

See-through plastic boxes are terrific for storing cross stitch fabric. Purchase one for each of the different fabric types and/or count sizes you have. Label the ends of the boxes for quick reference.

Creases can be difficult to remove from cross stitch fabric. To prevent them, store your projects rolled up in the plastic tubes which some cross stitch fabric is sold in instead of folding the fabric. You can also use cardboard tubes from plastic wrap or foil; however, cover the roll with a piece of acid-free tissue paper or white sheet fabric to prevent the cardboard from discoloring your stitching. Store small projects inside toilet tissue tubes.

Keep small scraps of cross stitch fabric, perforated paper, or vinyl Aida handy for small projects such as ornaments, button covers, bookmarks, jewelry, and magnets.

### **Framing Tips**

The easiest way to mount a piece of finished cross stitch is to use acid-free, self-stick mounting board. If not using a self-stick mounting board, center the stitching over a piece of acid-free illustration board or foamcore board. Stretch the edges to the back of the board, securing with acid-free tape.

If you are not framing with glass, boards may be covered with batting before mounting for a padded look. If using glass, place a cardboard shim under the frame between the glass and fabric to keep the glass from sitting directly on the fabric. When fabric is sandwiched against glass, moisture can get trapped inside the frame, causing the fabric to mildew and rot over time.