

PREPARING YOUR QUILT FOR A LONG ARM QUILTER

Quilting on a long arm is very different from quilting on a domestic machine. There are a few key things that can be done to make sure the quilting of your project can be accomplished smoothly and quickly -- be it a wall hanging, baby quilt or large quilt -- with great results. It should be noted that there are some long arm quilters who will not receive the quilt, or may add additional costs, if these steps have not been done beforehand.

BORDERS:

- Before adding borders to your quilt, give the top a good pressing, then measure for borders.
- When adding borders to the main body of your quilt, lay the top on a flat surface and measure the length and width of the quilt at the center and then measure closer to an outside edge. If these measurements are different take an average and cut the border to this new measurement. Quilts can sometimes stretch near the outside, and if you use those measurements for borders, you'll be adding in extra fabric that will lead to wavy borders. Don't leave it to your quilter to "quilt it out".
- If you cut a length of border without measuring first then sew it on and cut off the excess, you stand a chance of ending up with a wavy border that won't lay flat and could result in fullness that can't be quilted out which may result in creases. Don't leave it to your quilter to "quilt it out". They will try to do their best to work in some fullness, but cannot guarantee that puckers and tucks will not be formed. Just remember, the flatter your quilt top lays, the better your finished quilt will look.

YOUR FINISHED QUILT TOP:

- Trim all edges of your quilt top so they are straight and square (no pieces extending past the edge of the quilt). This ensures the quilt loads onto the machine straight and is important for keeping the machine quilting straight across your top.
- Baste a 1/8" seam around the entire quilt top (or take at least 6-8 stitches across any seam that ends at an outside edge) to stabilize the ends of the seam allowances.
- Make sure all your seams are secure and any loose threads are clipped off. Long unclipped threads could show through.
- Press seam allowances to leave the least bulk at the seams. Extra bulk can cause bumpy quilting and broken needles.
- Wait to add any 3-dimensional embellishments until your quilt is quilted.
- Finally, mark the top of your quilt top with a safety pin.

THE BACKING:

- Avoid choosing light coloured fabric for backing if the quilt top is dark and vice versa to avoid the occasional pokes of top or bobbin thread from showing through. Or choose a dense pattern where it may not be noticed.

- The backing needs to be 6" wider and at least 6-10" longer than your quilt top (at least 6" longer for lap and twin-size quilts, and 8-10" longer for queen and king size quilts).
- When piecing the backing avoid a vertical seam and run the seam horizontally across the quilt back from side to side using a 1/2" seam then press seam open. Having a vertical seam can possibly cause distortion as the seam is piled on top of itself as the quilt is advanced during quilting, where a horizontal seam gets crossed by stitching only once.
- Make sure all edges of backing are straight and square (if backing is pieced cut the edges even).
- Press your backing well.
- There are extra considerations if you plan on using Minkee or Fireside as a backing. Knit backings do not behave the same way as woven fabric and can only be loaded in one direction onto a long arm machine and that is with the selvedge perpendicular to the rollers (Selvage edges along the side of quilt). Keep this in mind if your top is too wide to go on one width of backing and backing has to be pieced. When piecing knit backing, take a wide seam allowance, about 1", press the seam open and stitch the seam allowances down on either side of the original seam. Use a stitch appropriate for sewing a medium-heavy weight knit fabric.
- Wide backing is a good choice as it's convenient and often more economical than piecing 45" yardage. Please wash and dry wide backing to pre-shrink and remove extra sizing. Make sure you buy more than "a little" extra to allow for shrinkage and it is often more skewed on the bolt than yardage, so more could be lost when it is trimmed square prior to loading on the machine. For example, if a top was 72 x 90, 2 metres (or 2.2 yards) of useable extra wide backing would be enough, but purchasing at least 2.2 metres (or 2.4 yards) will allow for shrinkage and trimming.
- ***Do not pin, baste or use temporary spray adhesive to layer your quilt together. Fold each layer separately as the layers are loaded separately onto the long arm machine.

BATTING:

- Batting must be at least 6" wider and at least 8" longer than the quilt top. For queen or king sizes batting needs to be 12" longer than quilt top.

HAPPY QUILTING!

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