



Quilting Basics

New to quilting, or just want the fundamentals in one place? This is the shape of every quilt — the tools you reach for, the handful of rules that keep blocks true, and the four steps that take you from fabric to finished.

The toolkit

These quilting tools earn their spot on the table.

- Rotary cutter + self-healing mat, and acrylic quilting rulers
- Sharp fabric scissors — and a separate pair for paper/templates
- Sewing machine with a ¼" foot; a walking foot helps for quilting
- Pins and/or clips, a seam ripper (no shame), a marking tool
- Iron + pressing surface; quality 100% cotton fabric and thread

The golden rules

Break these rules and the blocks fight you later.

- Read the whole pattern before you cut a thing.
- Sew a scant ¼" seam so blocks finish at their true size.
- Press; don't iron — lift and set the iron, never drag it (dragging stretches).
- Press toward the darker fabric or press the seam open where several meet.
- Cut accurately and measure twice; a little spray starch buys precision.
- Quilting cotton usually doesn't need prewashing — but if you wash one, wash them all.

Anatomy of a quilt

A quilt has three layers:

- **Layer 1:** The **top** is the pieced design you sew from blocks.
- **Layer 2:** The **batting** is the soft middle that gives warmth and loft.
- **Layer 3:** The **backing** is the fabric underneath.

Smoothed and basted together they make the **quilt sandwich**; the stitching that holds all three is the quilting itself, and a **binding** covers the raw edges to finish it.

Four steps, start to finish

1. **Piece the top.** Cut your pieces, sew blocks with that scant $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam, pressing as you go.
2. **Make the sandwich.** Backing right-side *down*, batting, then the top right-side *up*; smooth flat and baste with pins or spray.
3. **Quilt it.** Stitch the layers together — straight lines, free-motion, or hand — or send it to a longarm quilter.
4. **Bind the edges.** Trim batting and backing even, sew a folded strip around the front, fold it to the back, and finish.

Skill levels

A pattern may specify the skill level recommended for the respective quilt.

- **Beginner** — learning to cut, piece, and assemble a top; knows the steps to sandwich, quilt, and bind, even if not mastered yet.
- **Confident beginner** — has pieced a few tops, comfortable with the process, ready for projects that mix a couple of techniques.
- **Intermediate** — at home with most techniques and a good eye for design and color; confident choosing fabrics beyond the pattern's suggestions.
- **Advanced** — will take on any technique or design; and can read and finish a challenging pattern start to end.