

# WHAT IS APPLIQUÉ?

Appliqué is a versatile art form that can be used on quilting projects, for garment decoration, for decorative home accessories, and for many other items. Basically, appliqué is a technique of layering one fabric over another to create a colorful design (Figure 1). When done by machine, the design is finished using zigzag or satin stitches of various widths to secure fabric pieces to the desired location.

Sewing machine appliqué is fun and easy. All that is required is a zigzag sewing machine, fabric scraps, a design idea, and some time.

# **MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT NEEDED**

**Fabrics.** Choose light- to medium-weight fabrics with a tight weave. Smooth-surfaced fabrics are preferred unless a special texture is required as a design feature. Preshrink all fabrics you plan to use to avoid varying amounts of shrinkage that will cause appliqués to appear puckered.

Background fabrics can be solid colors, stripes, checks, or other designs that are compatible with the appliqué design. Poplin, denim, broadcloth, gingham, and other firmly woven fabrics are excellent choices.

**Thread.** An all-purpose thread can be used in most cases. Some sewing machines work better if cotton embroidery thread is used. A less expensive thread can usually be used on the bobbin, but it may create a lot of lint, so clean the bobbin case carefully after completing any appliqué project.

The top thread can be color-coordinated or can contrast with the appliqué design (Figure 2). White bobbin thread will work for almost any project. For special effects, metallic, rayon or nylon threads can add glitter and shine.

**Fusible interfacing.** Use fusible interfacing to stabilize each fabric piece in an appliqué design. It will give a crisp appearance to the design and help prevent the edges from raveling.



*Figure 1*. An example, somewhat complex appliqué design. (© Nadezda Obolenskaya | Dreamstime.com)

**Fusible web.** Apply fusible web to design pieces to secure them to the background fabric in preparation for machine stitching.

**Fabric stabilizers.** Your finished product will have a professional look if you use a permanent or temporary stabilizer. A stabilizer helps to prevent puckering or bunching of stitches. Choose from iron-on, adhesive, soluble, tear-away, cut-away, or mesh stabilizers depending on the weight and weave of your fabric. Permanent backings can be trimmed after sewing on the design and are made to be washed with the garment. Temporary backings are removed after the design is done.

**Needles.** Use size 11 sharp or ballpoint needles for lightto medium-weight fabrics. Size 14 or 16 needles may be needed for heavier fabrics. Change out your needles regularly for sharp, accurate stitching.

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*Figure 2.* Many types of threads and thread colors are suitable for appliqué designs. (© Weblogiq | Dreamstime.com)

**Glue stick.** Small fabric pieces can be held in place using a glue stick.

**Pins.** Small, smooth pins are helpful for holding fabric pieces in place.

**Scissors.** Sharp scissors are useful for clipping threads and trimming fabric edges close to zigzag stitching.

Seam ripper. Be sure it is small and very sharp.

**Iron.** A good steam iron is necessary when fusible web, interfacing, or stabilizers are used. An iron is also important for smoothing fabrics before they are sewn in place.

**Tracing paper.** Transparent tracing paper can be used to copy designs for appliqué projects. It can also be used to transfer designs to fabric.

**Heat-transfer pencil.** This marking device can be used to transfer designs to fabric. A hot, dry iron is generally needed to accomplish a transfer.

**Water-soluble marking pencil.** An excellent marking tool for appliqué, this pencil can be used to transfer designs or to mark small details that will be finished by hand. It is useful in situations when a heat transfer pencil cannot be used.

**Fray retardant.** This special sewing aid prevents fraying of fabric edges and is especially useful when loosely woven fabrics are used. Follow product instructions carefully.

**Press cloth.** A press cloth is important to prevent your fabrics from getting a shine. It will also protect the iron from coming into direct contact with fusible web.

Finally, you will need a sewing machine that is capable of making zigzag or satin stitches.

### **SETTING UP YOUR MACHINE**

A neat zigzag or satin stitch is used to finish the raw edges of a sewing machine appliqué design. To achieve a good-looking zigzag stitch, your machine must be carefully adjusted.

The width of the zigzag stitch will be determined by the size of the design and the type of fabric being stitched. Smaller designs will require a narrow row of zigzag stitching, while larger designs can be finished with wider zigzag stitching. Firmly woven fabrics can be finished with a narrower row of zigzag stitching than loosely woven fabrics.

The stitch length or closeness of stitches should be adjusted so the stitches form a smooth line of satin stitches. If the stitch length is too long, fabric edges will ravel out from between the stitches. If the stitch length is too short, the stitches will bunch up and cause the machine to jam.

Read the sewing machine manual to determine the exact machine settings required for appliqué work. The manual will also give the position of the feed dog and tell you whether or not a presser foot must be used.

An adjustment of top thread tension may be suggested for some machines. Loosening the top tension will allow stitches to interlock on the wrong side of the fabric. Some machines have a bobbin adjustment that creates a smooth satin stitch.

Do a line of test stitching on the fabric you will be using for the appliqué to be sure the top thread and bobbin thread are interlocking securely. The top thread should appear as a narrow row of color on each side of the fabric. If the bobbin thread appears as a straight line of stitching, the top tension is too loose and needs to be tightened.

#### **PREPARING THE DESIGN**

Designs for sewing machine appliqué can range from simple to complex. The fewer pieces you use, the simpler the design will be. Designs can be taken from a variety of sources. One popular source is children's coloring books. These designs are usually simple and relatively large.

To prepare the design, trace it on tracing paper or on a stabilizing fabric. If the design is to be transferred to fabric, it can be retraced on the wrong side of the tracing paper with a heat transfer pencil. The design can be transferred to the right or wrong side of the background fabric, depending on the appliqué technique being used.

If the design has a direction or if letters or numbers are involved, be sure they will be correctly placed when the design is transferred.

#### **USING FUSIBLE INTERFACING**

To create a crisp design, stabilize each piece of fabric in the appliqué design with fusible interfacing. Place swatches of fabric to be used over a piece of fusible interfacing and fuse. Then transfer the design shapes to the fabric and cut out.

In some cases, you can cut out all the fabric pieces of an appliqué design and arrange them on a single piece of fusible interfacing before fusing them.

# **TRADITIONAL APPLIQUÉ**

**Step 1.** Transfer the appliqué design to the right side of the background fabric.

**Step 2.** Cut design pieces from desired fabrics. Be sure to cut pieces on the straight of grain whenever possible.

**Step 3.** Cut out fusible web in the shape of the complete design. Position the design carefully. Hold steam iron over fusible web for a few seconds and press gently around edges with your fingertips to anchor it in place.

**Step 4.** Place fabric pieces of design over fusible web. Touch the center of each piece with the tip of the iron for a few seconds to anchor in place.

**Step 5.** When all pieces are securely in place, cover with a press cloth and press to fuse pieces. Follow the instructions that come with your fusible web carefully.

**Step 6.** Put a piece of stabilizer behind the design.

Step 7. Zigzag around each piece to secure it in place.

Step 8. Remove stabilizer fabric.

#### **REVERSE APPLIQUÉ**

**Step 1.** Transfer the design to stabilizing fabric.

**Step 2.** Secure stabilizing fabric to the wrong side of the background fabric.

**Step 3.** Determine the order in which fabrics should be placed on the design, then number the sections of the design and the fabrics 1, 2, 3, etc., in the order in which they will be sewn into place (Figure 3).

**Step 4**. Cut squares of fabric slightly larger than the areas they are to cover (Figure 4). Pin each one in place with the wrong side against the right side of the background fabric. Pin from the side on which the design is traced. Pin piece 1 in place, and be sure fabric is placed on straight grain.

**Step 5.** From the wrong side, sew a row of small, open zigzag stitches around the edges that will not be over-



*Figure 3.* Number sections of the design and fabrics in the order in which they will be sewn into place.



Figure 4. Cut squares of fabric slightly larger than the areas they are to cover.

lapped by any other layers of fabric (Figure 5). Straight stitch the edges that will be overlapped.

**Step 6.** Turn to the right side of the design and trim off excess fabric (Figure 6).

**Step 7.** Sew a closer, wider zigzag over the first row of stitching to finish the edges.

**Step 8.** Repeat steps 5–7 until all pieces are in place and the design is completed.

#### **SPECIAL TIPS**

At the beginning of each line of stitching, backstitch 5 or 6 straight stitches to lock threads in place before zigzagging (Figure 7).



*Figure 5.* From the wrong side, sew a row of small, open zigzag stitches around the edges that will not be overlapped by any other layers of fabric.



*Figure 6.* Turn to the right side of the design and trim off excess fabric.



*Figure 7.* Backstitch 5 or 6 straight stitches at the beginning of each line of stitching to lock threads in place before zigzagging.

At the end of each line of stitching, sew 5 or 6 straight stitches along the edge of the row of zigzag stitching to lock threads in place (Figure 8).

If fabrics are especially loosely woven, back the fabric with a fusible interfacing before cutting fabric pieces.

When turning corners, leave the needle down in the fabric on the outside edge of the design. Then raise the presser foot and pivot the fabric, as needed. Lower the presser foot and begin stitching so stitches overlap neatly on the corners.

When stitching, hold the first two fingers of your left hand on both sides of the presser foot in a V-shape to keep fabric taut. This will prevent the fabric from forming a tunnel inside the stitches.



*Figure 8.* At the end of each line of stitching, sew 5 or 6 straight stitches along the edge of the row of zigzag stitching to lock threads in place.

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