

How to...

FREE
information

Cross Stitch

Introduction

In this 'Beginners Guide' to cross stitch you'll discover everything you need to know to get started, from basic information about threads and stitches through to simple diagrams and handy tips.

Equipment needed

Most stitchers begin by using aida. This is a stiffly woven fabric with a grid pattern of regularly spaced holes for stitching through, making it clear where to place each stitch. It comes in various colours and 'counts' the most popular being 14, 16 and 18 – 14 count is ideal for the beginner. The count refers to the number of holes per inch so the higher the count, the finer the stitching will be.

Alternative choices of fabric are evenweave and linen. These are softer fabrics to hold and come in finer counts for the more experienced stitcher.

Threads

Stranded cotton is used to stitch most designs. This is available in a huge array of colours and is made up of six individual strands of thread. You will need to separate the number of strands you require for stitching. To do this, cut a length of about 45cm of thread, take hold of one of the loose ends and pull gently. Repeat this for each strand to avoid tangling then recombine the number of strands you need to stitch with. Specialist threads, ie metallic give a different finished look to your work.

Needle

When cross stitching on aida or evenweave it is best to use a blunt tapestry needle. Choose one slightly smaller than the holes in the fabric, for 11 or 14 count – size 24 needle, for 16 count and above – size 26 needle.

Cross stitch chart

Your cross stitch design can be worked from a chart – each symbol on the chart represents a stitch and each chart has a key which tells you the symbol to follow for each colour. The key also tells you the number of strands to cross stitch with and how many strands to use for other types of stitches. Generally most cross stitch is worked with two strands of embroidery thread.

Additional supplies

A hoop or frame can be used to hold your work in place while you stitch. Beads are effective to add dimension to your work.



Starting to cross stitch

Always start stitching at the centre of the fabric, this will enable you to correctly position the design. When following a cross stitch chart, the centre is normally marked by two heavy black lines. You can fold the fabric gently in half each way to find its corresponding centre.

Thread your needle with the number of strands listed in the key and count the squares from the centre on the chart and then on your fabric to find where to make the first stitch. Bring the needle up in the bottom left corner of a square on the fabric and down again in the top right corner, making the first half of the cross. Next, bring the needle up through the fabric at the bottom right corner and down again through the top left (Diagram A). This completes the first cross stitch. Carry on this way following the chart.

Half, quarter and three-quarter stitch

Half-stitches may be used on their own, usually for shading or background areas. Sometimes you will need to make a quarter stitch in one colour and a three-quarter stitch in another colour following the same method shown for cross stitch. These stitches are used to create shapes on a design.

French knots

French knots are used to add detail to a design such as eyes or small flowers. They are usually made using one or two strands, the size of the knot will depend on the number of strands used. Bring the needle up through the fabric, hold the thread where it comes out and put the needle behind it. Twist the needle around the thread and push it back into the fabric close to where it emerged. Pull the thread gently until it has all come through, leaving a knot on the surface.

Backstitch

Backstitch is used to outline and give definition to a cross stitch design. It is usually stitched with one strand of cotton and can be made horizontally, vertically or diagonally across a square. To start off, weave your needle through the back of several stitches to secure the end of the thread. Bring the needle up through the fabric (1) and down one hole back (2), up again (3) then down (see Diagram B). The back stitch should add the finishing touch to your work, once you have completed all the cross stitch.

Washing your work

Hand wash your work in warm water using a mild detergent. If you are worried about colours running, dissolve a little table salt into the rinsing water. Pad your ironing board with a thick towel to prevent the stitches from being flattened and place the work face down on the board. Place a thin, clean tea towel over the top and with a medium heat, iron until the stitching is dry.

See our Framing 'How To' leaflet for instructions on how to mount your work into a frame.

Other stitching techniques

When you have mastered the art of cross stitch why not try one of the other forms of counted thread embroidery such as Blackwork or Hardanger.

Blackwork is worked mainly using backstitch and is traditionally stitched using black thread on a pale background.

Hardanger is a cut thread embroidery originating from Norway. It is usually stitched using perle thread on either evenweave or hardanger fabric.

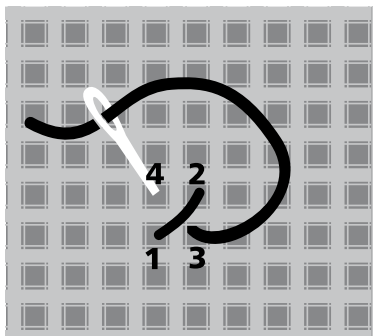


Diagram A

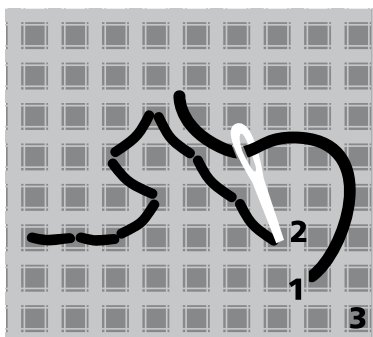


Diagram B

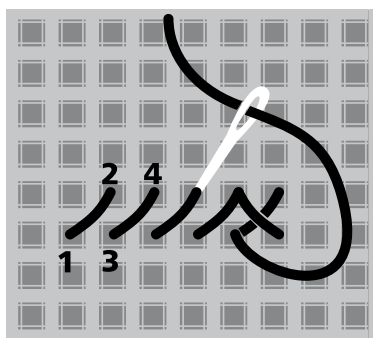


Diagram C

Hints & tips

- Stranded cotton is also known as “silk” or floss, particularly in American kits or charts.
- Always choose a piece of fabric that is at least 4” – 6” bigger on all sides than the design area.
- Start stitching the largest colour area first followed by the smaller blocks of colour.
- Where possible, start stitching darker colours; leaving lighter colours until last will keep your work cleaner.
- Where a chart has a whole row of stitches in the same colour, stitch a row of half crosses then go back and complete the crosses as a row. Always make the top half of the crosses lie in the same direction to give it a tidy appearance. (Diagram C)
- Count your stitches regularly as mistakes are easier to put right if they are spotted early.
- To keep an even tension, don't pull the thread too tight.
- Always work in a good light.
- If your thread gets twisted let the needle hang down straight until it unravels.
- Blend a strand of metallic thread with one of stranded cotton to create subtle highlights to your design.
- To add beads to a design, select a single strand of cotton, usually in a colour to match the colour of the bead. Do the first half of the cross stitch as usual, pass the needle through the bead before passing the needle through the fabric to finish your cross stitch in the usual way. This will secure the bead in place.
- Do not tie a knot to start or cast off, thread your needle under a few stitches at the back of your work.
- Never leave a needle or hoop in your work when storing it as it may distort or mark the fabric.
- To prevent your work from creasing, roll it around a tube when putting it away.
- Cross stitch is not just for pictures. For example, it can be used for cards as well as inserts for pot lids, handbag mirrors and key rings.
- Use waste canvas to cross stitch any design onto clothing or accessories. This is a temporary canvas tacked to your finished product before you start. You cross stitch the design in the usual way then dampen and remove the waste canvas, leaving your design in place.

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