

Decorative Machine Stitching

16.230

Page 1



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If you're like most people, you probably use only a few of your machine's stitches on a regular basis. But what about the rest?

The stitches are divided into two categories—utility and decorative. The utility or practical stitches are those including straight, zigzag, blindhem, overcasting, mending, buttonholes and perhaps a stretch stitch or two. The others, like ducks, snowflakes, scallops, trains, etc. are considered decorative, as embellishing is their sole purpose (1).

There are two types of decorative stitches in the machine—those that are formed only by a forward motion, and those where the machine moves both forward and backward in the formation of the pattern.

Any stitch in your machine can be used with novelty threads like rayons, metallics and variegated offerings. Heavier weights of threads may also be used, and playing with the stitch width and length can greatly alter the appearance.

Bobbin Basics

It's usually best to use a lighter weight bobbin thread with any novelty top threads. Adjust the tension so no bobbin thread shows on the top side and very little, if any, of the top thread shows on the underside.

Thread Tales

Threads come in many weights and fibers. Common novelty thread weights for use with decorative stitching are sizes 12, 30, 40, 60 and 80 (larger to smaller). The same

stitch sewn in different thread weights can give a totally unique appearance.

The fiber the thread is made from also affects the stitch's appearance. Rayons and silks are shiny, cottons are matte finish and of course, metallic is usually shiny as well.

For more information on novelty threads, see Guideline 17.110 Threads for Machine Embroidery.

Needle Nuances

Decorative stitching works well with a topstitching or embroidery needle, both of which have larger and more elongated eyes than a standard universal sewing needle.

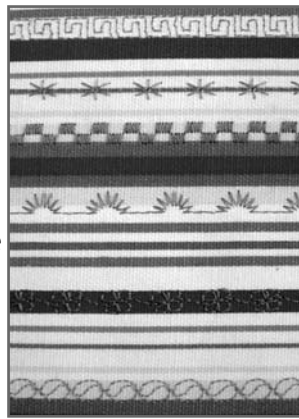
Decorative stitches can be sewn with a twin needle and in some instances with a triple needle as well (2). Be sure to consult your instruction book for width limitations to avoid needle breakage.

Foot Notes

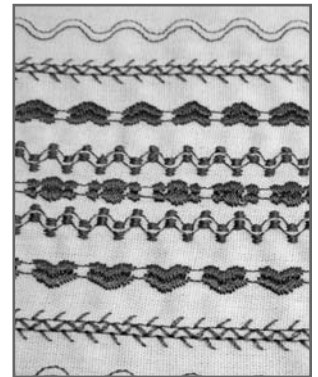
Most machines come with a satin stitch presser foot with an underside indentation to let bulky and dense stitches pass through without jamming. Using this foot helps with even feeding and a consistent stitch appearance.

Stabilizer Smart

Because decorative machine stitching is often dense, there is a tendency for many fabrics to pucker as the thread is pushed into it. Thus, the need for stabilizer of some sort to prevent this distortion and give a professional stitch appearance.



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A tear-away stabilizer can be used under most woven fabrics. To adhere it to the fabric itself, use a fusible version, or use temporary spray adhesive to hold the layers together.

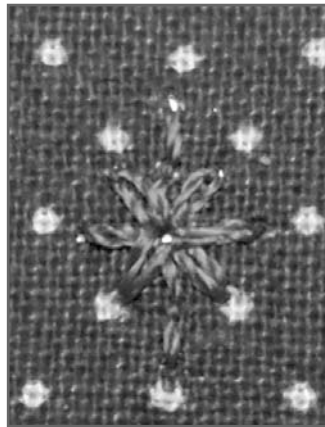
If you plan to use decorative stitches on knit fabrics, use a cut-away stabilizer so that it stays with the project to prevent later distortion and stretching.

A liquid stabilizer also works well on either knits or wovens, but requires preplanning. The project fabric needs to be soaked in the liquid and then laid out flat to dry before stitching. The stabilizer can also be "painted on" to the area where the stitching will be done, instead of stabilizing the entire project.

Machine Magic

Many machines also allow you to program stitches together to create your own patterning, and then save the combination to a memory. For example, you might combine three cars and then some waves to look like a road, or five snowflakes and three circles, etc. You can use the mirror-imaging function with the programming function to add lots of variety to the look of even just a few stitches. Or you can even combine a single motif with multiples of others—like one duck with some scallops for a pond.

Using the single-motif button tells the machine to tie off the threads at the end of one design, so you can stitch single designs all over a fabric surface for embellishment (3).

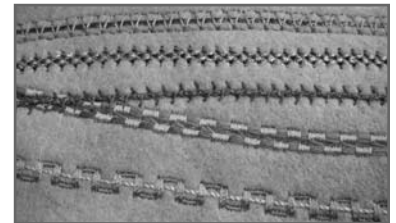


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Playing with Stitches

The decorative stitches in your machine can be used in many ways. Here are a few common ones:

- Stitch in rows to embellish clothing or home décor projects.
- Use to create trim bands and cut close to the edges, then appliqué the bands to other items.
- Hem clothing or home décor items using a decorative stitch to cover the raw edge.
- Couch yarns or trims (4). *For more information, see Guideline 17.215 Couching.*
- Embellish piping, either on the bias or straight grain.
- Apply bias tape using decorative stitches on one edge, both edges or down the center, depending on the width.
- Use decorative stitches to attach appliqués.
- Quilt with decorative stitches. A quilting guide can help you keep the rows straight, or perhaps you want them curved and overlapping.
- Embellish fabric for covered buttons.



4

Generally speaking, the sky's the limit to what you can do with your stitches and various adjustments. 🖱