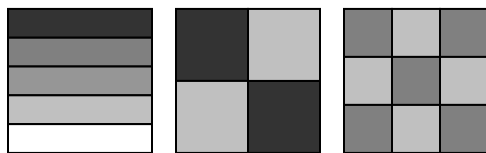


## Pieced Patchwork Block-Unit Assembly

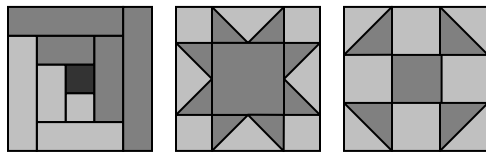
Block-unit patchwork involves the joining of fabric pieces into individual blocks. The blocks are then combined to create larger designs. Pieced blocks typically use geometric shaped pieces that form a definite pattern within the block. This method of construction is popular in American quilt tops. Below are some blocks and their common names.



Rail Fence

Four Patch

Nine Patch



Log Cabin

Sawtooth Star

Shoo Fly

### Templates

Patterns for patchwork are readily available or you can design your own. Most patterns are full size and ready to use without enlarging. Some patterns are single line, which means a 1/4-inch seam allowance must be added on all sides. (For hand piecing, it is helpful for these seam allowances to be marked.) A template is needed to create patchwork pieces. This is a firm pattern. Label each template with pattern letter, grain line, right and wrong sides, and name of the design. Always check for accuracy when making a template, and make a sample block before cutting all fabric. Single line or finished size templates

are used for hand piecing to transfer seams lines. Double line templates include the 1/4-inch seam allowance and are used for cutting pieces for machine piecing.

A well-sharpened or .5 mm lead pencil is best for marking around templates. To be accurate, angle the point of the pencil in as you trace. Laying fabric over fine-grade sand paper will prevent slipping and stretching.

### Rotary cutting

Using a rotary cutter, cutting mat, and quilter's acrylic ruler are great timesaving products to use. These tools make measuring fabric accurate and cutting multiple fabric layers quick and easy.

Rotary cutters have a sharp blade similar to a pizza cutter. They are available in various sizes. A midsized rotary cutter is good for most cutting jobs.

Always cut fabric with the rotary cutter pointed away from your body. Close the blade when not in use. Cutting patchwork pieces with a rotary cutter is best done with the lengthwise grain of the fabric, rather than across the grain. This prevents stretching. Cutting on the crosswise grain should be limited to the short cuts.

Cutting mats are sensitive to heat, so they should be stored flat to prevent warping. For this same reason, mats should not be left in a car for very long periods of time. For safety's sake,

keep all cutters out of reach of small children and pets.

## BASICS OF HAND PIECING

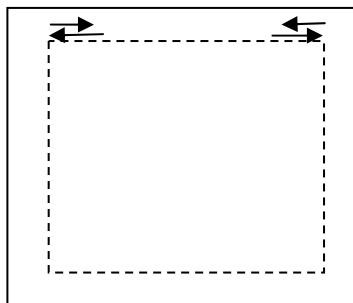
Before the invention of the sewing machine, all patchwork blocks were hand-stitched. Today hand piecing is still a valuable skill. Sewing by hand allows you more control than machine sewing, making it easier to achieve accurate results. Sewing curved seams, setting pieces into an opening, and sewing short, non-continuous seams are all easy to manage by hand. Piecing by hand produces seams with "soft edges," and because you never stitch into the seam allowances, you can press the seam allowance in any direction.

The running stitch is used in hand piecing.

Secure thread and bring the needle to the fabric surface. Insert the needle into the fabric taking three or four small, even, forward stitches, approximately 1/8 inch apart. Pull the needle through the fabric. Repeat. The use of a thimble makes it easier to push the needle through the fabric.



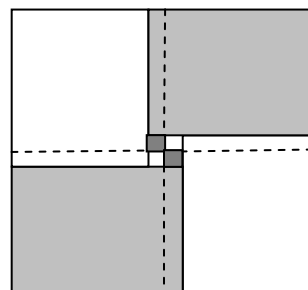
Most seams are 1/4 inch in hand piecing. You need to start sewing 1/2 inch in from the edge of your fabric and sew back to 1/4 inch. This locks your stitches and keeps the knots out of the seam allowances. Continue sewing to 1/4 inch from opposite end of fabric edge, back track 1/4 inch, and knot off your thread. This technique gives very secure corners on your patches. Do not sew all the way to the edge of the fabric as you would when sewing by machine.



The starting and finishing stitching is really double stitching. When tying off on the last stitch go through that stitch, make a loop, and pull the needle through to make a knot.

## Free-Floating Seam Allowances

When stitching rows together, stitch up to the point at which seams meet. Backstitch one stitch to reinforce. Pass needle through seam allowances at corner to reach the corner on other side of seam. Take one stitch forward; then backstitch to reinforce the corner. This allows the seam allowances to be pressed in either direction. On a four-patch block the seams can be pressed in the same direction making the intersection of seams very flat.



## Unit/Row Construction Method

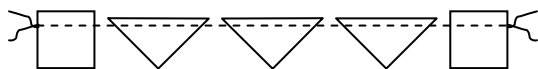
The basic principle for assembling most patchwork is to begin by joining smaller pieces into larger units, such as when sewing together right triangles to form squares. Units are joined into rows, and the rows are joined to complete the block. (This can also apply to machine piecing.)

## MACHINE PIECING

As with any type of machine sewing, always start out with a good needle. Needles sometimes get burrs on their points from repeated use. These can catch on threads as well as damage fabric. It is recommended that needles be changed after every six to eight hours of sewing.

With practice you can learn to piece most blocks on the machine, especially those that assemble in a row construction method. Use some type of ¼-inch seam guide on your sewing machine. It is advised that you check your ¼-inch seams by sewing a sample block. Do this by cutting three strips of fabric, 2 inches by 6 inches. Sew together along the long sides. Press and measure across the sewn piece. It should measure 5 inches. If it is even slightly off adjust your seam allowance now by either moving your needle position or adjusting seam guide on throat plate. Otherwise, the problem will compound itself across a larger area.

When several small pieces need to be joined, **chain piecing** helps prevent dragging under the presser foot. There is no need to backstitch as other seams in your quilt will cross the seams.



Leave a few stitches between shapes to allow for easier cutting later. Using scrap fabric to begin and end the chain will also save thread and prevent thread from jamming at the beginning of the seam.

In **strip piecing**, strips of fabric are sewn together, and then cut into specified sizes to create pattern pieces.

## PRESSING

Pressing is using the iron to apply heat and pressure to set and flatten seams. A dry, hot iron works best, but some steaming may help to remove puckers and wrinkles. It is recommended that 100 percent cotton fabric be used.

Avoid sliding the iron back and forth because it can stretch and distort your blocks. Seam allowances should be pressed together flat to set the stitching and then to one side—rarely are seams pressed open as in clothing construction.

Blocks are sewn together with seam allowances pressed in opposite directions to distribute bulk. This is called “nesting” the seams. Finger pressing can be done before using an iron. If possible, press seams towards the darker fabric. Pressing from the right side will prevent tucks from forming along the seam. A simple rule to remember: Never sew over a seam that hasn't been pressed.

### Reference

“Quilting in the ‘90s”

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