

Successful Machine Appliqué

20 Tips You'll Be Glad You Know

1. Always, always, always begin each project with a new needle. Also, be prepared to change your needle often so your satin stitches are continuously smooth.
2. Speaking of needles, purchase the best quality possible. There are different needles for different jobs, and their names indicate what the needles should be used for. The differences are in the sharpness of the point, size of the eye, and the thickness of the shaft. To begin with, I suggest you select either an embroidery or a Microtex needle.
3. If you have a “needle down” feature — use it! Better yet, if you lucky enough to have a “needle down and presser foot up” feature, you will sail around the design almost effortlessly. Otherwise, get into the habit of stopping with the needle down in the background fabric. Almost always.
4. The secret to a good satin stitch is a combination of the stitch length and width. They may be different for each project. Many of the computerized machines automatically set the tension for a satin stitch, but you can usually override the settings. To find the right combination of tension and stitch length, practice on scraps of fabric and stabilizer you are using for your project. It's best to make your adjustments now rather than after you begin your real project.
5. You will know the tension is correct when the upper threads wrap around to the back of the stitch with a tiny bit showing on both sides of the bobbin thread. This will make sense after you stitch a little bit. No bobbin thread should show on the front side of the satin stitch.
6. Use a stabilizer behind the satin stitches to help prevent rippling and puckering. I prefer a tear-away stabilizer, but you may prefer another type. Place the stabilizer behind the background fabric so it is against the feed dogs. After all the stitching is complete, remove the stabilizer as directed by the manufacturer.
7. For the smoothest stitches around curves and corners, always keep the edge of the appliqué PARALLEL to the presser foot.
8. Select a good quality thread (not from the bargain bins). There are many brands of threads to choose from. I have great success with an all-purpose thread. However, for special effects, I will use other types of thread. Experiment to find what you like to work with. One caution: if you select a thread is visually fuzzy to the naked eye, don't waste your time using it.
9. Invest in an open-toed appliqué foot (sometimes called an embroidery foot). The foot has a groove on the bottom so the satin stitch will glide smoothly under the presser foot. If you use a presser foot without a groove, there's really no room for the satin stitch; it may bunch up and pretty soon you'll have a big mess that you have to remove.
10. Use a single color of bobbin thread, one that matches the background fabric, regardless of the color used in the needle. Changing thread colors will be quick and easy.
11. Plan your stitch order. Stitch all sections that use the same thread color at one time.
12. When you start appliquéing a shape, always finish it in the same sitting. In other words, if the phone rings while you are stitching, don't answer it. Continue stitching. I swear: the interruption to your stitching rhythm will be visible in the finished project.
13. The faster you stitch the easier it is to guide the appliqué under the needle - especially when you have a long distance to stitch. Try it and you will see for yourself.
14. Use your fingertips to guide the fabric as you stitch. Regardless of how fast or slow you sew, too much pressure on the fabric prevents it from moving easily under the needle.
15. When stitching circles and/or curves, you may make just one or two stitches before having to pivot. When you pivot, move the fabric ever so slightly.
16. If the stitching is not going well, STOP! Don't force it. Move to another section and regroup, then go back. Don't allow yourself to get frustrated.
17. Have a sharp seam ripper nearby in case you have to remove some misplaced stitches. Remove stitches from the wrong side of the project.
18. Pay attention to what your machine is telling you. For example, maybe you should change the type of stabilizer you use.
19. Have fun experimenting with different built-in machine stitches for details like the butterfly “flight path” on the yellow pillow and the valance. If you don't have decorative stitches that you like, you can use a satin stitch.
20. Practice! Practice! Practice!

