

# Hand Appliqué Tutorial: 2 Ways to Sew

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**Appliqué** is a type of sewing where cut out fabric shapes are sewn down onto a background fabric to create designs. You can use appliqué to sew any shape you like, from a familiar heart shape to letters for spelling out a message or to recreate your favorite drawing as fabric art!

This tutorial will cover two methods of hand appliqué, **raw edge appliqué** and **needle turn appliqué**.

This tutorial is intended for beginning to intermediate sewers, using as few necessary materials as possible.

## Necessary materials:

- 2 colors of fabric
- Fabric scissors
- Sewing needle
- Thread
- Sewing pins or clips

A note on fabric: For this tutorial, cotton broadcloth or quilter's cotton is recommended for ease of work and flexibility.

Depending on the style of textile art being done, craft felt can also be a good option, especially for raw edge appliqué, as it does not fray when cut.

A note on pins, needles and thread: short pins, thin thread and small needles can all help you make smaller stitches in small spaces if you have access to them. This helps "hide" the stitches if that is one of your goals.

## Optional Materials:

- Paper or card stock, scissors, and a pencil or marker for an appliqué shape template
- A marking tool: tailor's chalk or fading fabric pens. Water-soluble marker can work too if you're able to get your project wet later, or light pencil on light-colored fabric.
- An iron and ironing board



# Table of Contents

<b>Materials</b>	page 1
<b>Getting Started</b>	page 3
<b>Raw Edge Appliqué Tutorial</b>	page 6
<b>Raw Edge Decorative Stitching</b>	page 7
<b>Needle Turn Appliqué Tutorial</b>	pages 8-9
<b>Examples of Appliqué in Quilts</b>	pages 10-14
<b>Glossary</b>	pages 15-16

# Getting Started

## What is Appliqué?

Appliqué is a type of sewing where cut out fabric shapes are sewn down onto a background fabric to create designs. People around the world use it in clothing, quilts, decorations and other textile or fabric art. *(Examples of appliqué in quilts from many cultures can be found on pages 10-14)*

You can use appliqué to sew any shape you like, from a familiar heart shape to letters for spelling out a message, or to recreate your favorite drawing as fabric art!

## Planning your project:

- Decide what you want to make

Curves are more difficult to sew than straight lines, but that's why many quilters choose to appliqué curved shapes! Simpler shapes are easier for beginners. You can use a shape you make yourself, or a template shared by someone else.



Remember that your fabric shape will be the same as your template shape, so be sure you have one you like!

Hearts can make good beginner projects, for practicing both curves and points.

Choose the type of appliqué you want to do: **raw edge** or **needle turn**. Raw edge appliqué is often easier for beginners making fabric art, and needle turn appliqué is preferred for quilts and clothing that will be washed and used a lot.

- Prepare your materials

- Fabric should be uncreased and lie flat.

If it is not flat, you may need to iron it. If you don't have an iron and your fabric is wrinkled, you can try getting it wet with a damp cloth and smoothing it flat with your hands or a heavy book. You could also

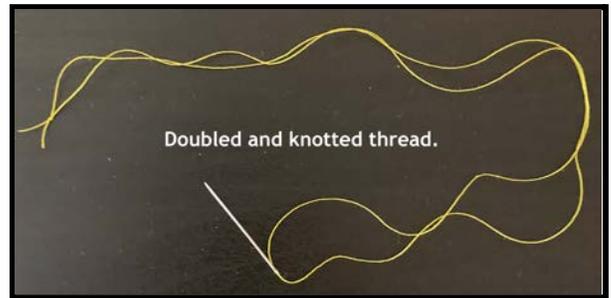


dampen it and then put it in the dryer, or use a steamer, if you have those options.

- Thread your needle. Choose thread that is close to your appliqué fabric if you want your stitches to be hidden, or very different from your fabric if you want them to be visible.

A shorter length of thread is easier to sew with. Try the length from your fingertips to your elbow to start. If you want extra-thick thread to make it show up more, double it.

Tie a knot at the end of your thread. If you are doubling your thread, tie both ends together.

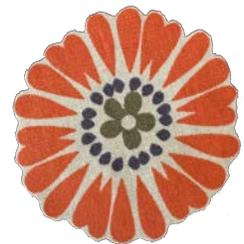


## Creating appliqué shapes:

- Create your appliqué template

Paper or card stock can be used to make your template. Just draw the shape you want! Keep in mind that the outline of what you draw is the shape your fabric will be.

If you don't want to draw your own appliqué template, you can use one someone else has made, or you can cut out a shape that's already in the fabric, like this flower.



You might ask a friend or teacher whose art you like to draw what you want, or there are many simple appliqué shapes online.

Remember that your fabric shape will be the same as your template shape, so be sure you have one you like, and cut it out carefully. You can keep working on your drawing as many times as you want.



- Cut out your appliqué shape

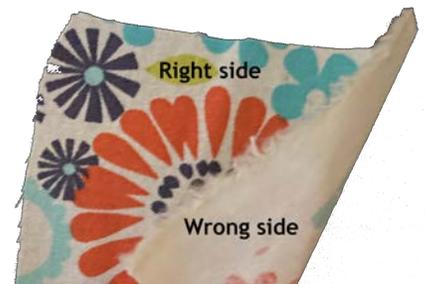
Pin your template to your fabric the way you want your shape to look, with the “right” side facing up, so you get the shape you want.

The “right” side of your fabric is the one the pattern was printed on, so it’s usually brighter. On the “wrong” side it can be hard to see the pattern. On solid color fabrics, it can be hard to tell which is the “right” side and which is the “wrong” side. As long as you like the color, this can be okay. Experienced sewers might notice, but it’s your art and you can make it however you want to.

For **raw edge appliqué**: no border is needed, but be careful not to cut into your shape!

For **needle turn appliqué**: cut a ¼-inch border around shape. You can mark this with your marking tool if you have one.

Cut carefully, and don’t cut into the edges of your template. The edge you cut here will be the same shape you sew down!



- Pin your appliqué shape to your background fabric

The number of pins you use will depend on the size of your shape. One or two pins is often enough. Make sure your shape lies flat so you don’t end up with bumps in your final piece.

Because this cat and moon both have sharp points in their shapes, more pins were used. The cat is made with cotton batik fabric, and the moon with craft felt. The moon will not fray.

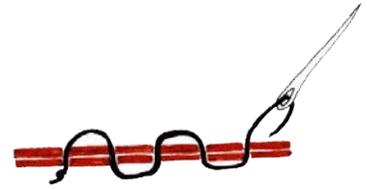


# Method 1: Raw Edge Appliqué

Raw Edge Appliqué is often used in fabric art and art quilts to create shapes that are more “true to life” or “true to drawing” because the fabric is cut exactly into the shape desired. It’s especially useful for beginners and artists who are making pieces they intend to display as hanging art. If your appliqué is going to be washed or folded a lot, this may not be the best method for you.

## Sewing Raw Edge Appliqué

The simplest sewing stitch to use for this technique is running stitch, sometimes called dolphin stitch. This is the most common and basic sewing stitch, where you push your needle up through the layers of fabric, move it forward along the fabric’s edge a small length, and then back down again, in a line. If you know other stitches you like, you could use those instead.



(Image by Jomegat, Wikimedia Commons)

Try to keep your stitch length pretty short, so that your shape will stay secure. Long stitches and large spaces between stitches may lead to your fabric coming loose later.

Pull just until you feel resistance. If you pull too hard on the thread, you can wrinkle the fabric. If your thread gets tangled, untangle it carefully before continuing.

## Start sewing!

- Push your needle through both layers of fabric from the “wrong side” of the background fabric, so that the needle comes out just inside the edge of the appliqué shape.
- Stitch around the edge of your shape until you have secured all parts of your shape to the background fabric. Be careful not to get your thread caught on anything as you stitch.
- If you run out of thread, tie a knot on the back side of your fabric and re-thread your needle to start where you left off.
- When you reach the end, tie a knot on the back side of your fabric. That’s it!

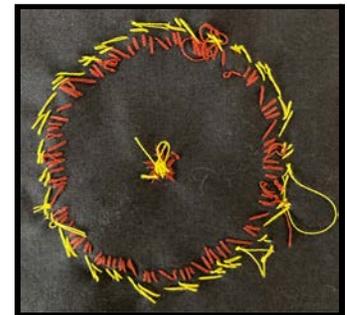


## Alternative: Raw Edge Appliqué with a Decorative Stitch

Another type of raw edge appliqué can be done with decorative stitching. Decorative stitching is any kind of stitch that is meant to be a visible part of the art.

For this example, a beginning sewer used red threads to make stitches on the ends of the flower petals, and then also in the middle, securing the flower to background fabric. Then they used yellow thread at the very center and just on the background fabric. For this decorative effect, they used doubled thread to make the stitches stand out more.

It was their first try, so it's not perfect and the back is pretty messy. But as long as you like how it turns out, it's successful art!



# Method 2: Needle-turn Appliqué

Needle-turn appliqué involves turning the cut edge of the appliqué shape underneath and sewing the shape down with near-invisible stitches. It's called "needle turn" because you use the needle to tuck the fabric as you go, although you can use your fingers for that part if it's easier.

This type of appliqué is used when the artist wants to create a clean edge, or is worried about wear and tear on a project like clothing, or a quilt, that will be folded and washed many times.

**Note:** This technique begins to be different from raw edge appliqué when you're ready to cut out your shape, so we'll begin there.

## Cutting out your shape:

For needle turn appliqué, you want to leave a border of fabric around your shape. This is the fabric that will be folded under. Usually, it's recommended that you give yourself  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of fabric as a border.

For curved shapes, you will need to cut small slits in the border to let it fold flat.

You can also iron the border fabric into place, or hand-press it to make a crease where you want it, so the sewing is easier. Make sure you make all folds to the back or "wrong" side of your fabric.



## Start Sewing!

- For this example light-colored thread was used so it would show up in photos. If you don't want your thread to be noticed, choose a color that matches the fabric.
- Push your needle through from the "wrong side" of the background fabric, so that the needle comes out just next to or under the edge of the appliqué shape.



- Begin to turn the ¼-inch border under. The “right” side should be facing up, and the turned edge should make a smooth fold. Corners may also need extra care.
- Use a “slip stitch” also called “invisible stitch” to secure your shape to the backing fabric. For this stitch, you will make one stitch on your shape fabric right at the edge, and then another through the background fabric right next to it to create nearly-invisible stitches. If you are not concerned about the stitch being visible, you could also use whip stitch or running stitch.

- Carefully stitch around your appliqué shape, turning your border under and paying attention to the fabric as you go to make sure you have a clean edge. In this example you can see that sometimes the stitches were bigger and sometimes they were smaller, and the last fold wasn't quite right, so the heart is a little wonky. Mistakes like this are just part of being a beginner, and as long as you like the end result, it's good art. Some fabric artists do these things on purpose!



- When you reach your starting stitches, make one or two more stitches to secure the shape, then push your needle back through the background fabric.
- Tie a knot in your thread and cut off the remainder. Congratulations! You've appliquéd a shape with needle turn appliqué!



The back side of a beginner's attempt at needle turn appliqué.

# Examples of Appliqué in Quilts

These 10 quilts each show a different way a quiltmaker used appliqué. Some create repeating patterns, while others tell stories or show original designs. In each case, the appliqué was applied by hand by a different maker in a different part of the world.



Ralli, probably made in Sindh, Pakistan, circa 1970-1990, maker unidentified. IQM 2005.033.0019

Quiltmakers in Pakistan often don't use templates, but cut their shapes freehand. The appliquéd parts of this quilt include the snowflake-like shapes, the crosses, and all the small shapes that make up the three borders.

For a closer look, visit: <https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/quilt/20050330019>



Kaiulani's Fan and Crown, made by Marjorie Kerr in Hawaii, USA, circa 1981-1990. IQM 2014.074.0001

Like the ralli quilt above, Hawaiian quilts like this one feature geometric appliqué designs. The central red fabric seen here is all one piece. The maker folded her fabric into a small square and then cut a design into it so that it would be symmetrical when the fabric was unfolded.

For a closer look: <https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/quilt/20140740001>



Bai Jia Bei, made by Pan Kai Li in Wang Jian Cun, Shaanxi, China, circa 2013. IQM 2013.020.0001

This style of quilt from China, also called a 100 Good Wishes quilt, is made to celebrate a new baby's birth. This example has tigers, frogs and birds appliquéd and embroidered onto it, as well as other animals. The appliquéd figures are associated with protection from evil influences and disease.

For a closer look, visit: <https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/quilt/20130200001>



Tomato, made by Eiko Okano in Tokyo, Japan, circa 1998. IQM 2017.081.0015

Eiko Okano is a quiltmaker from Japan who makes many types of quilts, including quilts about her favorite foods. This quilt block is only 8x8 inches, but she has appliquéd onto it a pair of tomatoes in a bowl. She used dark thread to stitch outlines for shapes, and a second layer of lighter-colored red fabrics to make highlights.

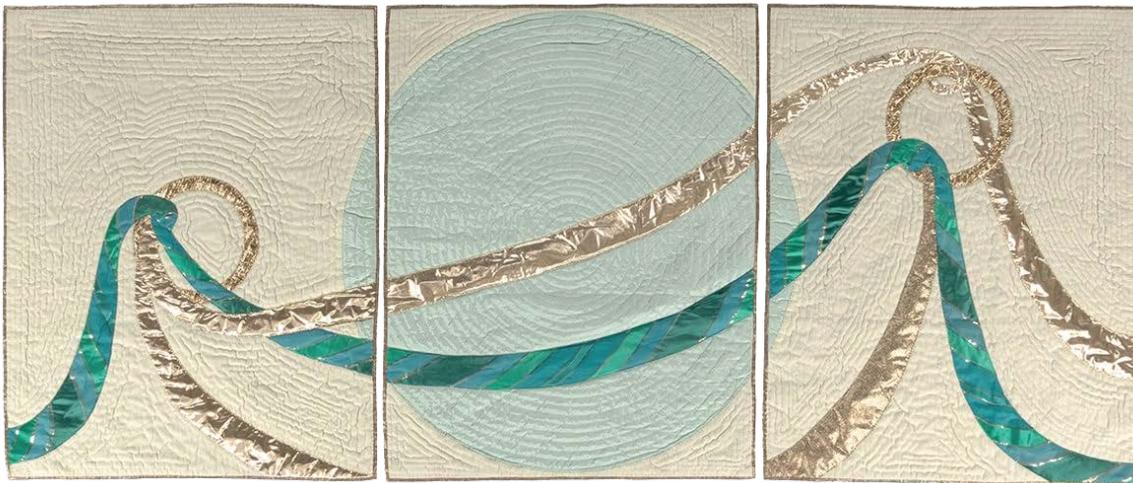
For a closer look, visit: <https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/quilt/20170810015>



Daisy Chain, made in Shaker Heights, Ohio, USA by an unidentified maker, circa 1936. IQM 1997.007.0834

This quilt shows one of the most common ways appliqué is used in traditional quiltmaking: to decorate a quilt with flowers and other rounded shapes that are difficult to sew by piecing. Each white flower petal, yellow center, green leaf and stem were sewn on separately.

For a closer look, visit: <https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/quilt/19970070834>



Paradis Perdu No. 2, made by Mariel Clarmont in Paris, France, circa 1986. 2018.035.0003

This quiltmaker from France created what's called a triptych, or a series of three panels that come together to form one artwork. In this work, appliqué is used to sew beautiful curves. The quilting pattern, which outlines the colored shapes, is called echo stitching.

For a closer look, visit: <https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/quilt/20180350003>



My Galaxy, made by Tony Berlant and Diane Berry in Kingston, Ontario, Canada, in 1976-77. IQM 2008.042.0003

This original quilt shows a pattern of appliquéd cats! With their curved backs and tails and pointy ears, cats make for an excellent shape to appliqué. This quilt is large enough to fit on a large bed, so that the owner could be covered in cats.

For a closer look, visit: <https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/quilt/20080420003>



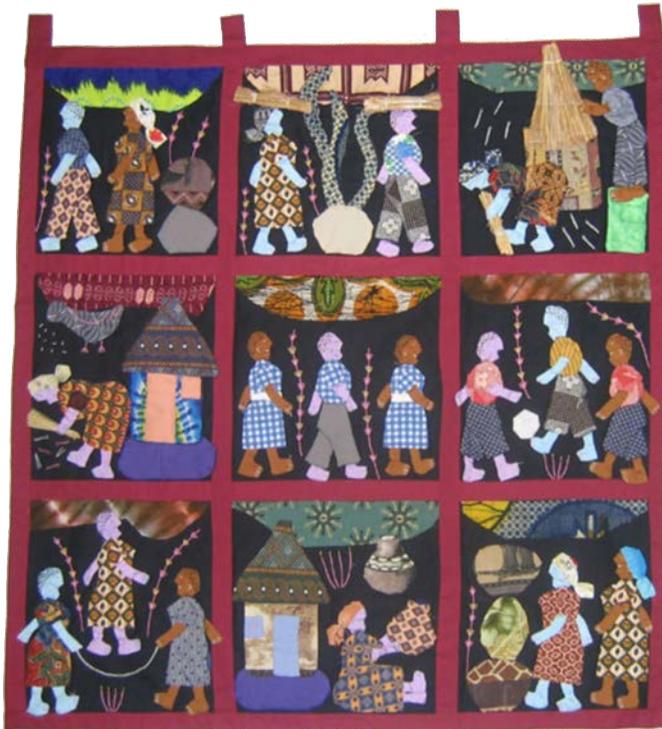
Squirrel and Acorn, made in the United States by an unidentified maker, circa 1980-90. IQM 2006.043.0018

Though this quilt also features an animal as its main focus, here the quiltmaker has stuck to a more traditional format of four repeating blocks showing the same image. The light tan border pieces frame each scene of a squirrel eating an acorn amid colorful fall leaves.

Why do you think the top pair of squirrels are facing each other, but the bottom pair are facing away?

For a closer look, visit:

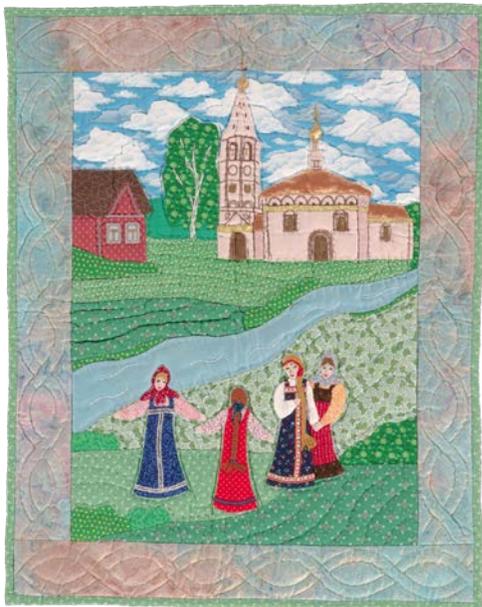
<https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/quilt/20060430018>



Original, Story Quilt, made by Elizabeth Savanhu in Zimbabwe, circa 2006. IQM 2006.040.0001

This quilt, made in Zimbabwe, shows scenes of daily life in the maker's home. Appliqué with many different layered fabrics was used to create the figures in each block, showing them playing games, doing chores and making art.

For a closer look, visit: <https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/quilt/20060400001>



Holiday in Suzdal, made by Lidya Lebedeva and Luba Karlycheva in Suzdal, Russia, circa 2006. IQM 2018.008.0007

In this story quilt from Russia, appliqué was used to create a scene from the makers' hometown. Four young women in traditional sarafan dresses and headscarves dance in a field across the river from the Church of St. Nicholas, one of many churches in the ancient town of Suzdal. In 1864 Suzdal businessmen tried to convince the government to route the Trans-Siberian Railway through their town, but failed. As a result, much of Suzdal's centuries-old architecture survives to this day.

For a closer look, visit:

<https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/quilt/20180080007>

# Glossary

## Appliqué

*noun*

Decoration, such as a cutout design, that is sewn on to or otherwise connected to a piece of fabric.

*verb* ap·pli·quéed, ap·pli·qué·ing.

To apply something as appliqué to a background.

## Raw Edge Appliqué

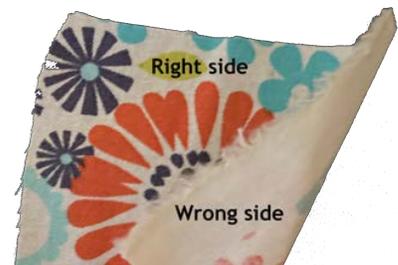
An appliqué method where the shapes are cut to the exact size needed and the edges are kept “raw,” and not turned under. This method is generally either used for fabric art where fraying edges will not matter, with a non-fraying material such as felt, or reinforced with fusible materials to prevent fraying.

## Needle Turn Appliqué

A hand appliqué method where the shapes are cut with a small (¼-inch) border, which is then “turned under” the shape during sewing, to create a clean, folded edge. This method is most often used for quilts, clothing, and other projects that will be folded, washed, and frequently used, rather than only displayed.

## “Right Side” of fabric

This is the side of a piece of fabric that is more colorful and vibrant, the “face” that looks out at the world. On printed fabric, it’s the side it’s easiest to see the pattern on. On solid-color fabric without a pattern, it’s the side that seems brighter, and often it’s harder to see the texture of the fabric weave.



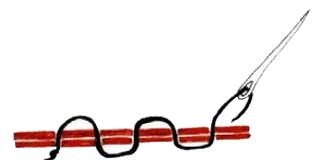
## “Wrong Side” of fabric

This is the side of a piece of fabric that looks “faded”. On printed fabrics this side will often be paler, with more white threads visible. On solid-colored fabrics, this side will be duller, and often the threads that make up the weave will be more visible.

## Running Stitch - Also called “straight stitch” or “dolphin stitch”

A basic sewing stitch that makes a line of small, even stitches that run in and out of the cloth like a leaping dolphin or a single line of footsteps.

(Running stitch image by Jomegat, Wikimedia Commons)



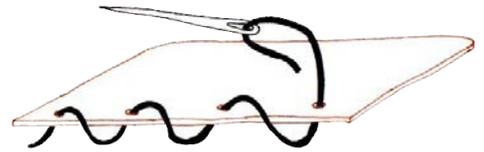
## Slip Stitch - Also called “invisible stitch”

A stitch used to hide the appearance of the stitches. It is made by running the needle inside a fold or meeting point and picking up a thread or two from one side, then the other, without the needle passing fully through the outside-facing fabric.

## Whip Stitch

A sewing stitch where the needle passes through one or two layers fabric and is then pulled over the edge and re-inserted, so that the thread circles the outside edge of the fabric.

(Whip stitch image by Jomegat, Wikimedia Commons)



## Other stitch examples:



Hand Sewing Stitches by Hellosewing. Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.