



Stitcharama

Super-Simple Guide
to Beginning Embroidery

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Welcome to the Stitcharama.com Super-Simple Guide to Beginning Embroidery! Whether you're brand-new to embroidery or looking to refresh the skills your Grandma taught you, this little booklet will be your trusty companion along the way.

At its most basic, embroidery is the act of adding decorative stitches onto an object - usually, but not always, made of fabric. Embroidery can be a simple stitched line added along the bottom of a skirt, or as intricate as a medieval silk tapestry hanging in the Louvre. In between, there's so much room to play around and embellish clothing, create beautiful and functional home furnishings & gifts and stitch new family heirlooms. Let's get started!

Bits you'll need

For less than the cost of a movie ticket (and definitely less than a movie ticket + popcorn, \$ouch\$), you can gather all the basics you'll need to start embroidering. Take a quick trip to your nearest independent craft store (or big-box store with a craft section) to add the following bits to your craft stash:

1. Embroidery hoop

Embroidery hoops keep your fabric taut as you work, ensuring your stitches are the right tension -- not too loose nor too tight. They're inexpensive, and you really only need one medium-sized hoop of 6" - 8" in diameter to start. Hoops are made from plastic, wood or metal, and come in round, oval and square shapes -- we recommend a round hoop made from wood or plastic, as they're lightweight & easy to hold.

How to use a hoop:

1. Separate the inner and outer circles of the embroidery hoop. If there's a screw on the outside of the hoop, loosen it first so the two circles easily slip apart.
2. Place your fabric on top of the smaller (inner) circle.
3. Place the bigger (outer) circle on top of your fabric and press down, so the fabric is sandwiched between the inner and outer circles. Tighten the screw. From the underside of the hoop, pull the fabric taut as you continue tightening the screw, until the fabric is tight like a drum. The fabric will loosen as you stitch; just keep tightening the screw and pulling the fabric taut as you go.

Tip: remove the hoop from your work after each session. Leaving the hoop on may cause the fabric to permanently stretch and/or crease!

2. Embroidery Floss

"Embroidery Floss" is the name for the "thread" used in embroidery. It's typically (though not always) made from cotton and comes in a rainbow of beautiful colors.

Of course, you can embroider using any kind of "thread" you want, but floss is sold in most craft stores, it's easy to work with and makes it simple to find the perfect colors for your project. FYI: if you embroider with wool (instead of cotton), you're magically doing "crewel", which is exciting!

Floss is usually sold by the skein -- and, talk about bad design: skeins twist into a giant knot as you pull out floss to work with. For this reason, it's helpful to buy a package of cardboard "floss bobbins" and wind your floss onto them before beginning your project:

1. Remove both paper end tabs from a skein of floss.
2. Carefully find the center space in the middle of the floss, separating the skein into a large "O" shape.
3. Wind the entire skein around a bobbin, and tuck the end of the floss into the "notch" on the side of the bobbin so it doesn't unwind.

When you're ready to embroider, cut a short length of floss (up to 12" or so) to ensure the floss doesn't knot or tangle as you work. Make a simple overhand knot close to one end of the floss, thread your needle onto the other end, and you're ready to stitch!

3. Embroidery needle

Easy to find at most craft & fabric shops, embroidery needles have sharp points and slightly elongated eyes, making them easy to thread. No need to overthink this bit -- pick up any packet of needles marked "embroidery needles" and you're all set.

4. Scissors

You'll need 'em, so keep 'em handy. A small pair with sharp points is easiest to work with when dealing with small threads, but no need to buy a new pair -- use what you've got. Keep your scissors with your embroidery stash, so they'll be handy when you need them.

5. Fabric

You can embroider onto nearly any material, though some is easier to work with than others. Choose fabric with a medium weave: too tight and it'll be hard to get your needle through, too loose and your embroidered design may look wonky.

It's helpful to choose your fabric with the final product in mind; for example, an embroidered pillowcase will need to withstand years of washing and drying, while a decorative framed piece only needs to look good.

Get creative: embroider onto your denim jacket, along the neckline of a shirt or onto your jeans or tote bag!

6. A pattern

Here's where the real fun begins -- choosing the design you're going to embroider. Most patterns resemble simple line drawings, and it's those lines you're going to cover with stitches.

There are four ways to use embroidery patterns:

1. Purchase fabric already printed with an embroidery design
2. Buy a pack of iron-on patterns to transfer onto any fabric item you desire
3. Draw your own embroidery pattern -- a simple outline of a heart or flower, or a word or phrase you love, can make for a super-special and personalized piece.
4. Purchase a PDF downloadable pattern, or print out nearly any line drawing & transfer the design to your fabric. For this, you'll need:
 - Tracing paper and/or dressmaker's carbon, and one of the following:
 - A water-soluble fabric pen, OR
 - A disappearing ink fabric pen, OR

Two ways to transfer a pattern onto fabric:

1. Hold your paper pattern up to a sunny window (or a light box) & place your fabric on top of the paper. Trace over the design and onto your fabric with either the water-soluble pen or disappearing ink pen

OR

2. Lay your fabric on a flat surface and place a piece of dressmaker's carbon on top with the carbon-side facing down. On the top of this stack, place your pattern with the lines facing up. Using a regular ballpoint pen, trace along the lines of your pattern, making sure not to skip any bits. The pressure from your pen will transfer carbon from the paper onto your fabric. Be aware that the carbon will smudge, so this is not my favorite method!

Basic Stitches

These four stitches will get you started and serve as the base stitches for your embroidery for years to come. There are countless other decorative stitches you can pick up along the way, but don't stress -- these are useful and flexible enough to stitch up nearly any pattern!



Running Stitch

Starting from underneath the fabric: Push your needle up through the fabric, and down through the fabric, along the pattern lines. Try to make sure the stitches are approximately equal in length. Continue along the pattern.



Split Stitch

Starting from underneath the fabric: push your needle up through the fabric and then down again, along the pattern line, making a single stitch. Then push your needle up through the center of the previous stitch, splitting the strands of the floss. Bring your needle down through the fabric in front of that split, to finish the stitch.



Back Stitch

Starting from underneath the fabric: push your needle up through the fabric and then down again, along the pattern line, making a single stitch. Then skip the length of a stitch, and push your needle up through the fabric. Going backwards, insert your needle down into the fabric at the end of the previous stitch. Continue along the pattern lines, making sure your stitches are evenly spaced.



Satin Stitch

Starting from underneath the fabric: push your needle up through the fabric, then insert the needle down into the cloth on the opposite side of the shape you're filling in. Push your needle up through the cloth again, very close to your first stitch. Repeat & fill the shape, keeping stitches close together.

Tip: before starting, make a few random stitches inside the shape itself. Then, when you satin stitch over those and fill in the shape, they will give height & dimension to the work.