

RAG QUILTING BASICS

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How Many Squares Per Yard of Fabric

Most fabric is 42" wide. So when you ask for a 1 yard cut you will receive a piece of fabric 36" L x 42 W". The following chart is based on a 1 yard cut of fabric. MOST of my patterns will call for 6" to 9" squares with 8" being used more often than any others.

Square size	Number of squares per 1 yard cut
6"	42
7"	30
8"	20
9"	16
10"	12
11"	9
12"	9

Use any leftover fabric (when applicable) to make matching pillows.

What type of fabric to use

I suggest using only cotton fabrics--from prints and solids to homespuns and flannel. Homespuns rag better. Flannels make a nice cozy backing. I try to buy my flannel by the bolt in the Ivory or Cream colors because most of the colors in my front fabrics go well with the Ivory or Cream. I'll explain next about 2 different rag quilt applications and which cotton works better with which application. Keep in mind that these are only tips and you can use whatever print, solid, homespun or flannel you want and use any application you prefer. My main suggestion is to use cottons throughout.

Different Rag Quilting Techniques

Ruffled Rag Quilt

Cut all front, back and batting squares the same size. After sewing the entire quilt together, you will snip the edges about ¼” to ½” apart. The batting sandwiched between the front and back fabrics fluff out the snipped edges giving it a ruffled appearance. It’s best to use cotton prints and solids for a ruffled look.

True Rag Quilt

Cut all front and back squares the same size. Cut the batting 1” to 2” smaller. After sewing the entire quilt together, snip the edges about 1/8” apart. There will not be any batting hanging out so you’re edges will fray more. Homespun frays the best and you get a really raggy rag quilt.

How Many Different Fabrics to Use

Most of my patterns will call for 3 to 5 different fabrics to work into a diagonal pattern. Sometimes I’ll add 3 or 4 more different fabrics when I add appliqués to the design. I will include this in the supplies lists with my quilt patterns as will most other quilt designers.

Batting Selection

Batting is sold in different sizes (crib size, queen/king size, etc.) in bags or you can select your own amount off the bolt. I prefer the bagged brands. I feel like they are cleaner. Select the size that will be enough to finish the quilt project. I will usually provide you with a size in my patterns. There are also different thicknesses. I prefer the low loft or TRADITIONAL polyester batting when it’s available. The traditional batting looks and feels a lot like cotton batting. There’s too much shifting with the thicker lofts. You can use cotton batting also. It costs a little more than the polyester and makes me sneeze so I don’t use it that often.

Keep it Square

Cut all pieces as square as possible. It isn’t a complete disaster if they aren’t perfectly square. A rag quilt pretty much corrects itself. But you want it to look neat, so trim any excess batting or fabric lengths when necessary. This also makes it easier to line up your squares when sewing them together.

Seam Allowance

½” to 1” seam allowance is typically used.

Rag Quilting Tools

Inexpensive Rag Quilting Tools

Make your own templates by using a straight edge ruler and a pencil to trace your templates onto stiff cardboard. Once your template is made, you can trace your squares onto your fabric and cut out with sharpened scissors. You can layer or double your fabric to make this go faster. I suggest only 2 fabrics per layer so you won't get shifting. This is the least expensive but can be quite time consuming not to mention the hand cramps.

True Rag Quilting Tools & the Approximate Cost

28 mm rotary cutting tool (looks like a small pizza cutter) About \$15

This works best for me because I do not cut more than 2 layers of stacked fabric at a time (to prevent fabric shift) & replacement blades are less expensive than for the larger cutters. Do not buy a smaller rotary cutter.

Replacement 28mm rotary blades About \$5 (2 pack)

Be sure to pick up replacement blades when you buy the cutter so you can have a sharp blade ready when the other one gets dull. **BE VERY CAREFUL WHEN CHANGING THE BLADES.**

Pair of sharp ergonomic scissors \$2 to over \$20

Sharp nosed (needle nose) scissors for clipping rag sections Start at \$10

You can use regular scissors but you get more precise cuts with less chance of cutting through the seams with a sharp nosed set of scissors

Ceramic scissor sharpener About \$3

Self Healing 36” rotary cutting mat About \$30

24” or longer ruler found near the cutting tools About \$15

This will be about 4” or 5” wide and will have a special lip on one edge that will keep it straight when you butt it up against the cutting mat.

Sewing machine Start at about \$90

I know a couple of ladies who can sew a quilt by hand, but I suggest a sewing machine for faster work. Perhaps you can borrow a friend's or rent one if you don't own one. Wait until all your cutting is finished for less borrowing or rental time.

Size 14 or 16 sewing machine needles About \$5 for a pack of 4 or 5
You need the larger needles because you have a lot of fabric and batting to sew through.

3 or 4 (300 yds each) spools of All Purpose thread About \$3 each
You will need more thread for larger projects and I will try to inform you in my patterns if you need more thread than normal.

Lots of LONG quilting pins (you'll be disappointed if you get short ones)
About \$10 depending on the count (try to find at least 500 count)
Use two pins on each stack of squares (front, batting, back), one at the top and one at the bottom.

At least 4 bobbins About \$5

Miscellaneous Tips & Instructions

Before you cut

- Press your fabric before cutting
- Fold each yard of fabric in half with selvage sides together. Trim off the selvage and trim the rough edges of the other 2 sides so that they are good and straight before cutting your squares.
- Sometimes lines, checks and plaids run crooked so that you can't line the edges up to cut without cutting off a lot of fabric. If this is the case, cut off the selvage edges and even up the other raw edges as best you can.
- Make row tags to place on the first square in each row. If necessary, make row/square placement tags in case your stacks topple before completion. Nothing is worse than trying to figure out where your toppled squares should go. You can make your row tags by cutting small note size pieces from notebook paper or printer paper OR you can use sticky notes or any small notepaper.

- Keep the row tags pinned on the first square of each row through completion of the quilt. This helps you get your rows together correctly without confusion.
- Wind at least 4 bobbins so you aren't constantly winding bobbins throughout the quilt making process.

Cutting

- If you choose the inexpensive method, draw your squares on with a pencil, water soluble marker or disappearing fabric marker.
- When you choose to use the rotary cutter, cutting mat, & special ruler, practice on scrap or inexpensive fabric before cutting into your good fabric. This will help you learn how to line your fabric up with the edge of your cutting mat (the zero "0" edge) and how to use your rotary cutter with the special ruler. It just takes a couple of practice tries to get this right. **You will need to pull your cutter blade right beside the ruler, pressing hard into the mat, and hold the ruler in place (to avoid shifting of the ruler) as you cut down the side. KEEP YOUR FINGERS OUT OF THE WAY!** The cutting mat has measuring marks on it so you will place the ruler in the correct place. ZIP! In just a few seconds you've cut your first length of fabric. When repositioning the fabric to cut the longer lengths be sure to line up the fabric at the edge of the mat. Be sure everything is straight before you cut. Turn this cut length so that it will run left to right and cut the squares from it. Repeat until you have the number of squares you need.
- Keep scissors nearby to clip through any places the cutter may have skipped. This usually happens if you don't press hard enough OR if the blade is getting dull.

Appliqués & Embroidery

- Do any hand embroidery with the front and batting only BEFORE adding the back for quilting.
- Use doubled fabric when cutting appliqués. Doubled fabric makes a prettier appliqué. Sew off the edge almost ¼". Clip as you would the rest of the rag quilt.
- My appliqués will usually call for plaid, check, and lined homespuns. For fun, I like to cut out some of the appliqués at different angles to add depth and dimension to the quilt.

Machine Sewing, Quilting, Trimming, & Clipping

- Always sew your squares together back to back so that the seam is facing the front.
- All fabric faces right side out.
- Secure the first and last 4 or 5 stitches of each row of stitches with the forward stitch, back stitch, forward stitch process.
- Stay ½” – 1” off the edges when sewing the squares together. Sew from seam to seam when sewing the row of squares together but stay to ½” to 1” off the outer raw edge. Some people do like the longer seams and that’s fine, but you will have a slightly smaller quilt if you are using one of my patterns.
- Everyone quilts differently so sizes will vary anyway.
- Keep your squares trimmed of any fabric or batting excess overhang as you sew the square layers together and then as you sew the rows together.
- When sewing the traditional X to quilt each square, sew from the upper left corner & sew diagonally to the lower right corner. Repeat & quilt the other 2 corners to form the X.
- Smooth out the first diagonal stitches with your finger tips just before you run the second row over it so you don’t “scrunch” your back fabric at the intersection of the X.
- You will need more tension to quilt the X’s or other designs & patterns onto the squares and less tension as you acquire more fabric to sew through when you sew the squares together into rows. Begin with your tension on 2 or 3 and adjust if it seems too tight or too loose.
- You can always draw a cute pattern (**HINT:** use your appliqué pattern) and sew around it to quilt a few of your squares instead of quilting all X’s. I do this sometimes by quilting hearts or other pattern onto a few of the squares.
- If you want a larger quilt, add rows of squares and continue your diagonal pattern. Use the chart above to figure how much more fabric you will need. **HINT:** For a full size comforter/bedspread or larger, you may want to use the larger 9” to 12” squares to make the work go faster. Use the chart above to figure how much fabric you’ll need for your front and back fabrics.
- If you want a smaller quilt such as a table runner, tote bag, candle mat, coasters, etc., eliminate any squares and rows you will need to make the smaller size you desire. **Hint:** You may want to use smaller

- squares for these smaller quilts. Use the chart above to figure how much fabric you'll need for your front and back fabrics.
- You will need to help pull the quilt through the sewing machine as the quilt becomes heavier. The feed dogs can't handle that much weight so just give it a gentle tug from the back of the machine close to the needle as it's being pushed through by the feed dogs. It is also a good idea to have a table extension or use a large dining room table or even an extra table (like a card table) to help hold the heavy end of the quilt while you are sewing the quilt. This makes the pulling process less stressful for you.
 - Line up each square on each row before sewing them together. If one square is longer than the other then you can make them appear to be the same size by lining up the seams on each one. Hold each seam or pin them together to prevent shifting and sew those two together. Sometimes it just requires a little extra tugging on one to "stretch" it to the slightly larger size.
 - Trim around the outer edges of the entire quilt with scissors to even up any excess & sew to make the outer seams to snip.
 - **Be careful to NOT clip through your seams!**
 - If you want a little more fray, use a clean, soft bristle tooth brush to brush along the clipped ends. This will usually loosen a few more threads. I will usually use this technique on pillows. Do this over a trash can.

Washing, Drying and Finishing

- Washing & drying the quilt is a messy task so you may want to do this at the laundry mat. If you choose to do this at home, clean out both machines (especially the lint trap(s)) immediately after removing the quilt to prevent drain clog and dryer fire. There will be lots of lint and loose threads in each machine.
- Clean out the dryer vent at about half way through the drying cycle as well as afterward for an additional safety precaution.
- Wash on the cold, gentle cycle. Dry on Low setting.
- Shake quilt vigorously outside after the washing process and again after drying.
- Use a vacuum cleaner and brush attachment to remove any excess threads that remain on the quilt after shaking for the last time.

Email me at the above email address if you have any questions or corrections for me. This guide will help you better understand the quilt making process. Refer to this section if you get stumped when following a pattern. If you run into a problem that is not covered in this help guide or in the pattern you purchase, email me and I'll do my best to address the problem. Please do not resell our patterns without permission. If you desire to sell our e-patterns from your website, email me so we can work out an agreement. Please do not share our patterns. Our patterns are very affordable so that everyone can purchase them. If you use our patterns to produce items to sell, we would appreciate receiving credit for the design. Thanks for purchasing our patterns.

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