

Fabrics 101: Embroidering on Chiffon



Chiffon is a lightweight, sheer fabric that has beautiful drapes and folds

Proms, graduations, weddings -- many formal occasions take place in the warmer months when lightweight fabrics such as chiffon are part of the fashion scene.

Chiffon is a thin, sheer fabric made from cotton, silk, or polyester. It is most commonly used as an overlay to gowns and formal evening wear to give an elegant and floating appearance.

Chiffon is also used in summery scarves - for a dresser, table, and your body!

As I mentioned earlier, chiffon is made from cotton, silk, or polyester. I tested designs on polyester chiffon as it is the common choice for most garments, and easier to find than the cotton or silk varieties. Although chiffon is a lightweight, sheer fabric, the weave of the fabric gives it a slightly rough feel. It is very see-through and has a little bit of stretch to it.



Hoop chiffon tightly with water soluble stabilizer and just a bit of temporary adhesive

Because chiffon is so transparent, I wanted to use a water-soluble stabilizer so that it would be entirely removed after stitching. I tested with Sulky Ultra Solvy. You can certainly use tear-away or cutaway stabilizers, but they'll be visible from the front side of your stitchout.

Chiffon is slippery, so it was important for me to get a nice tight bond between the fabric and stabilizer. I sprayed the stabilizer with a bit of temporary adhesive (KK100 - not too much, or the water-soluble stabilizer dissolves), then smoothed the fabric on top.



A design without large fill areas works best on chiffon

To begin, I selected an open and light [Swallow design](#). This design is composed entirely of satin stitches, so it was a good way to begin my test. Generally satin stitches are heavier than other types, so any tendency toward puckering or dimpling will be evident right away.

The result was great! The stitches are clean and crisp, and there is no shifting or gapping.

After I finished stitching, I soaked the chiffon in warm water for 10-15 minutes until the stabilizer dissolved. Check your water-soluble stabilizer's packaging, instructions may vary. (Please note: if you are using silk chiffon, the care instructions are generally dry clean only.)

I blotted the fabric dry, then left it to air dry completely. It was a bit ruffled, so I pressed it with a pressing cloth on a low setting.



*Lighter and more open designs
are the best choice for chiffon*

Next I tested a design with a blend of satin and running stitches. I stitched the [Avant Garden Flower 6 design](#) onto the chiffon.

The results are perfect. Vintage designs, Redwork, toile - most designs that you find in the [Quick Stitch category](#) - will work well on chiffon.

Avoid designs that have fills, or anything complex with layering or shading. Those types of designs put too much stress on the chiffon, as you will soon see.

Next, I selected two different styles -- one light, and one heavy. The results are shown below.

You can see that the light-stitching [Golden Wattle design](#) (below, left) allows the chiffon to drape and move naturally, while the more stitch-filled [Tantalizing Tulip Square design](#) (below, right) has a heavy appearance, and actually prevents the fabric from floating.



The tulip design has a solid fill, and it's just too heavy for the light and delicate chiffon. You can see puckering of the fabric around the edge of the satin stitch border. Conversely, the light-and-breezy wattle stitchout on the left has no puckering.



A solid fill design needs cutaway stabilizer, but that will show through chiffon

In addition to poor draping, the stitchout also has shifting and gapping in the results. The needle perforations caused the water-soluble stabilizer to disintegrate, leaving nothing behind to prevent the shifting of the fabric fibers.

As a result, sections of the design don't line up where they should. It's most noticeable along the left side of the frame.

When working with a design that has a solid fill, cutaway stabilizer works best - so using a cutaway stabilizer would resolve this issue. But then the stabilizer would show through the chiffon; a bit of a Catch-22. To avoid this problem, choose simple, light, open, and airy designs.

It's the usual practice to wash fabric to preshrink it before embroidering on it, but I didn't find that necessary with chiffon, as it won't shrink much.

After embroidering on chiffon, you can wash it with a gentle cycle. However, try not to toss the item in with jeans or hoodies, to avoid snagging the fibers on zippers, or wearing down the sheen.

Stitching tips for chiffon:

Needle	75/11 sharp needle; an embroidery needle may also be used
Stabilizer	Water-soluble (Vilene or Sulky Ultra Solvy)
Design Choice	Open, airy, and light.

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