Towels are one of the most popular items to embroider. They're easy to find, come in a variety of colors, and are a fun way to dress up a kitchen and bath.

Getting good registration or alignment depends on hooping. If a towel is not hooped, or hooped loosely, sections of the design can be off. But it can be tricky to hoop a thick terrycloth towel. Today I'll share a tried-and-true technique for working with bath towels.

In the photo to the left you'll see a roll of rubberized shelf liner. Rubberized shelf liner is how I keep the hoop from slipping when I'm trying to hoop something bulky.

You'll find this "hooping helper" in the kitchen/ housewares section of a store like Target.
I spread the rubberized shelf liner on the table to get a non-slip surface. Then, I open up the bottom part of the hoop as far as possible. I placed cutaway stabilizer and the towel on the bottom hoop. Then, the topping (water-soluble stabilizer) is on top.

*Hooping a bath towel with stabilizer and topping can take some effort, but will bring consistently good results.*

Next is what I call the "Hooping Hokey-Pokey." I put my left arm across the whole thing and wiggle and jiggle the top hoop into place. At the same time I'm making sure that the towel is evenly positioned in the hoop, straight so that the design ends up straight on the towel.

Then, when everything is snug as a bug, I tightened the screw on the outer hoop. Attach the hoop to the machine and roll the bulk out of the way.

*Hooping a "towel sandwich" of stabilizer, towel, and topping ensures that the stitches in a design are properly aligned.*
I embroidered the **Christmas Poinsettias Spray** design on a towel using this method, and it looks beautiful! The stitches are crisp, clean, and well-aligned.

Now you've seen what works. And next, I'll show you what sort-of works.

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**Hooping the towel and topping with the stabilizer ensures that the stitches of the design are properly aligned.**

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Sometimes it isn't possible to hoop a towel. The towel might be too thick, the hoop is too thin. Maybe you've had a towel hooped, but midway through stitching the whole thing popped apart. Yeah, me too. It's happened to most, if not all, of us.

The alternative is to "float" the towel on top of a piece of hooped stabilizer. Now, I have to say that I don't like this idea, and went into it kicking and screaming. Embroidery hoops have been used for 4000 years, and for good reason. The hoop keeps the fabric taut so that the stitches land evenly (conversely, if something isn't hooped, you'll see gapping and shifting). The hoop prevents the fabric from puckering. The hoop contributes to a high-quality and professional look. I'm not likely to discard the hoop without a very, very good reason.

But I gave it a try. And I found that the results from embroidering an unhooped towel were not the best, but they were "ok."
Here's how I did it: I hooped a piece of cutaway stabilizer and then sprayed the stabilizer with adhesive. I pressed the towel on top.

Then I basted a stitch around the perimeter of the hoop, and pinned it all together for good measure.

If a bath towel is too thick to hoop, then hoop the stabilizer, and affix the towel to the stabilizer with spray adhesive, pins, basting stitches, etc.

There are a couple of problem areas, as you can see. In the circled area, the top stitches aren't covering up the understitching. This is because the top of the towel is wiggling back and forth, as it's not held in place by the hoop.

When the fabric is only secured at the bottom, then the top of the fabric is wiggling around as the hoop is moving back and forth. And that's when you see things fall out of alignment.

"Floating," or hooping the stabilizer only, can result in stitches being misaligned.

Hooping a towel will bring the best results. And, sometimes using the floating method will give "ok" results. If you're using the floating method, and are seeing some problems, like puckering or shifting and gapping, then try hooping the towel. If that isn't possible, then read on for some creative alternatives:
If you don't want to do the Hooping Hokey-Pokey and wrestle towels into the hoop, but you're not satisfied with the results you're getting from leaving the towel unhooped, then try these creative alternatives:

The image to the left is of the Cozy Bath Coordinates project. You can embroider on a thinner fabric, then sew that embroidered piece to the towels.

Another suggestion is to use the idea in the Embroidered Candle project. In that project I demonstrate how to embroider a design onto organza and water-soluble stabilizer, then remove the excess to have a freestanding piece. Use that theory, and then attach the freestanding piece onto a towel with a simple sewing stitch.

The main focus of this article is about hooping, but I'd like to add a quick note about stabilizer: I always recommend cutaway stabilizer for terrycloth towels. Always. Every so often I'll hear from someone that wants to use tear-away stabilizer for a neater-looking back.

I understand the desire to have the back side of something look almost-as-good as the front side. However, cutaway stabilizer will bring the best results, both long-term and short-term.

Consider the main benefit of tear-away stabilizer: it's meant to be easily torn away after the embroidery. But, because it's designed to do that, it tears away during the embroidery too. All of those hundreds and thousands of needle perforations weaken the tear-away stabilizer during the embroidery. That means that you're more prone to having thread tension problems, more prone to see puckering, and more prone to see shifting and gapping, too.

Then, after embroidering, the towel is going to be used and laundered. Laundering breaks down the tear-away stabilizer even further, and soon enough the towel is going to come out of the drier wrinkled. I don't mind pressing towels for my own use, but I don't wish to give a gift to someone that involves ironing. For those reasons, I use cutaway stabilizer, and recommend it
Hooping 101: How to Hoop Towels for giving the best results.

But, I decided to stitch a towel with tear-away stabilizer on the back side to see what happened. I used the Bird in Berry-Bright Spring design and a flour sack towel, just as in the above example. I hooped the towel with a piece of tear-away stabilizer.

And I've never had this happen before, but the whole kit-and-kaboodle got sucked down into the throat plate. What a mess!

Avoid mishaps: Use cutaway stabilizer, rather than tear-away or water-soluble, on the backs of towels.

Most towels can be hooped; but, I've been known to wrestle with the really thick ones. If you're struggling with hooping a thick towel, perhaps there's a thinner version available in a local store. Or, you can use one of the creative alternatives above (Cozy Bath Coordinates, or Embroidered Candle theory) to add embroidery to a towel without struggling with the hoop.

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