

Fabrics 101: Embroidering on Nylon Screen

As early as 2002 I was hearing rumors about people stitching on screen. "Impossible," I thought. "And what in the world do you do with it?"

Then I started seeing some fantastic and creative projects from embroiderers, such as [Geri's screen door with hummingbirds](#), Judie's Kanji-themed bag (below), and [Rose's decorative fireplace screen](#). Sure enough -- they made a believer out of me.



Kanji-themed screen tote bag
by Judie Sparling of Canada.

The type of screen or mesh to embroider on is called "pet screen." Pet screen was originally developed to guard against holes made in regular screen by little four-legged pals (such as Deb's monstrous kitties, Rocco and Trixie). Now pet screen is an embroiderer's dream, giving way to scads of fantastic ideas and projects.

Pet screen is a fiberglass/polyester mesh that's coated with vinyl. The vinyl addition makes it seven times stronger than regular fiberglass screen. It's pliable, dent-proof, and is tear-resistant.

As with everything, pet screen is easy to find once you know where to look. Hardware stores and home improvement stores carry the screen in basic black. When I went to Home Depot I asked two employees where to find the pet screen. I got two blank stares in reply, and emphatic insistence that they didn't carry such a thing. But I had a hunch, and headed over to the regular metal screen section in the store. And of course, that's where the pet screen was stocked.

Along with pet screen available in hardware and home improvement stores, some quilt and fabric stores carry the screen in a rainbow of colors. And, a search for "Pet Screen" at Google gives a variety of results. [Find those results by clicking here.](#)

You might think that because pet screen has open areas (the holes), light designs are best to stitch. However, I've found that the opposite is true. Designs that are medium



to high in complexity show up best on screen. Light designs, such as Redwork or toile, get a little lost in the mesh.

Judie Sparling, embroiderer extraordinaire from Canada, made this beautiful grape-themed tote with a [grape bunch design](#) and coordinating fabric. The [grape design](#) is one that I'd consider to be high in complexity, as there is significant shading and detail. It looks "wine"derful on the screen!

Most embroiderers use a medium-to-heavy weight water-soluble stabilizer on the back of the screen. Some use tear-away stabilizer. I used Sulky Ultra Solvy (that's a heavy weight), and it worked great.

Some embroiderers use a water-soluble stabilizer on the top of the screen, too. However, I didn't find that was necessary. As water-soluble stabilizer can be a bit pricey, I like to economize when I can. But, as always, if a different technique works for you, then by all means use it!

I used a 75/11 sharp sewing needle. I'd recommend using a needle with a fine point, and stay away from needles that have rounded points (such as ballpoint or stretch needles). Remember when I mentioned how pet screen resists tears from paws and claws? Yep, you'll need a sharp, fine-point needle to make a stitch in the mesh.

Below are the basic steps for embroidering on screen:

I didn't really have a specific project in mind, so I simply cut a rectangle of screen. If you're making a tote bag or fitting a window or a door, then measure and mark the screen for design placement in advance.

Screen can be a bit slippery, so I sprayed a small amount of temporary adhesive onto the water-soluble stabilizer (not too much, or the stabilizer will dissolve) and smoothed it onto the back side of the screen. Then I



hooped both together.

If you find the screen to be really slippery, and if you think it's going to slip about in the hoop, then add double-sided tape or a bit of rubberized gripper (like shelf liner) to the sides of the hoop to hold the mesh and stabilizer in place.

I used black screen, and wanted the backside of the embroidery to blend into the screen. For that reason, I put my normal white bobbin thread away, and wound bobbins with 60 weight black thread.

And it's as easy as that! Attach the hoop, load the design, and stitch away.



Unhoop the screen and trim away the excess stabilizer. Set the scraps aside, and either dissolve them in water to use as spray starch, or piece them together like a puzzle and use later.

Snip any of the long bobbin threads from the backside, too.



Soak the screen according to the stabilizer's instructions to remove the excess. If using Sulky Ultra Solvy, soak in water that's hot from the tap for about 15 minutes.

Blot the screen with a towel or paper towels, and allow the piece to dry.

And here's the result -- an embellished piece of screen, ready to be turned into a tote bag, pencil case, beach bag, or even in a window or door!





Alan in Colorado Springs mailed me some of his excellent samples. He's found that most of his embroidery is now done on screen for front doors and sliding patio doors, too. Alan uses full-size screens that he purchases from Lowe's, and finds that screen softer and more pliable than other brands. The image to the left is one piece that he did with a [lighthouse design](#).



Here's another piece that Alan did with a [Gardenia design](#). Isn't it exquisite?



Elizabeth caught pet screen fever, and has been stitching up a storm of craft bags. "Quilters, scrapbookers, and basket weavers enjoy having the bags to hold their supplies," she writes. She uses a different method of embroidering on fabric and stitching it to the screen, adding more color. Her bag pattern is [Zip It Screen Play II](#) by Nancy Ota.



Elizabeth stitches on a Deco 330. The finished size of the bags is 9 x 9, just perfect for holding all the odds and ends that come with our craft.

As well as using Elizabeth's method of adding the embroidered fabric to the



bag, you can also use the process described above, and embroider directly onto the screen. To see the designs that Elizabeth used on her bags, visit the [Crafty and Sewing category](#) at [Embroidery Library](#).



Sandy and her Husqvarna Designer 1 dressed up her front screen door with a [birdhouse design](#).

Sandy's from Florida, so she removed the snow from the design with editing software to make it more fitting for her home state. She also added text (Welcome) to make the embroidery even more personal.

And here's another one of Judie Sparling's great tote bags! The [Caribbean tropical fish](#) adds bright color to the ocean-blue mesh. Great for the beach, or any summer excursion.



Just like Geri, Judie, and Rose have made a believer out of me, I know that the projects on this page, and the talented folks behind them, have made a believer out of you. Careful, though. Working with pet screen is like eating a potato chip. You won't stop after just one.

Stitching tips for nylon mesh/pet screen:

Needle	75/11 sharp needle; an embroidery needle can also be used
Stabilizer	Water-soluble; we like Vilene or Sulky Ultra Solvy
Design Choice	Choose medium-to-complex designs. Avoid light designs, such as Redwork, as those will get lost in the screen.

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