

Fabrics 101: Embroidering on Wool



Experience the splendor and warmth of wool -- and embellish with your favorite embroidery designs!

Wool fabrics offer excellent comfort and versatility. Wool is a natural fiber, shorn primarily from sheep as well as goats and llamas, that has been used through the ages to create warm and durable clothing and blankets.

It's a terrific fabric for garments, as it is long-lasting, flame retardant, has an extremely high absorbency rate, and does not build up static cling.

Wool is also a great fabric for sewing: it's strong, easy to work with, and the tight weave of most wool fabrics makes it a terrific canvas for embroidery.



Wool and wool blends are a popular choice for comfortable and durable garments.

Wool has characteristic bends, or crimps, along the fiber, which lets the fibers bunch together, resulting in a fabric with excellent insulation. Fine wool, such as Merino, may have dozens of crimps per inch, while rougher wools may have only a handful.

Wool fabric has come a long way from the scratchy, boxy sweaters of the past! Merino wool makes soft and fine garments, and many wool fabrics and blends work well in skirts, shirts, pants, coats, hats, and other winter accessories.

Design Choice

100% wool fabric has a fairly tight weave, so it is able to support a wide variety of embroidery designs. Different wool blends, such as wool/silk or wool/nylon, may have a slightly looser weave. If you can pull the fabric fibers apart easily, or the fabric feels stretchy and delicate, lighter designs might work best on that fabric.

In preparing this article, I stitched onto two different 100% wool fabrics -- one a light suiting material, and one that was slightly thicker, with a higher nap -- and I experimented with an array of designs. Some were lighter and had more open areas, and some were more stitch-filled. I was curious to see how well the different wool fabrics could support both types of designs.

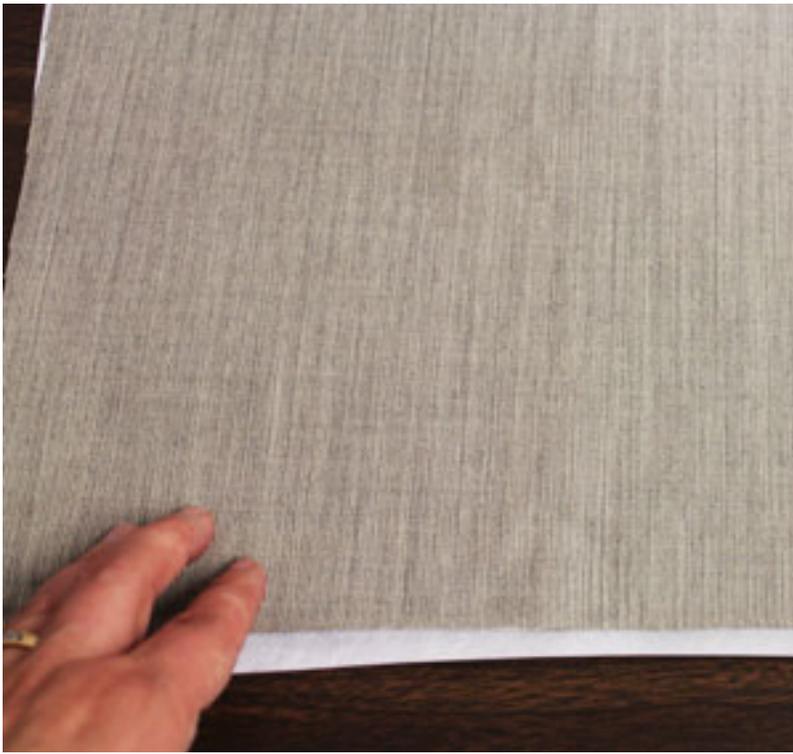


A wide variety of designs look great on wool fabrics.

When choosing designs to stitch onto wool, consider whether your fabric is 100% wool or a wool blend. A blended fabric may have a looser weave, and would best support a lighter, more open design.

If you're stitching onto tightly woven 100% wool, then designs of nearly any complexity will work well.

What your fabric is made of, its degree of stretchiness, and how delicate it is, will help you determine the type of design your fabric will support best.



Back the wool with the cutaway stabilizer to achieve professional-looking results.

To provide the strongest support for your embroidery, cutaway stabilizer is the best choice. Cutaway stabilizer will lead to a crisp stitch out, as well as keep designs looking professional through lots of wear and tear.

Spray the fabric with temporary spray adhesive (I use Gunold's KK100), and smooth the fabric on top. The adhesive between the fabric and stabilizer will help to create a nice tight bond for sharp-looking stitches.



The sample stitched onto cutaway stabilizer is sharp and professional-looking.

This sample features the [Damask English Rose](#) design. I chose this medium weight design as a starting place for the lighter suiting material. If there were puckering or gapping with this design, I would know that lighter designs would be the way to go with this fabric.

As you can see in the photo on the left, the fabric (with cutaway stabilizer) supports this design beautifully.



Tear-away stabilizer produced acceptable results; for better results, use cutaway stabilizer.

I also stitched the [Damask English Rose](#) design using tear-away stabilizer, to see that type of stabilizer could support a medium-complexity design with this fabric. And it stitched out ok. There is a little puckering of the fabric around the design, so it seems as though cutaway stabilizer will be a better choice.

If you see any thread loops, gapping, puckering, or stitches landing where they're not intended to, switch to cutaway stabilizer.

Needle Choice

One of the reasons I think the [Damask English Rose](#) design stitched pretty well using tear-away stabilizer is that I used a 75/11 sharp sewing needle. A sharp needle has a finer point than an embroidery needle, so it makes smaller holes in the fabric, and the stitches are nice and crisp.

Either an embroidery needle or a sharp sewing needle will be fine on wool, but if you notice that your stitches are a bit fuzzy and not quite as defined as you'd like, then try a sharp sewing needle instead. For most projects, my preference is sharp needles, as that keeps the stitches very crisp.



The lighter 100% wool suiting material supported a solid-filled design such as [Christmas Whimsy 1](#).

Encouraged by this success, I selected a solid-filled design ([Christmas Whimsy 1](#)) to see how the suiting material would support a more stitch-filled design. With cutaway stabilizer and a sharp needle, the design (in the picture on the left) stitched out without a hitch.



I figured my slightly heavier fabric could definitely support a fairly stitch-filled design, so I let fly the [Radiant Reindeer - Comet](#) design. You can see in this photo how beautifully he stitched out, with no gapping or puckering. With the tight weave of 100% wool, designs of almost any complexity will work. Its versatility for embroidery is one of the best qualities of wool!

The tight weave of 100% wool fabric supports stitch-filled designs such as the [Radiant Reindeer - Comet](#) design.

Laundering

While many wool garments are machine-washable, you may come across wool clothing that needs special care. In these cases, hand washing or dry cleaning will be the best option. If there is a label, follow the washing instructions on the label.

Stitching tips for wool:

Needle	75/11 sharp needle; an embroidery needle can also be used
Stabilizer	Cutaway (2.5 ounce)
Design Choice	Any design works well, but consider the weight of the wool. For lightweight wool, choose light and airy designs for the best draping.

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