



Fabrics 101 Stabilizer & Design Guide

When fabric is produced, manufacturers don't anticipate that anything will be added to it. When embroidering onto fabric, we're adding weight and tension of thread and stitches. The fabric needs to be stronger and more "stable" to support the stitches - and that is why stabilizer is used with every embroidery project.

If the fabric isn't stabilized properly, you'll see less-than-stellar results. You might find shifting and gapping, puckering, dimpling, and more. Choosing the right type of design and stabilizer for your fabric is the key to getting great results.

The [Fabrics 101 articles](#) are an excellent guide for your stitching projects, and you can find them all [here](#). This chart is a quick reference guide that summarizes those articles. Below you'll find the type of fabric, along with our recommendation for type of design, stabilizer, and needle. To read the full Fabrics 101 article for a type of fabric, click on the fabric name.

Steps To Complete

Fabric	Stabilizer/Backing	Design
Aida Cloth	Cutaway	Any.
Balsa Wood	Cutaway	Choose light designs. Redwork, toile, or
Batiste	Water soluble or tear-away	Choose light and open
Broadcloth	Cutaway	Choose light designs. Toile, vintage, Redwork designs with light areas.
Burlap	Cutaway	Choose solid, stitch designs. Avoid light designs (they will get lost in the nap of the burlap).
Canvas	Cutaway	Any.
Chamois	Cutaway	Any; but be cautious of running-stitch designs (Redwork) that may obscure the nap of the fabric.
Charmeuse	Cutaway	Any, but consider designs with draping (choose open designs for draping).
Chiffon	Water-soluble	Open, airy, and light

Cloth Diapers	Cutaway	Designs of any complexity will work well. Choose small designs or designs with large areas to avoid leaking.
Confetti Dot	Cutaway	If using a large design, choose open, airy, and light; if using a small design, solid-filled.
Corduroy	Cutaway	Any for narrow wale; for wide wale, choose solid-filled designs (avoid running-stitch or Redwork designs).
Denim	Cutaway	Any.
Faux Fur	Cutaway	Solid-filled designs; avoid Redwork or light designs.
Faux Suede	Cutaway in most cases; tear-away with light designs	Any, but consider draping.
Faux Leather	Cutaway	Any, but consider draping (open designs will give better draping).
Felt	Cutaway	Any.
Flannel	Cutaway	Any.
Fleece	Cutaway; tear-away may be used for simple and light designs	Any (but in some cases, running-stitch or Redwork designs may get lost in the fabric).
Gabardine	Cutaway	Any (but consider draping).
Handkerchiefs	Cutaway, tear-away, or water-soluble can be used.	Choose light designs, solid-filled, Redwork, toile, or vintage designs.
Hemp	Cutaway	Any, but can depend on weight of the fabric.
Homespun	Cutaway or tear-away depending on the fabric blend	Light and open designs for cotton/poly blends, solid-filled designs for sturdier 100% cotton homespun.

Brands of stabilizer:

Each brand and type of stabilizer has strengths and weaknesses, and everyone has their favorites. Here's what we use:

Cutaway. Choosing a soft and pliable cutaway stabilizer (nothing stiff) will bring the best results, both during embroidery and during wear/use/laundry of the item as well. We use a 2.5 ounce cutaway called Soft-n-Stable made by Brother. We also enjoy a wide variety of the Floriani cutaway products (in particular, No-Show Mesh).

Tear-away. We get great results with Terradon Clean Tear, as well as Floriani tear-away products.

Water-Soluble. Vilene (a fibrous water-soluble product) is a dream to work with when making freestanding lace items. We've also used Sulky Ultra Solvy with excellent results.

Notes about needles: We prefer to use a size 11 sharp needle (not an embroidery needle) in all of our projects. A sharp needle has a fine and small point, whereas an embroidery needle has a rounded tip. A sharp needle will give a crisper and neater look to the stitches than an embroidery needle.

When embroidering and using a cutaway backing, you can use an embroidery needle instead of a sharp needle (the difference in the results will likely be negligible). However, if you are using tear-away or water-soluble stabilizer (for in-the-hoop or freestanding lace projects), always use a sharp needle. Using an embroidery or universal needle will rip, tear, or leave large holes in the stabilizer. That can cause misalignment issues, as well as thread looping, breaks, and other tension problems.