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 design Redwork, toile, or
Batiste	Water soluble or tear-away	Choose light and op
Broadcloth	Cutaway	Choose light design toile, vintage, Redw designs with light a areas.
Burlap	Cutaway	Choose solid, stitch designs. Avoid ligh (they will get lost ir of the burlap).
Canvas	Cutaway	Any.
Chamois	Cutaway	Any; but be cautiou running-stitch desi Redwork) that may the nap of the fabri
Charmeuse	Cutaway	Any, but consider o (choose open design draping).
Chiffon	Water-soluble	Open, airy, and lig

Fabric	Stabilizer	Design Type
Cloth Diapers	**Cutaway**	**Designs of any comple** work well. Choose sma designs or designs with areas to avoid leaking
Confetti Dot	**Cutaway**	**If using a large design,** open, airy, and light; i design, solid-filled.
Corduroy	**Cutaway**	**Any for narrow wale;** wale, choose solid-fille (avoid running-stitch c Redwork designs).
Denim	**Cutaway**	**Any.**
Faux Fur	**Cutaway**	**Solid-filled designs; av** Redwork or light desig
Faux Suede	**Cutaway in most cases; tear-away with light designs**	**Any, but consider dra**
Faux Leather	**Cutaway**	**Any, but consider dra** (open designs will give 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 Redv designs may get lost in fabric).
Gabardine	**Cutaway**	**Any (but consider dra**
Handkerchiefs	**Cutaway, tear-away, or water-soluble can be used.**	**Choose light designs, s** Redwork, toile, or vint
Hemp	**Cutaway**	**Any, but can depend o** weight of the fabric.
Homespun	**Cutaway or tear-away depending on the fabric blend**	**Light and open design** cotton/poly blends, sol designs for sturdier 10 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/laundering 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.