

A Sarah Payne Quilty Tip - What's in a Wadding?

Increasingly, people are asking me about wadding! It is an integral part of quilting - and can really affect the resulting quilt.



As it happens I recently presented a show on wadding/batting for the US Create & Craft channel - so I thought I would share my thoughts and questions that people commonly ask. By the way - what we call wadding is known as batting across the pond - the two terms are interchangeable!



Question - what do the different methods of processing mean?

Needle Punching

- This is where fibres are needle punched or dry felted together to create uniform layers that are strongly fused and creates a soft drape.
- The more the fibres are punched together, the denser the resulting wadding.
- Needle punched wadding requires very close quilting - often with stitching no further than about 4 inches apart.
- The needle punched fibres are easy to glide a needle through and so is perfect for the hand quilting enthusiast.

Needle Punching with Scrim

- Scrim is a lightweight sheet of stabiliser that is needle punched into the wadding as it is formed.
- It adds strength and durability, and supports the final item when it is washed after completion.
- This stability also allows for quilting much further apart, allowing stitching lines 8 - 10 inches apart.

Thermal Bonding

- Thermal bonding is used for fibres like polyester or wool. Needle punching for these fibres can cause fibre migration (or bearding) where the finished wadding has a 'fuzz' and can easily show through the resulting quilt.
- Thermal bonding is where a small amount of 'low melt' polyester is mixed in with the wadding fibres and then passed through a warm oven to melt them together.
- Thermally bonded polyester has a higher loft (height) and is very light weight and 'poofy'! This can add real dimension to the quilting and adds real definition.
- Thermal bonding in high loft wadding often requires a stitched area of 4".

Question - Should I pre-shrink?

- Some wadding will shrink depending on the fibre content - and this is usually noted on the packaging so make sure you keep a note once you have removed it from the packaging.
- 100% cotton & cotton blends tend to shrink the most. This can be used to create the 'antique' look that many quilters desire by washing AFTER the quilt has been completed.
- If you do not want to achieve this affect, you should pre-shrink. To pre-shrink your wadding, submerge in warm water (not hot) and soak for 20 minutes. Gently squeeze out excess water by rolling it in a dry towel. Be careful as wet wadding is very fragile. To dry your wadding, lay it flat or put in a warm dryer for a short time.

Question - What are the different varieties of wadding and when are they best used?

Polyester

Polyester has many advantages for the quilter:

- It is lightweight and durable - it will spring back into shape no matter how many times it is washed.
- Washable by hand or by machine.
- It is good for those with allergies because there are no allergens in it.
- Inexpensive and available in a wide range of lofts & thicknesses.
- Higher loft wadding are great for showing quilt stitch definition.
- Bags and items of haberdashery that are used often.
- All items that require frequent washing.
- Good thermal properties so great for cold weather quilts!
- Children's play mats - though not recommended for babies (you should only use 100% cotton for baby quilts)

100% Cotton

This is a firm favourite with quilters who like the antique/heirloom look and the pleasure of working with pure cotton. It has been used since the earliest days of quilting and is still hugely popular today.

- It is soft and can be quilted with a lot of detail.
- Washable by hand or machine (on a cool wash).
- Great for hand quilting.
- Cotton won't melt if you put a hot pan on it, so is great for table runners, place mats etc.
- Thin and low loft
- Breathable
- Ideal for giving your quilt that heirloom look, as it shrinks (about 3%-5%) and wrinkles the first time you wash it.

Perfect for:

- Heirloom quilts.
- Summer quilts as it is light and breathable.
- Competition quilts

Cotton/polyester blend

This is the best of both worlds!

- The light low loft feel and breathability of cotton with the durability and safe washing of polyester.
- Popular blends are 80% cotton/20% polyester and 60% cotton/40% polyester.
- A blended material is a good choice for quilters who are unsure which batting is the best for their quilts. Cotton and polyester blend batting is

typically less expensive than pure cotton but pricier than completely polyester products.

- Just about anything!

Wool

- Wool is the warmest of the waddings on the market and is the best choice for quilts which are used in damp and cool climates as they are able to absorb moisture.
- It is too warm for Spring and Summer use.
- Wool is popular with both hand and machine quilters.
- It is lightweight and retains its loft though out the life of the quilt - making it popular with art quilters.
- It can attract moths if not stored correctly.
- It can be tricky to wash - and should NEVER be tumble dried!
- It is a pricey option!

There are other waddings available on the market - including bamboo and silk. Eventually, the choice of wadding is personal. It can be based on how you plan to use the finished quilt, how you want to quilt it, what look you want it to have or how much money you can afford to spend.

