

3rd Edition

# Start Quilting

*with* Alex Anderson

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- Everything First-Time Quilters Need to Succeed
- **8 Quick Projects**  
Most in 4 Sizes





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*with* Alex Anderson

Everything First-Time Quilters Need to Succeed  
•  
8 Quick Projects—Most in 4 Sizes





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## Dedication

To Pam Vieira-McGinnis, queen celebrity stunt sewer. Thank you for your keen eye and swift hands—this book would not have been possible without you.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to Todd and Tony Hensley for your continued support; Liz Aneloski for keeping me on track and for being so generous with your time; Mark Aneloski for being my project carrier pigeon; Olfa, Omnigrid, P&B Textiles, Moda Fabrics, Maywood Studio, Hoffman Fabrics, and Superior Threads for providing excellent products; Erica for your eagle eye; Cindy Carvalho and my friends at Alden Lane Nursery for your help and support; John Vitale for your creative eye; John who puts up with my crazy lifestyle; and last but not least, my cousin Lauren Marlotte for her killer poppy seed cake.





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# Introduction

A quilt is like a sandwich. It has three layers:

The quilt top is usually made of many 100% cotton fabrics that are cut in various sizes and then sewn together, either by hand or by machine. This is called piecing.

The middle layer, called the batting, is usually either polyester or cotton.

The backing is another piece of 100% cotton fabric. Cotton fabric is usually 42" wide; so, if your quilt top exceeds 42" in width, you will need to sew pieces of fabric together (piece) to create a wide enough piece of fabric for the backing.

All three layers are then stitched together, either by hand or by machine, uniting all three components (pieced top, batting, backing) as one. This is called quilting.

I can remember the first quilt I ever made. My grandma started a Grandmother's Flower Garden quilt in the 1930s and was pleased as punch when I expressed a desire to finish it. What she didn't know was that I was one month and one unit short of graduating from college, and I had contracted the project to fulfill that requirement. I had not only a fantasy of graduating with a bachelor's degree in art, but also dreams of snuggling under my hand-pieced and hand-quilted queen-size quilt on a cold winter night. Needless to say, I graduated, but with a quilt the size of a bath mat. Although I had originally planned to be a weaver, visions of quilts danced in my head. As they say, "The rest is history." I'm a quilter for life.

I love quilts. During the past three decades, I have been fortunate enough to be a participant in the renaissance and evolution of quilting into a sophisticated art form that offers many different avenues to explore. At

*The Quilt Show* ([www.thequiltshow.com](http://www.thequiltshow.com)), Ricky Tims and I present expert quilters who share their latest techniques or approaches to quilting. This craft keeps getting more innovative, and there is always a new method on the horizon. I can remember when the quilting world was introduced to rotary cutters, and now we can generate quilts on computers, scan images to print our own fabric, and connect with other quilters worldwide!

Whether this time-honored craft has reached its peak is often discussed. Are there any new quilters out there? The answer is yes, and it is you! I am often asked where a person interested in quilting should begin. So I decided to write this book to get the beginning quilter started with the basics. You must remember that there are many different approaches to quilting, and one is not better than the others, just different.

What this book provides is an introduction to the world of rotary-cut quilting (as opposed to the templates that my grandma used), with eight simple wall quilts you can complete using seven basic 6" x 6" finished quilt blocks. Fabric requirements are based on standard 42"-wide fabric.

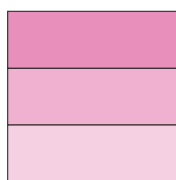
The term *finished* means that this is the size after the piece has been sewn into the quilt. This size no longer includes the seam allowances. Thus, a 6½" x 6½" block becomes 6" x 6" finished block once it has been sewn into the quilt.

I recommend that you start with a small project as your first quilt. You will be able to finish it and feel successful. I find that when first-time quilters start with a large project, the whole process becomes overwhelming, and they either give up in frustration or lose the enjoyment of the process. Besides, if you start small, you can begin another quilt sooner.

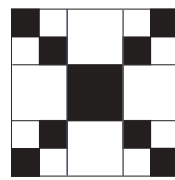
I will teach you how to make the following seven quilt blocks.



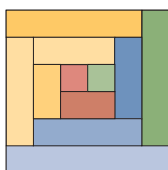
Rail Fence



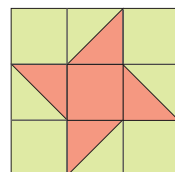
Nine-Patch Variation



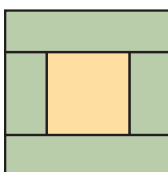
Log Cabin Variation



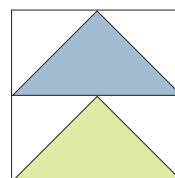
Friendship Star



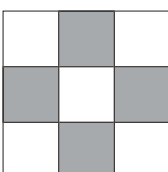
Square Dance



Flying Geese



Nine-Patch



These seven blocks consist of three of the most basic shapes quilters work with all the time: squares, rectangles, and triangles.

If you find that you really enjoy making one of these patterns, you can make more blocks to complete a larger quilt any size you want (see chart below). The width of the borders is just a suggestion; trust your eye to determine the border width that works for your quilt. See Appendix A (pages 44–47) for yardage requirements and cutting instructions for twin, double/queen, and king comforter-style quilts to augment the projects in this book.

My hope for you is that through making these projects, you will become familiar with the basics of quilting and develop into a quilt lover, as I have. Good luck, and don't blame me if your family never sees the whites of your eyes again—they will get used to it.

STANDARD MATTRESS SIZE		COMFORTER* (6" blocks)		COVERLET** (6" blocks)		BEDSPREAD*** (6" blocks)	
Three-Year Crib	23" × 46"	32" × 56"	4 × 8 blocks, 1" inner border, 3" outer border	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Six-Year Crib	27" × 52"	40" × 64"	5 × 9 blocks, 1" inner border, 4" outer border	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Twin	39" × 75"	66" × 90"	9 × 13 blocks, 1" inner border, 5" outer border	72" × 102"	10 × 15 blocks, 1" inner border, 5" outer border	78" × 108"	11 × 16 blocks, 1" inner border, 5" outer border
Full	54" × 75"	78" × 90"	11 × 13 blocks, 1" inner border, 5" outer border	84" × 102"	12 × 15 blocks, 1" inner border, 5" outer border	96" × 108"	14 × 16 blocks, 1" inner border, 5" outer border
Queen	60" × 80"	88" × 94"	12 × 13 blocks, 2" inner border, 6" outer border	94" × 106"	13 × 15 blocks, 2" inner border, 6" outer border	100" × 112"	14 × 16 blocks, 2" inner border, 6" outer border
King	78" × 80"	106" × 94"	15 × 13 blocks, 2" inner border, 6" outer border	112" × 106"	16 × 15 blocks, 2" inner border, 6" outer border	118" × 112"	17 × 16 blocks, 2" inner border, 6" outer border

All measurements reflect finished sizes.

\*Comforters cover the mattress but not the box spring; no pillow tuck.

\*\*Coverlets cover the mattress and box spring and have a pillow tuck.

\*\*\*Bedspreads cover the bed almost to the floor and have a pillow tuck.



# tools

## Tools Checklist

See pages 6–7, 18, and 20 for more information.

- Rotary cutter
- Rotary mat
- Rotary ruler
- Scissors
- Pins
- Thread for hand and machine piecing and quilting
- Seam ripper
- Iron
- Sewing machine
- Fabric
- Marking tools for quilting
- Batting
- Masking tape (¼" and 1" widths)
- Hoop or frame for hand quilting
- Thimble for hand sewing and hand quilting
- Needles for hand and machine sewing and quilting
- Walking foot for machine quilting
- Safety pins for machine quilting

Quilters love gadgets, and every year more tools are introduced to the quilt-making world. Your first visit to a quilt shop or the quilting section of a fabric store can be overwhelming. Many decisions need to be made when purchasing the necessary tools to get started quilting. The following shopping list provides the must-haves for anyone getting started. Many of the products come in different sizes. Please obtain the sizes recommended here. Later, you may want to add companion supplies, but the following are the best sizes to start with. Although the initial investment will seem costly, these tools will serve you for years if taken care of properly. (See pages 16, 18, and 20 for quilting supplies.)

### ROTARY CUTTER

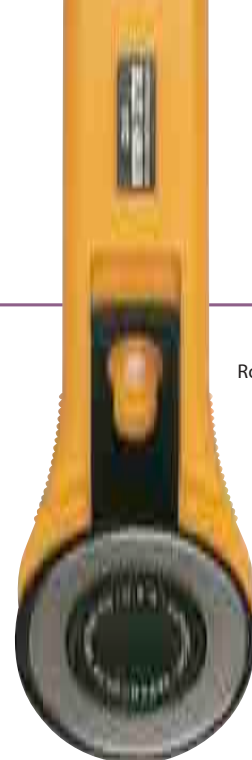
This rolling razor blade mounted on a plastic handle is extremely dangerous and should be kept away from young children. I recommend the medium-size (45 mm) cutter.

### ROTARY MAT

This self-healing plastic mat must be used in conjunction with the rotary cutter. I recommend either the medium or large mat. The medium one is great for starting out or for taking to a quilting class. The larger one is more versatile. Eventually you will want both sizes. Keep the mat out of direct sunlight and never leave it in a hot car, as the heat will cause the mat to warp and become unusable.

### ROTARY RULER

This tool was made especially for use with the rotary cutter and mat. It has ⅛" increments marked in both directions and is thick enough not to be cut by the rotary cutter. You will eventually have many rulers; to start with, I recommend a 6" × 12" rotary ruler. Remove the plastic wrap before using.



Rotary Cutter

Rotary Mat

## SCISSORS

Use 4"- to 5"-long shears with a sharp tip for clipping unwanted threads and fabric tips (bunny ears). Don't cut paper with fabric scissors, as doing so will quickly dull them.

## PINS

Use extra-long, fine, glass-head pins. These are costly, but the less-expensive bargain brands are thick and will cause distortion when lining up seams. (I stock up when the good ones go on sale.)

## THREAD

Use a quality cotton thread for piecing. Don't use decorative threads (such as metallic) or unusual fibers (such as rayon) for piecing. You can either match the thread color to your project or use a neutral gray or tan.

## SEAM RIPPER

I hate to sound negative, but yes, even the seasoned quilter uses a seam ripper. Splurge and get yourself a quality one (you'll know by the price). Cheap, dull rippers will cause the fabric to stretch and will create more problems than they are worth.



Seam ripper

## IRON

The one you have in your closet is probably just fine, but eventually you might want to purchase a super-hot steam iron. Correct pressing is very important in making a successful quilt.



Sewing Machine

## SEWING MACHINE

Like cars, there are many different makes on the market. Eventually your sewing machine may be your biggest purchase. But for your first quilt, you simply need one that is in good working condition, with proper tension, an even stitch, and a good, sharp size 80 needle.

That's it! The rest of the tools are gravy. If you are like most quilters, however, one day you will look into your sewing room and realize the amount you paid for the contents could have put your firstborn through medical school. But shhh, don't tell anyone.



Thread



# fabric

## Choosing Fabrics

Quilting stores are found all over the world. It is in quilting stores that we can get the finest 100% cotton fabrics available. Different grades of cloth are used for the printed fabrics available to us. You want to use the best you can find. The less-expensive cottons are loosely woven with fewer threads per inch and will only cause you problems as they stretch and distort. Stay away from poly/cotton blends, which will shrink right before your eyes as you press the shapes.

As an avid fabric lover and collector, the thought of starting from scratch seems foreign to me. As I look back to my early days, I realize I did not really start to feel confident with fabric choices until after I had made several quilts. The fabric will dictate your quilt's mood or look. Each quilt in this book uses a different approach to fabric selection, which is briefly discussed at the onset of each project. Once you have decided what look you want, there are two vital rules to keep in mind.

- Always use light-, medium-, and dark-colored fabrics. Look how the second example below is composed only of mediums. It lacks the punch that the third example has. Medium fabrics are usually the most appealing, but force yourself to integrate both lights and darks. Using a combination of lights, mediums, and darks will make your quilt sparkle.



**Don't** use fabrics with all the same scale of print.



**Don't** use all the same value (lightness and darkness) of fabrics.



**Do** use fabrics with a variety of values and scale of prints.

- Use printed fabrics that have variety in the character of the print. *Character of the print* refers to the design and scale of the print on the cloth. New quiltmakers often come to the craft with an image of what quilting prints should look like—that is, small calicos. However, when you use only one type of print, your quilt may look like it has the chicken pox. See how much more interesting the third example is than the first? This is because the third example not only has light, medium, and dark prints but also contains fabric with different characters of print, or visual texture. There are fabulous prints in delicious colors available to us. Never judge a fabric by how it looks on the bolt. We are not making clothing. Remember, when the fabric is cut up, it will look quite different.

### tip

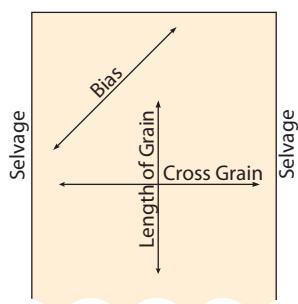
Try this trick: Take a 4" square of cardboard and cut a 2"-square hole in the center. Position the cardboard over the fabric to see how the fabric will "read" when used in patchwork.



Be open to using fabrics that might make you feel uncomfortable. Remember, you aren't wearing the fabric; you are cutting it into little pieces and making a quilt. Experiment. That is how I grew to love and understand fabric relationships.

# Grain of the Fabric

When fabric is produced, threads are woven in two directions, creating a length and a width. This is called the straight of grain. If you cut diagonally across the grain (in triangle pieces), you are working on the bias. Bias edges must be sewn and pressed carefully, because they stretch easily. The long finished edges of the fabric are called the selvages. Always trim off the selvage edges—they cause distortion of the block and are difficult to hand quilt.



Grain of fabric

## tip

When prewashing your fabric, unfold it completely before you put it in the washing machine, so you don't get a permanent fade mark along the original fold.

# Preparing the Fabric

There are different schools of thought as to whether you should prewash your fabric. My philosophy is that you should, and here are three reasons.

- When the quilt is laundered, 100% cotton shrinks, causing puckers and distortion in the quilt.
- Darker dyes have been known to migrate to the lighter fabrics. This defines the expression "heartbreak."
- Fabric is treated with chemicals, and I don't think it is healthy to breathe or handle these chemicals over an extended period. I sometimes find myself wheezing when I decide to pass up prewashing.

## tip

Always prewash darks and lights separately.

If you are working with a dark piece of fabric (reds and purples are extremely suspect), test your fabric by cutting a 2" square and putting it in boiling water. If any color bleeds, wash your fabric in Retayne, Synthrapol, or a half-and-half solution of white vinegar and water. Dry and retest the fabric. If it still runs, repeat the solution process. If the fabric continues to run, throw it away. It could ruin your quilt.





# How to Make a Quilt

1. Make the blocks.

2. Sew the blocks together to create the quilt top.

3. Measure the quilt top.

4. Cut and attach the borders.

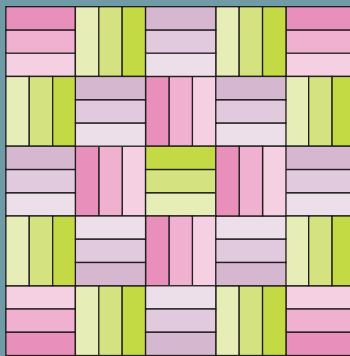
5. Layer the quilt top, batting, and backing.

6. Baste through all the layers.

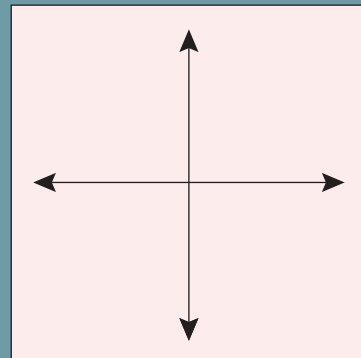
7. Hand or machine quilt, attach the binding, and add a label.



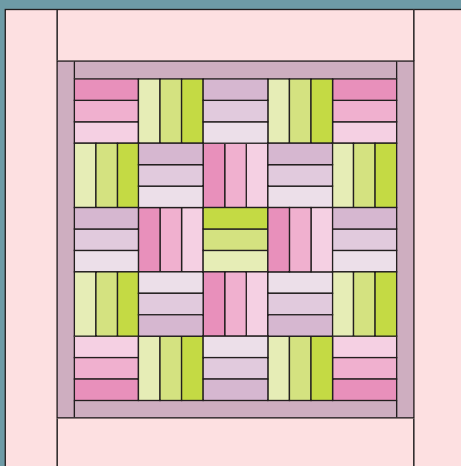
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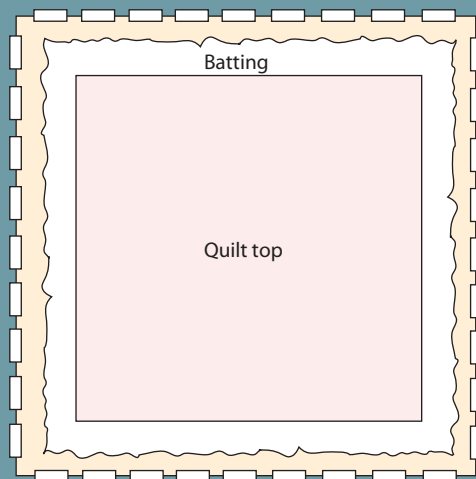
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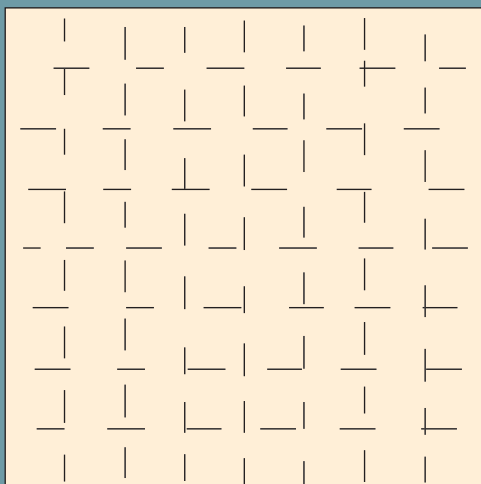
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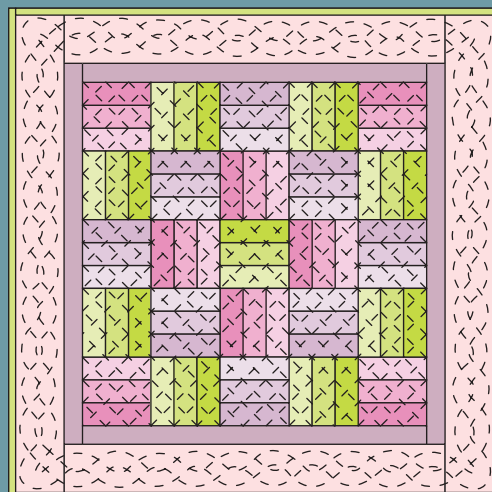
4.



5.



6.

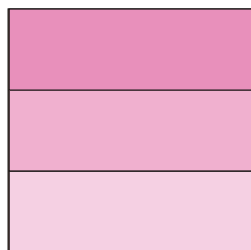


7.

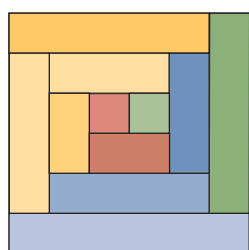
# The Basics

## Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

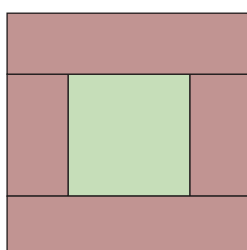
Choose either the Rail Fence, Log Cabin Variation, Double Nine-Patch Variation, or Square Dance project to start with.



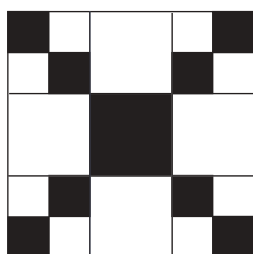
Rail Fence



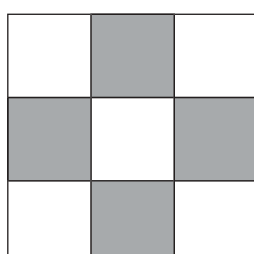
Log Cabin Variation



Square Dance



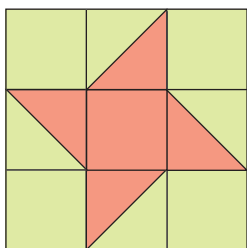
Double Nine-Patch Variation



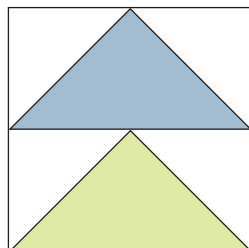
Nine-Patch

These patterns are made of shapes that are on the grain of the fabric. Therefore, they will not stretch or distort as you work with them.

After you have completed one or all of the projects using the blocks above, try your hand at the Friendship Star or Flying Geese blocks. Two of the project quilts in this book include the Flying Geese block. I have included two different methods for piecing the Flying Geese units. Try them both to see which one you prefer.



Friendship Star



Flying Geese

These two blocks are a little more challenging because they have triangular shapes. Whenever you work with triangles, there is a risk of stretching the fabric as a result of bias edges. If you make a mistake or two, don't fret. This is a learning process. Enjoy it.

## Rotary Cutting

I love rotary cutting. Please practice this technique on some scrap fabric before starting on your project.

### Cutting Strips

**1.** When rotary cutting strips of fabric, fold the fabric selvage to selvage and then fold again, bringing the first fold up to match the selvages. Line up the straight of grain as much as possible. This folding will give you 4 layers of fabric to cut through. Line up the edge of the fabric with the cutting mat's grid.



Fold the fabric.

**2.** Position the fabric on the mat, keeping all sides of the fabric in line with the mat's grid. (To prevent the fabric from being pulled out of alignment, keep the fabric from hanging off the edge of the table.)

**3.** Line up the vertical marks on the ruler with the grid on the cutting mat. To square up the raw edges, place the ruler  $\frac{1}{2}$ " over the raw edges of the fabric. Be careful to position



your hand so that none of your fingers are hanging over the side of the ruler where you will be cutting. Rest your pinkie finger on the outside edge of the ruler. This not only will help protect your finger but will also keep the ruler from moving.

**4.** Place the rotary cutter blade right next to the ruler. Depress the safety latch of the cutter, exposing the blade; make a single pass (cutting away from your body) through the entire length of the fabric to remove the uneven raw edges.

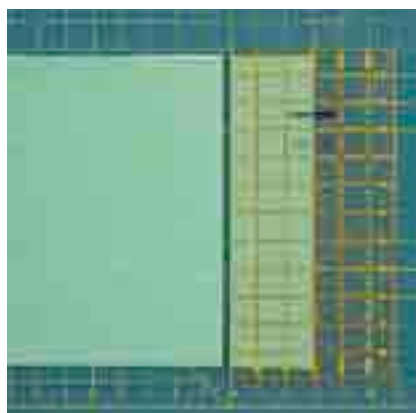


Left-handed

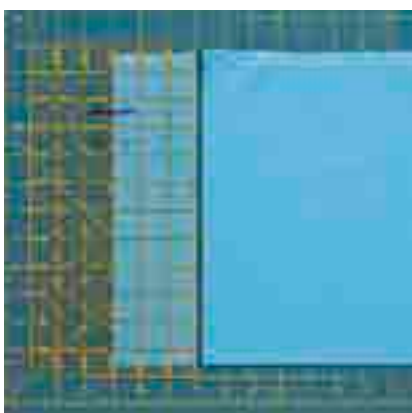


Right-handed

**5.** Move the ruler over 3" (to cut a 3" strip), lining up the vertical 3" mark on the ruler with the edge of the fabric. Line up one of the horizontal lines on the ruler with one of the horizontal grid lines on the mat and with the folded edge of the fabric. Cut the 3" strip. Practice this a few times to get the hang of it. Follow this same process to cut the strips needed for your quilting projects.



Left-handed



Right-handed

Position the ruler for rotary cutting a strip.

If the strip of fabric you are cutting is wider than your ruler, use the grid lines on your rotary mat to help you cut this wider strip.

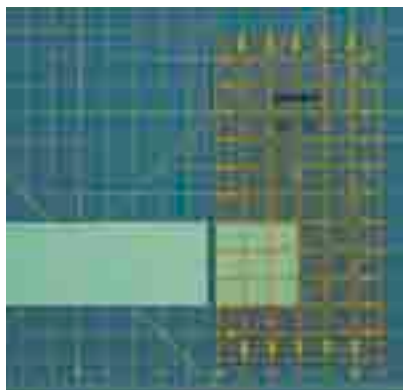
**tip** .....  
 : Rotary cutters are very sharp.  
 : Retract the rotary cutter blade  
 : after every you cut. This is a  
 : good habit to develop from  
 : the start.

## *Cutting Squares, Rectangles, Half-Square Triangles, and Quarter-Square Triangles*

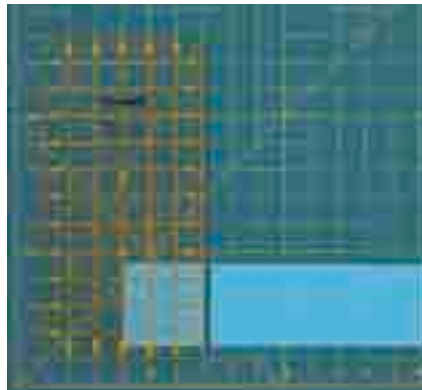
**6.** Reposition the 3"-wide strip that you cut so that it is horizontal, on or parallel to one of the mat's grid lines. You can cut 4 squares or rectangles at a time (4 layers), or you can open the strip to cut 1 or 2 squares or rectangles at a time. Trim the edge of the fabric as you did in Steps 3 and 4, but only trim off about  $\frac{1}{8}$ " to square up the end of the strip.

**7.** To cut a 3" x 3" square, line up the vertical 3" mark on the ruler with the edge of the fabric. Line up one of the horizontal lines on the ruler with one of the horizontal grid lines on the mat and with the folded edge of the fabric. Cut the square. Practice this a few times to get the hang of it. Rectangles are handled similarly. Repeat Steps 6 and 7 to cut all the squares and rectangles needed for your quilting project.

If the square of fabric you are cutting is wider than your ruler, use the grid lines on your rotary mat to help you cut this wider strip.



Left-handed



Right-handed

Position the ruler for rotary cutting a square.

**8.** Cut squares in half diagonally (corner to corner) to make half-square triangles. Use the 45° line on the ruler or the 45° line on the rotary mat to help make the cut more accurate.



Left-handed



Right-handed

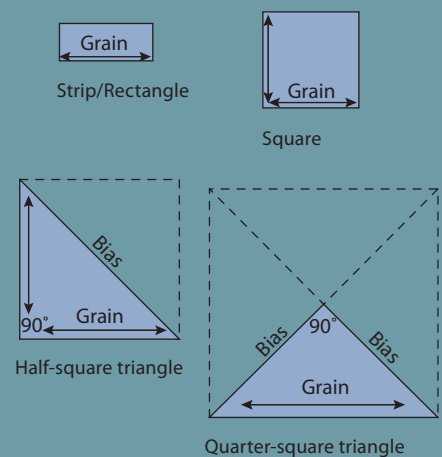
Position the ruler for rotary cutting a half-square triangle.

**9.** Cut squares in half diagonally again to make quarter-square triangles.



Quarter-square triangles

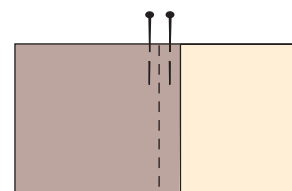
## Grain Line



## Pinning

As you become acquainted with different quilters and quilting techniques, you will see that some people pin and some don't. I have found that the little time it takes to pin can determine the success of the block. Basically, you should pin where there are seams and intersections that need to line up. Here are a few guidelines:

**1.** When aligning seams that are pressed in opposite directions (like a Nine-Patch block, page 25), place a pin in both sides of the seam, no more than 1/8" from the seamline.

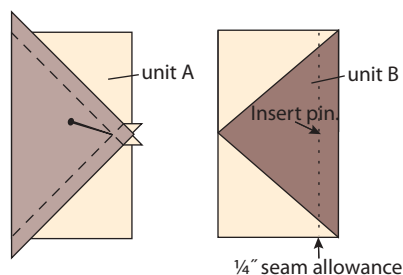


Pin seams pressed in opposite directions.

**2.** If you have a point of a triangle that needs to be positioned exactly (like the Flying Geese units, pages 37 and 40) follow these steps.

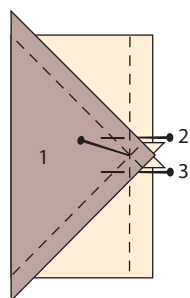


**A.** Place the first pin in the wrong side of unit A (exactly at the intersection), inserting it into the right side of unit B (exactly at the  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance). Press the head of the pin firmly through both layers.



Pin the point of the triangle to align exactly.

**B.** While holding the pin firmly in place, place the second and third pins on either side of the intersection, no more than  $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the first pin. Let the first pin dangle loosely.



Insert second and third pins.

**C.** Stitch so that the piece requiring the exact point is on top. As you approach the intersection, remove the first pin at the last second and let the sewing machine needle drop into that hole. If your sewing machine doesn't sew over pins easily, remove the second and third pins right before you stitch over them.

I have found this to be a great technique, and I encourage you to develop this habit.

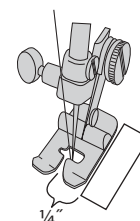
## Stitching

Set the stitch length on your machine just long enough so that your seam ripper slides nicely under the stitches. This is about 10–12 stitches per inch. Back-tacking is not necessary for the projects in this book, because all the seam ends will be enclosed by other seams.

### $\frac{1}{4}$ " Seam Allowance

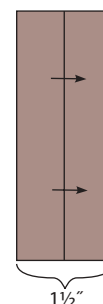
When piecing a quilt top, you always use a  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance. Cutting instructions in this book include that seam allowance. Many machines have an exact  $\frac{1}{4}$ " foot. If yours does, you are home free. If not, put your clear plastic rotary cutting ruler under the sewing machine needle and drop the presser foot, then manually ease the needle down on top of the  $\frac{1}{4}$ " mark. Take a thin piece of masking tape and mark the  $\frac{1}{4}$ " mark on the throat plate, using the edge of the ruler as your guide.

As you sew the pieces together, use this piece of tape as your seam guide. This is an extremely important step for ensuring accuracy. Take the time to understand your machine's  $\frac{1}{4}$ ". My kids' term "close enough" will only reward you with yards of frustration.



## tip

- To check your  $\frac{1}{4}$ ", Sally Collins of Walnut Creek, California, recommends that you cut 2 strips of fabric each  $1" \times 3\frac{1}{2}"$ .
- Sew the 2 strips together along one  $3\frac{1}{2}"$  side, press, and measure. The sewn unit should be  $1\frac{1}{2}"$  wide. If not, try
- again until you find your machine's perfect  $\frac{1}{4}"$ .



## Seam Ripping

On occasion, you will want to pick out a seam. Cut every third stitch on one side of the fabric, then lift the thread off the other side of the fabric.

If you have two bias edges sewn together, as in the Flying Geese block (pages 37 and 40), consider throwing the unit away and starting over. The chance of stretching the bias pieces when removing the stitches is almost 100%. If the pieces do stretch, they won't line up and won't fit properly when stitched to the next section.

# Make Your First Quilt a Success!



- Alex guides you every step of the way as you learn to plan, cut, piece, quilt, and bind your quilt
- Get started with 8 easy, beautiful projects
- Expanded edition includes new projects, more quilt sizes, and lots of helpful new tips and shortcuts

