

Free Form Feathers~Getting Started

The lessons in this book are set up as “building blocks”. We are going to start simple, learn some basic guidelines and then build off of those guidelines to create heirloom style feathers. This is the same process I described in the Introduction...divide and conquer, keep it simple, and play in your sandbox!

Being able to quilt a beautiful feather is a quilter’s crown. Everyone strives to achieve the perfect, most beautiful feather ever...and honestly, that’s not very easy to do. It took me a very long time to earn my feather crown. I’m happy to take you on my journey and teach you the same way I learned.

As with any new skill, practice makes “perfect-ish”. One of the easiest ways to learn feathers is to draw them first...over...and over...and over again. I purchased a small white dry erase board and some dry erase markers. Each evening before going to bed I would draw feathers for about 30 minutes or so. I didn’t care if they were good or bad, I was simply trying to get the rhythm from my hands into my head. By doing it before going to bed I was doing it in my sleep...literally!

If you don’t want to use a dry erase board, purchase a nice, smooth writing black pen and a drawing tablet and go to town. Fill in your pages with all shapes and sizes of feathers and challenge yourself to fill in spaces. You will find you are drawing feathers on everything including a steamy shower door, the program at church, the kids’ chalkboard, etc.

Once I felt comfortable with my feather rhythm, I grabbed some sacrifice panels and started playing with them in my machine. The best advice I can give you is don’t worry about making perfect feathers... I didn’t. If I made a bad feather I just covered it up with an added detail. As I say in class, “If you have an awkward moment, cover it with a distraction” and that’s exactly what I did.

As you go thru these lessons please feel free to change things so they work for YOU. I am only offering suggestions to get you on your way. Remember, you are the boss of your feathers!

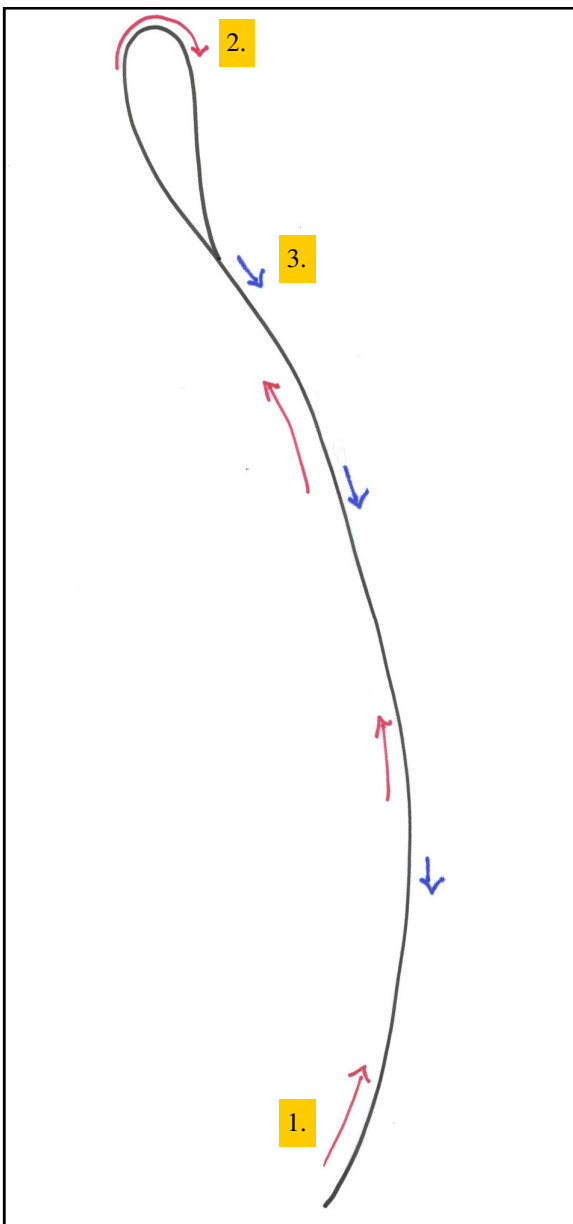


Creating a Basic Feather

Step One...Quilt Your Spine

When I start my feather design I like to create a base first. I call this the spine. Your spine can be any shape you wish. For our beginning basic feather we're going to start with a simple curved line ending with a Q-tip at the top.

When I do my feather spines I like to start quilting from the bottom, work my way up to the top, and then come back down again. You may start anywhere that works for you.

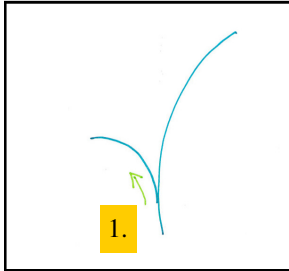


Let's start with a basic feather with a softly curved spine. I think curves add more motion and are a bit more "user friendly"...they hide awkward moments better.

1. I started my spine from the bottom and made a soft curve all the way up to the top.
2. To end my spine I added a Q-Tip.
3. I quilted all the way back down to the bottom retracing my line.

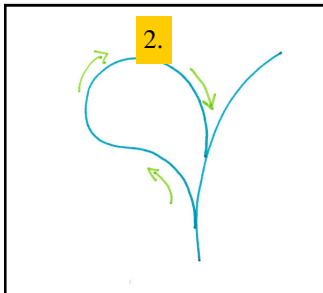
Step Two...Create Your First Feather

I do better learning a new rhythm or skill when I have a word association... words that click in my head to remind me of what to do. I have three words that I use for feathers.



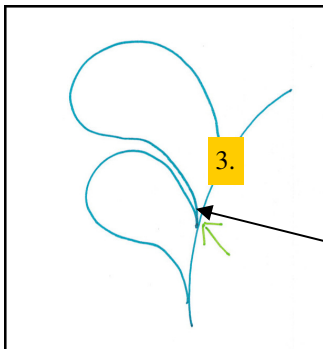
1. SCOOP. This is my first word.

After the spine has been quilted, and starting on either side of the spine, the first motion is scooping out. This defines the shape of the feather. *(think of scooping into an ice cream bucket).*



2. SWIRL. This is my second word.

Once I scooped out, it's time to swirl back and head back to the spine. The top should be fat and the base should be skinny. *(think of a fat head and skinny ankle).*



3. SPOON. This is my third word. Once I finish the first feather, I kick back up and start the next feather. *(Think of spoons stacked in a silverware drawer...they are close together but with a small gap in-between.)* By leaving a gap there's never a mistake.

It's important to remember that you kick right back up to start the next feather...don't travel up the spine to start the next one as you'll leave a huge flat space.

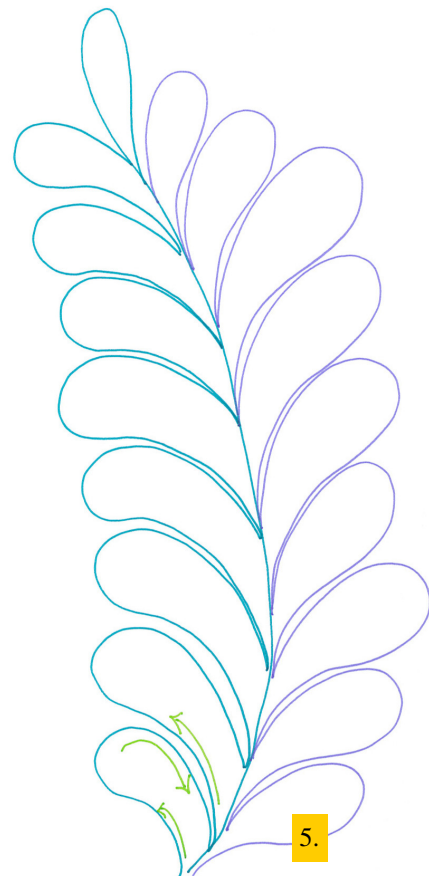


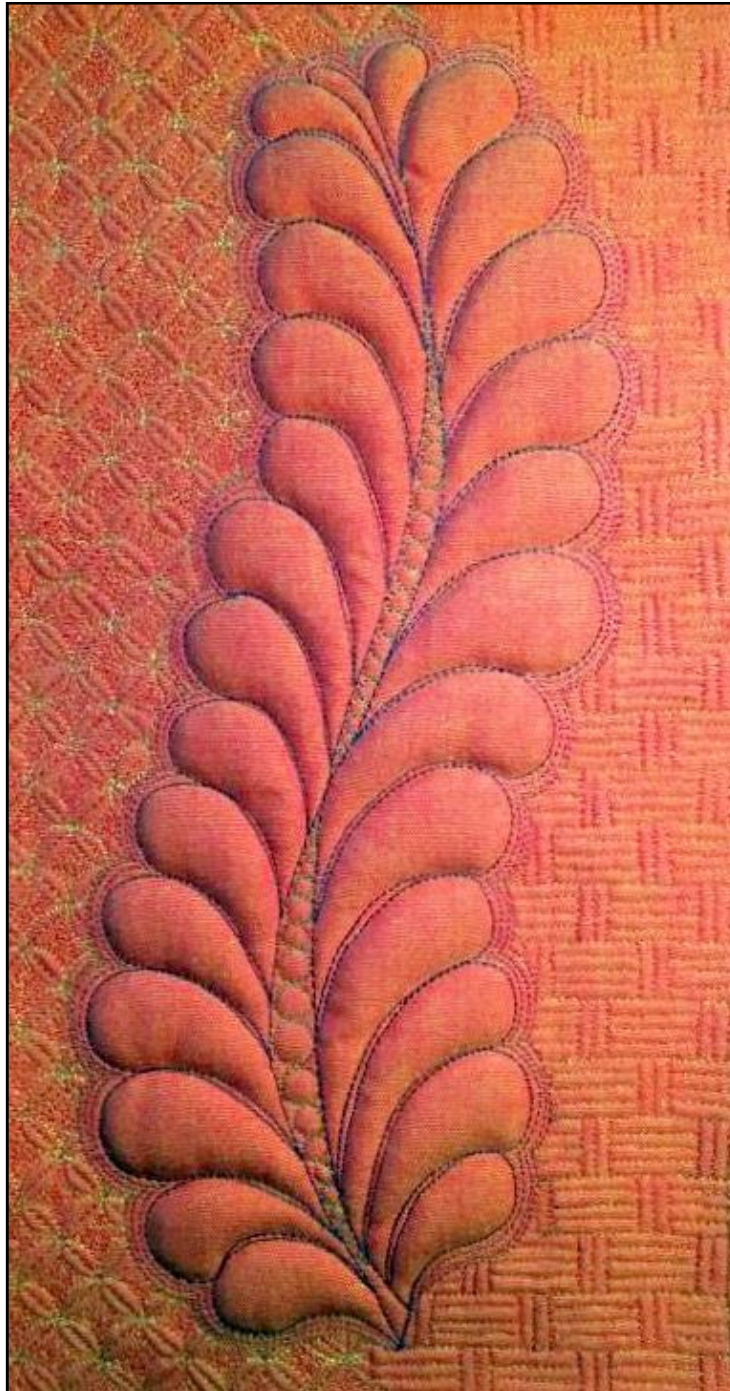
4. Continue to scoop, swirl and spoon your feathers until you complete an entire side.

5. Now travel back down to get to the bottom of the spine and start back on the other side.

When you travel back down to the bottom you can retrace the spine if you wish or you can do an echo on the outside of the feathers to add detail.

Another thing to keep in mind is most quilters do feathers better on one side than the other. It all depends on how your brain is wired!

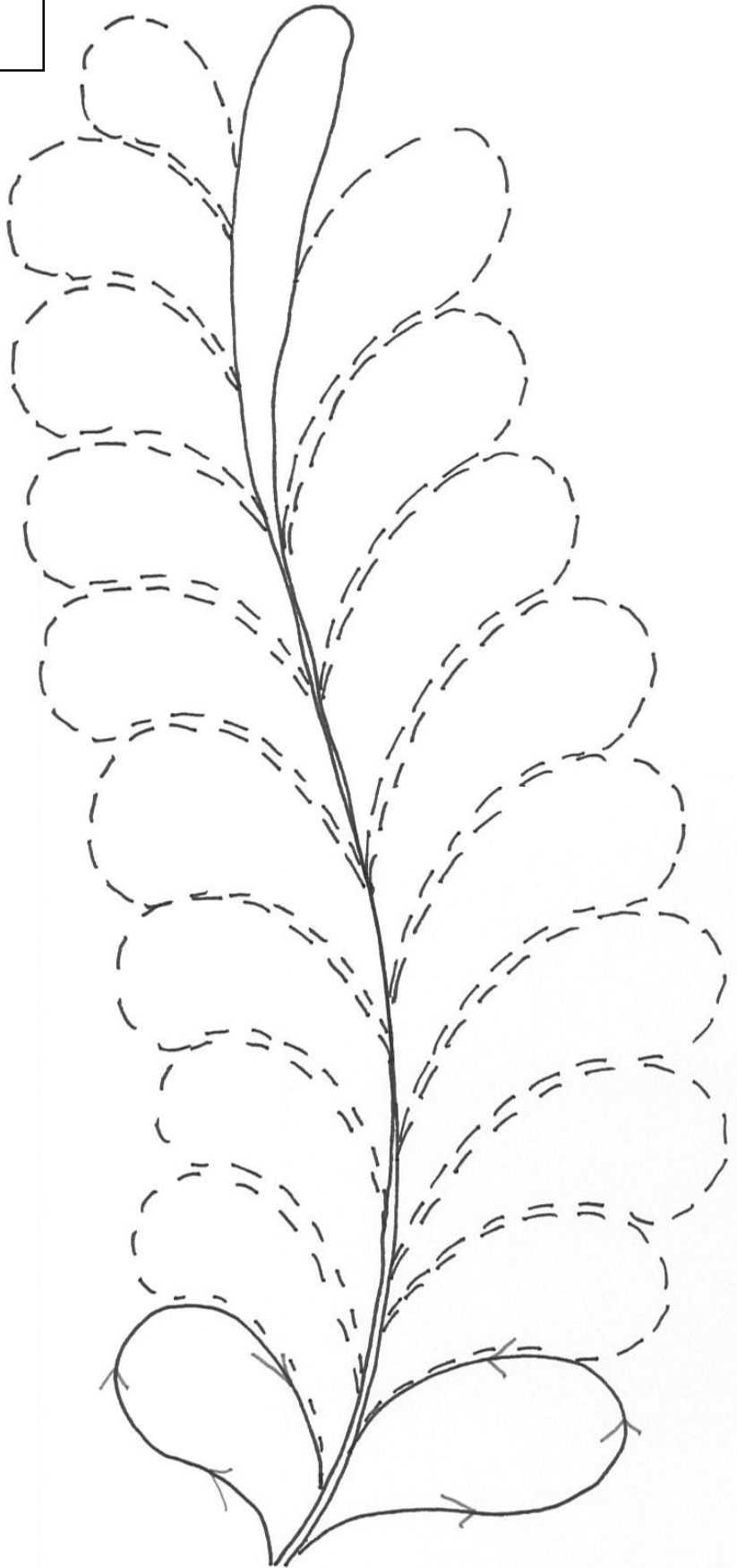




This is a very basic free form feather. I quilted the main feathers with Magnifico 40 wt. thread. Echo's and background quilting were quilted with Kimono Silk. Notice, too, that I missed the spine coming down and made a ribbon, filling it with pearls. (*Background fillers are Cathedral Window on the left and Basket Weave on the right*)

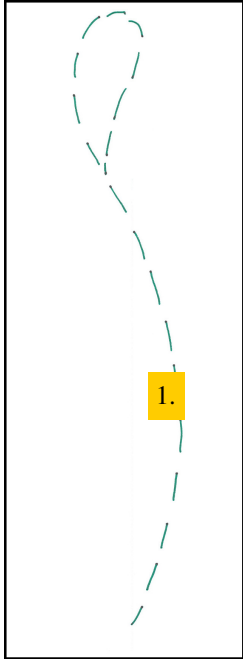
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PRACTICE

1. Starting from the bottom draw your spine first.
2. Starting on either the right or left side draw your first feather. Remember...scoop first, swirl back and hit the spine second and kick up and spoon the next feather.
3. Complete one side. Travel back down to the base of the spine and repeat for the other side.

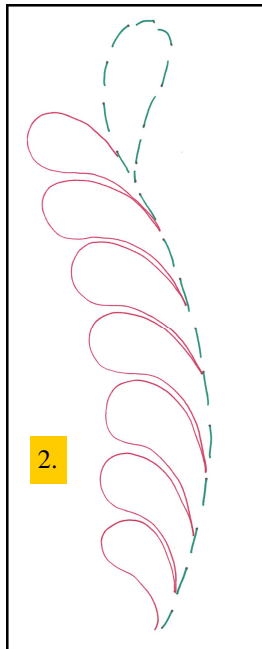


Single Line Spine

In previous instructions I talked about quilting your spine starting from the bottom, going up to the top and working your way back down again. This provides a double-stacked spine. What if you don't want that thick heavy line? You have options!



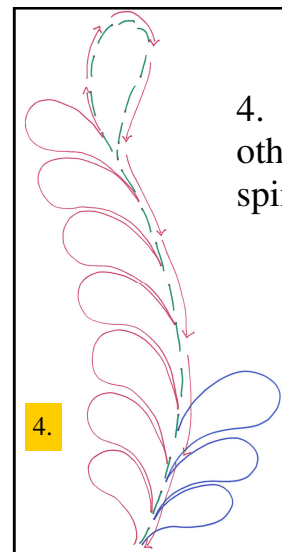
1. Draw your spine first, don't quilt it.



2. Quilt your feathers. Be sure that your feathers touch the drawn spine.



3. When you get to the top feather, quilt the Q-tip at the top and quilt the remainder of the spine all the way down to the bottom.

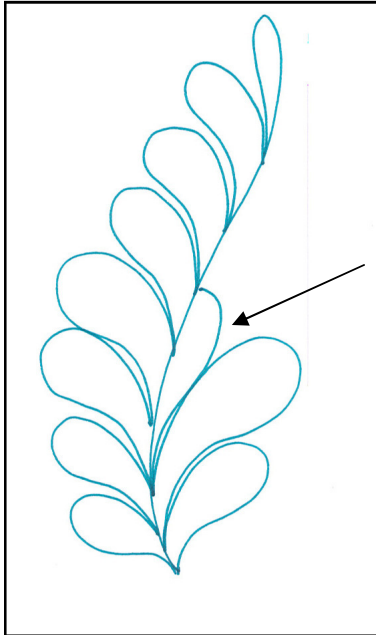


4. Now quilt the other side of the spine with feathers.



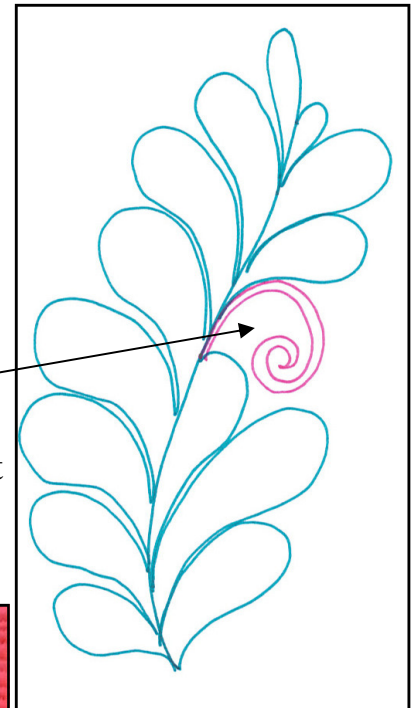
This is an example of a single line spine. I drew my spine first. I quilted the feathers on one side making sure I touched the drawn spine each time. When I got to the top I quilted the spine all the way down and then completed the feathers on the other side. Magnifico thread for the feathers, Hobbs Tuscany Wool batting and Dupioni silk fabric.

Awkward Moments & Distractions



Face it, none of us are perfect, and unless we're a robot or a machine, our quilting will never be perfect either. In my opinion perfection is a bit over-rated and boring!

When you have those "oops" or "awkward moments" try and refrain from immediately picking it out. Embellish it instead with a "distraction".



This is a very easy distraction! If you make a bad feather travel up your spine just a bit and "flip a Uey" and make a swirl. Be sure to miss your lines when you back out of it to make it more interesting and add detail. I use this swirl a lot not only for awkward moments but to just add a fun detail. They're also great for eating up space to get thru tight turns.

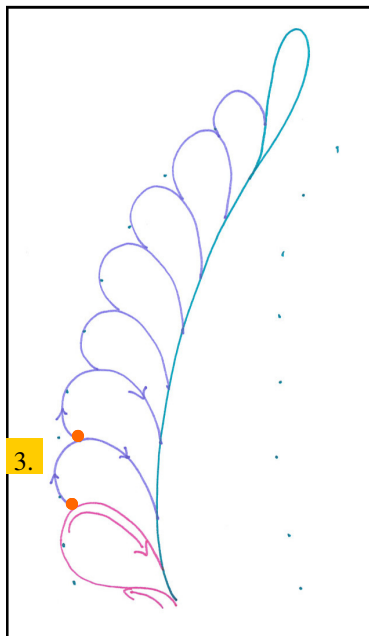
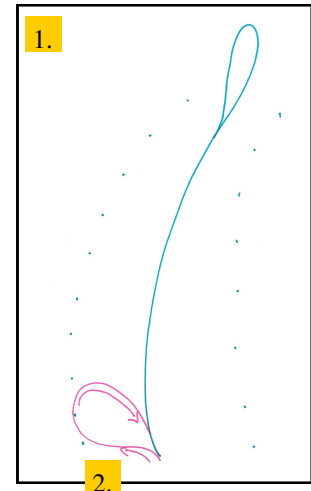


Marking Your Feathers

The unspoken “rule” for free form feathers is they need to be quilted without marking them first. Feathers should magically come out of your head and be easily quilted. I agree with that to a point but I also believe you should be able to mark them if you want.

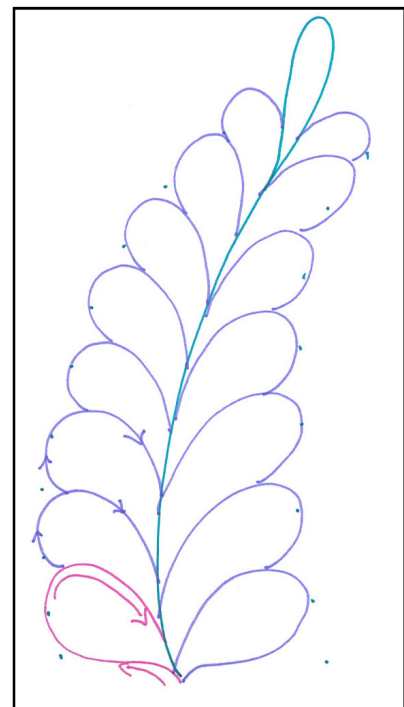
I mark a lot of the feathers for my class samples because they need to be “just so”. Since I’ve introduced this concept in my classes many students have taken comfort in having the option of being able to mark their feathers first... it sort of takes the fear out of it.

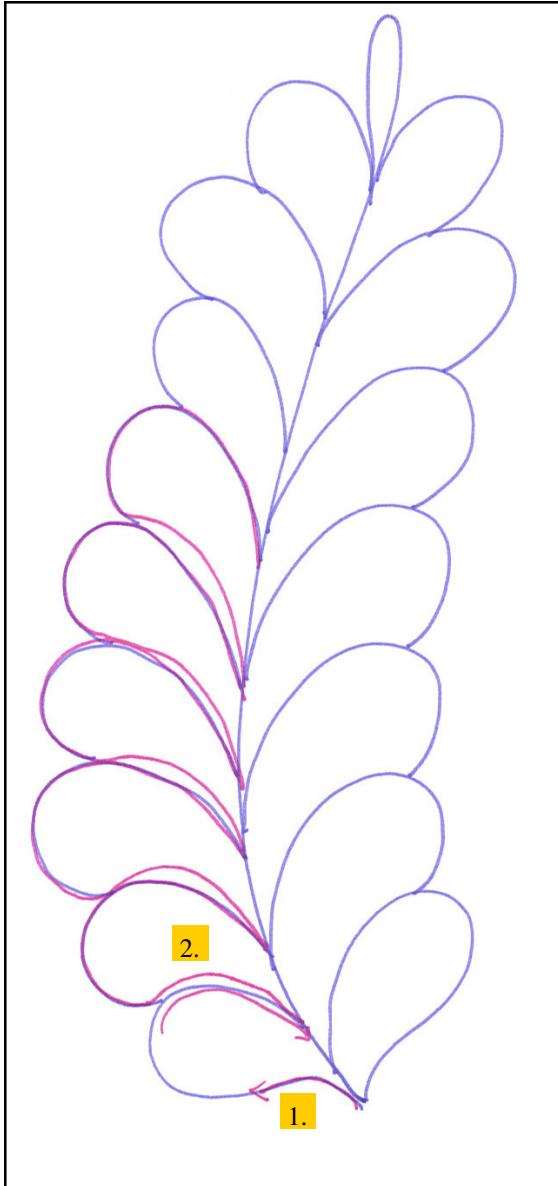
1. Mark your spine first. If it makes you feel more comfortable add dotted lines as a guide where you want your feathers to extend to.
2. Draw your first feather the same way you would quilt it with your scoop and swirl.



3. Draw your next feathers starting at the top of the hump and swirl back down. •

Draw each feather individually. By doing it in this fashion you end up with feathers that have a nice fat “top” and a pretty skinny ankle at the bottom.





Once all your feathers are marked, quilt the spine as you normally would.

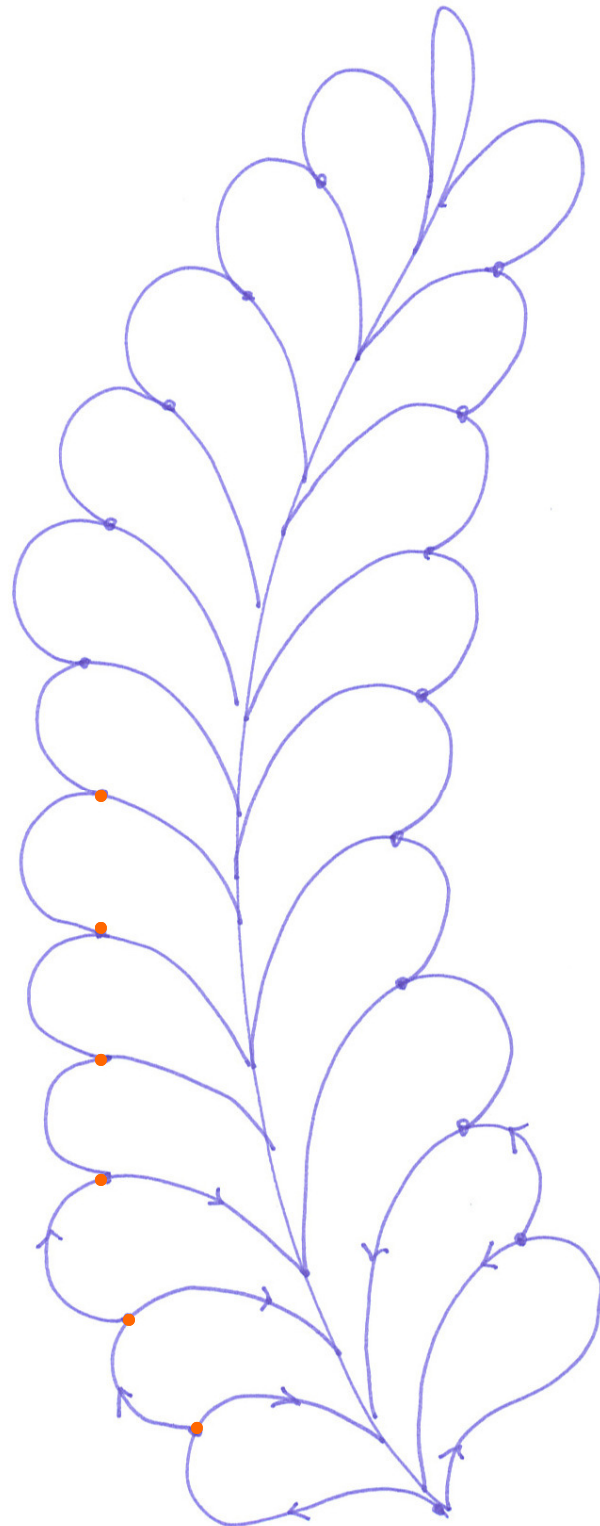
1. Quilt the first feather with your scoop and swirl.
2. When you kick back up to start your second feather spoon, leave a small gap above your marked line and then quilt on your marked line when you get to the top.

When you are filling in odd shapes and spaces with feathers, marking them first in this fashion is a life-saver.



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1. Starting from the bottom draw your spine first.
2. Starting on either the right or left side draw your first feather. Remember...scoop and swirl.
3. Starting at the top of the feather you just drew (the yellow circle), hook each feather in making a fat head and skinny ankle.



Divide & Fill

Shapes can often be difficult to fill with feathers especially when you have awkward corners... or no corners such as circles. I recommend that you take these shapes and divide them at least once and then mark your feathers to fill. When you get to the awkward corner make sure you fill it with a FAT feather...it fills the space better.

