

February 2008 Newsletter

Textiles 101 – Cutting on the Direction of the Grain

One basic in cutting and piecing that is often overlooked in quilting is the direction of the grain. If you have constructed clothing, you will know that all pieces are aligned and cut on the length of the grain to ensure proper drape. The length of the grain does not have the stretch that is evident on the width of the grain. If you tug on a piece of fabric, you will notice that the length of the grain has less give and stretch than the width. If you are piecing with an item like a jelly roll, all of those piece are cut on the width of the grain which creates additional stretch in the piece of fabric being sewn. Be careful when piecing with fabrics cut on the width because the stretch can cause distortion if pulled and tugged in the piecing process. If by contrast you are using a charm pack, lay out all of your fabrics on the length (tug on each piece and lay them out with the length running vertically), and seam them with all of the length grains running parallel to the seams into strips. Then as you seam the strips together you will be working on the width grain and the stretch on the fabric will allow you to more easily make corner seams and such. You are now working with the fabric and not against it in your piecing.

This is also true when attaching a border fabric, if you cut all of your border fabric on the length of the grain, you create less stretch in the finished edge. This does two things – first is creates more stability if you are having your quilt long arm quilted, and it also eliminates distortion (if you have also squared your quilt correctly before you attached the borders). Heirloom Patch kits include border fabrics that are cut on the length of the grain. This eliminates piecing the border (which looks better) and gives the stability to the finished quilt.