Now that you have all of your tools ready, we can begin making a hexagon!!

No matter what size hexagon you decided to make, cut a piece of fabric large enough to give yourself a generous 1/4 inch seam allowance! Be sure to punch a hole in your hexagon paper before you begin stitching.

Pin the paper to your fabric and cut a generous 1/4 inch seam allowance. Err to more seam allowance than less. It doesn't have to be precise or accurate at all, so eyeing it is perfectly fine.

A smaller seam allowance can work, but it can turn an easy job into a difficult one.

I didn't start out with these applique pins....with the nice white glass head.
I started with these little applique straight pins. They work, but as time went on they began to hurt my fingers. I splurged a whole $6 on the better glass head pins. Money well spent!

I've also seen some people use paper clips instead of pins. I tried it but decided I liked the pins much better. Truth be told, you don't need pins, but they really make the job easier, in my humble opinion. Try these options for yourself and do whatever works well for you!
Use a single strand of general purpose thread no longer than 18 inches or so. Run the thread over the Thread Heaven, thread the needle, and tie a knot at the end. A thread longer than 18 inches will likely just get caught on the pin and/or the hexagon corners.

Fold the top seam allowance over the paper and mitre fold the seam at the left so it fits the corner snugly. Bring your needle under the seam allowances and up thru the fabric near the point of the hexagon.

Hints:
* You may find it very helpful to pin the top seam allowance in place. I do this because it makes for a tighter seam and...after making lots and lots of these... releases the stress of holding the fabric from your hands. This gets to be a very real concern! After I made dozens and dozens of hexagons my hands began to hurt from the pressure of holding everything in place. Save yourself the hurt and use the pins!

* Don't bring the first stitch too close to the point of the hexagon because you'll get a wonky dunce-cap kinda point from it. Better to begin a bit lower!
Take two stitches at the top of the seam. With the second stitch, I catch the loop to make a knot. This will stop the thread from releasing the stitches so you don't have to constantly maintain pressure on the folded seams.
Bring the needle down a bit further and repeat with two more stitches, catching the loop on the second stitch as you did before.
Rotate the hexagon and mitre the next seam to the left. Take one or two running stitches to bring the needle across to the next point. Do not pierce the paper! These basting stitches should be made in the fabric only.
Stitch as before taking two stitches near the top, loop knot, then two more stitches a bit further down with another loop knot.
Continue until all six seams have been turned. Knot the thread and cut!
You can remove the pin.
I didn't need to use my thimble when making the hexagons, but if your fingers get sore, you certainly should.
One down.....that wasn't too hard, was it? They are just too cute!

You may feel all thumbs at first, but hang in there!! The thread *will* get caught on the corners of the hexagon or the pin. It just will. If you get frustrated, write me a note....I will sympathize with you! Just keep stitching!

*Prepare to become addicted!*  
(And yes....you can blame it all on me!)

In my next post, I will cover how to stitch the hexagons together.

Happy hexagons! Pam

Monday, September 26, 2011

**Hexagon Tutorial ~ Part One**
Hexagon Supplies

I am very happy to report that my hexagon quilt is now in the hands of Ronda, my very talented friend and most excellent quilter. Before I took the quilt top to her, I did take a quick photo so I can show you how it's progressing. Drum roll please.......... 

PWSC J3 - Elizabeth's Prairie Garden
This is the first project I've ever made using hexagons and I have to say that it is something I know I will do for the rest of my life! Those hexies are sooo cute and addictive!! Nearly every fabric I encounter I think would make into an adorable hexagon, so I have a constant running pile of fabric squares ready to work on. It takes only a few minutes, once you get the hang of making them, and before you know it, you've made enough to begin sewing them together. And.... just as everyone always says, they really are the most portable little project! A small bag of fabric squares, hexagon papers, needle, thread and scissors equates to many hours of sewing time.

So...let's get you started making hexies!
English Paper Piecing

Here are my recommendations for basic supplies:

Fabric swatches, hexagon papers, needles, general 50 or 60 weight sewing thread, silk thread, applique pins, Thread Heaven, thimble, needle threader, and either tweezers or hemostats.

There are lots of opinions about the "right" supplies to use. I will share my favorites with you and why they work well for me. You may have a different choice and that's just fine.

**Hexagon Papers**
I looked into many of the available template & paper hexagon options and chose to work with pre-cut papers by a company called Paper Pieces. There are many great options here and like so many quilting techniques, all are good...you just have to decide which is the right one for you. I didn't want to spend my time cutting my own papers...I wanted to spend it sewing. I chose to buy mine from Paper Pieces because they came in a wide array of sizes and pieces in the package and are very affordable. When choosing yours, one thing I would make sure of is that you can fold the sewn hexagons in half. This was critical for me when piecing them together. More about that later.
Hexagons come in a wide variety of sizes and the size refers to the measurement of one of the six sides of the hexagon, not the width. I chose to work with a 1 inch hex, which measures about 1 3/4 inches across. The size was large enough so it would be easy to handle and shows a nice amount of fabric. I also punched a hole in the center of my hexagons (before sewing them) so it would be easier to remove the papers when it was time....glad I did that, too! Paper hexagons are available Here.

**Fabric**

It's no surprise that you'll want to use 100% cotton fabrics, but depending on the size of the hexagon you're making, and the project itself, you may want to choose certain types of prints. If you're making really small hexagons, then you'll want to choose small prints. When making my quilt, I stayed away from tone-on-tones that read one color and looked for fabrics that had a cute print or multiple colors. If I were making a large super scrappy quilt, then I'd probably use anything and everything.

Regular readers of my blog know that I love to starch my fabrics before cutting them, but I don't recommend using starched fabric when piecing hexagons. I did piece several with starched fabric and it was harder to push the needle through the fabric. Not so bad when you're sewing one or two, but awful when sewing a couple of hundred! I got great results without the starch.

**Thread**

I recommend using two different threads - one for making the hexagon and a different one for piecing them together.

When sewing your hexagon around the paper, use any regular or unwanted (rarely used color, etc) 50 or 60 weight thread! All you're doing is basting the fabric to the paper (thus taking on the hexagon shape) so the thread will never be seen. It won't be removed either. So...empty your bobbins, use odd colors, buy what's on sale.

When sewing your hexagons together, I highly recommend using silk thread. Silk thread is strong and very thin. Your stitches sink into the fabric and are nearly invisible. This is very important as you don't want your stitches to be seen on your quilt top. I use it for needle-turn applique as well. I like using YLI silk thread (although there are many good brands out there) and have it in two colors, although it's available in a variety of colors, but I don't think it's necessary to purchase lots colors. My favorite colors are taupe #235 and black # BLK. I pieced all of my hexs together using just the taupe color and it worked just fine. Silk threads are a bit pricey, however, a spool lasts a long time. For example, I made 72 needle-turn basket blocks and pieced more than 200 hexagons before I emptied one spool. There are some pitfalls to be aware of when sewing with silk thread and I'll help you thru those in future posts.

Use a single strand of thread when sewing the hexagons around the paper and when piecing them together.

**Needles**

When you're sewing the hexagon around the paper, use whatever needle feels comfortable to
you. At this point it's not as important to pick a particular needle. For general use, my favorite needle is an embroidery needle, size 8, by Piecemaker.

When sewing your hexs together, it's very important to have the proper needle. Choose a small needle (small in diameter not necessarily length) that will pierce a small hole for tiny stitches and work well with the silk thread. There are many types that will do this... straw needles, milliners needles, and my personal favorite... an applique needle, size 10 Gold'nGlide (gold eye) by John James. Try them until you find the right one for you!

Once you find a needle you like, I do recommend buying a package or two because your needles dull from use against the papers. You'll notice when it's a bit of a struggle to sew and you'll want a new sharp needle.

**Thread Heaven**
Thread Heaven is a wonderful helper with any type of thread. (It's the little blue square in the photo.) It's filled with a substance that coats your thread so it's less likely to knot and tangle. I use it on most every type of thread, but it's very important to use it for the silk thread which wants to twist and tangle more than cotton thread. I've never had a problem with silk threads tangling since using Thread Heaven. It's very inexpensive (about $4) and lasts a very long time.

**Applique Pins**
These pins are very short pins made to stay out of your way when appliqueing. You can use a regular size pin when sewing your hexagon around the paper, but the shorter applique pins lessen the chance your thread will become hooked on it. Another inexpensive tool that will last many years!

**Thimble**
I'm not a person who sews with a thimble very often, but I guarantee you will need a thimble when piecing the hexs together!! I tried sewing without one for awhile and had a nice hole in my finger to show for it. Invest in a comfortable thimble. That doesn't necessarily mean lots of money. My favorite (and only) thimble is the leather one shown in the photo (the other one is an antique). It's soft, nicely broken in and costs around $5.

**Needle Threader**
This is an optional notion. Technically, you don't need to have one, although you probably have several lying around. We will use this when I show you a great hint about working with silk thread.

**Tweezers or Hemostats**
We'll use either of these to easily remove the papers from our hexagons.

Gather your supplies and get ready for my next post where I will teach you how to sew the fabric around the hexagon. Please ask for all of these supplies at your favorite quilt shop! They are usually happy to order whatever items you need.