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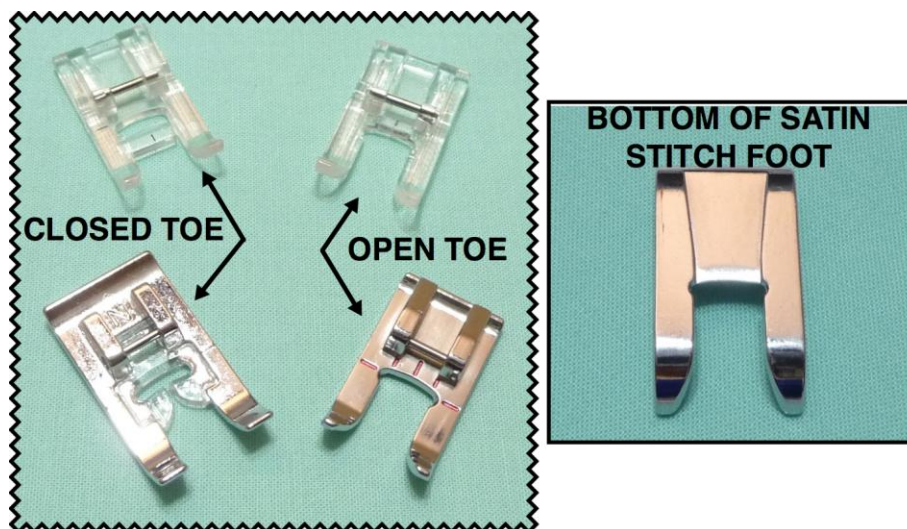
Basic Applique with a Zig Zag Satin Stitch

In this tip sheet you'll find some nitty gritty tips for stitching basic, satin stitch style appliques without using a fusible product to secure the appliqué to the base fabric. Fusible appliqué is certainly an option. However, the method presented here uses a satin style stitch to cover the raw edges and securely attach the appliqué piece. With this method the appliqué is durable and stays in place without being "glued" with a fusible product. Some fabrics become stiff when using a fusible. In addition, fabrics such as silk and home décor fabrics treated to resist water and stains may be difficult to fuse. In my opinion skipping the fusible allows for a greater variety of fabric choices, giving you more versatility along with a beautifully finished appliqué!

I like to call this method manual appliqué as opposed to auto appliqué. Manual appliqué simply means you are manually guiding the fabric as you stitch. Auto appliqué generally refers to machine embroidered designs digitized for an appliqué stitch. In both cases, you'll commonly see a short length (compact) zig zag stitch used to cover the raw edge and finish the edge of the appliqué.

With just a little bit of practice you'll find that manual style appliqué is quite easy. This method allows you to stitch many shapes in any size you choose. It's a technique that's possible on both mechanical and computerized machines. All you need is an ordinary zig zag stitch with the ability to adjust the stitch length and stitch width. With manual appliqué and adjustments for stitch width and length you are in control of every aspect of the finished look. The more you practise this technique the better and faster you will get. We'll concentrate on appliqué with outer and inner curves such as the flower shape in this sample.

Let's begin by talking about specialty presser feet for appliqué and basic machine set up. Below you see a variety of feet commonly used for appliqué. These feet may be labeled satin stitch, decorative stitch, or appliqué accessory feet, and are usually found in two forms, open toe and closed toe. When to use which one depends on a variety of circumstances. They are often interchangeable. I'll repeat my standard advise, "To test is best." If your fabric is relatively firm and stable you can probably opt for the open toe version. The open toe certainly provides more visibility. However, if your fabric is thin or slippery you may need the closed toe version. This foot puts a bit more pressure on the fabric at the specific spot where the stitch is formed. One thing all of these feet have in common is a slight groove or indentation on the bottom side. This runs all the way from the front to the back of the foot and allows the bulkier style of satin length zig zag stitches to easily flow under the presser foot.



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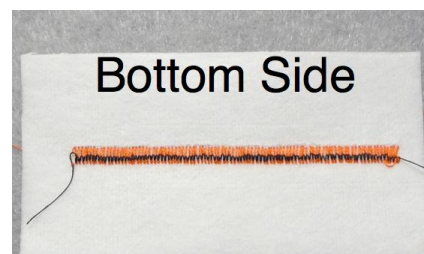
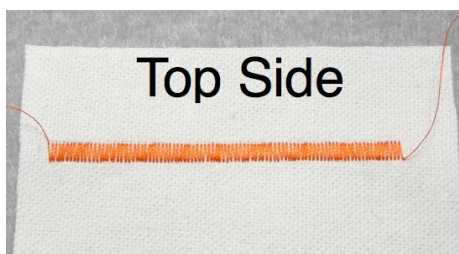
One caution, after using this foot for appliqué you may be tempted to keep it on for sewing regular seams. That will likely be a mistake. The channel under the foot doesn't allow for maximum contact with fabric layers in a standard seam. Of course there are some exceptions to this rule but if you use this foot and your stitches do not form properly or your fabric seems to slip and slide as you sew, the presser foot may just be the culprit. Switch to your ordinary presser foot for best results.

Setting Up the Sewing Machine:

- Attach your preferred appliqué foot to the machine.
- Begin with a new needle suitable for your fabric. I use a sharp needle for woven fabrics and a stretch needle when stitching an appliqué on knits.
- Clean any lint build up from the bobbin case area of the machine.
- Thread needle with decorative thread to match or contrast with the appliqué. I recommend using machine embroidery thread on top. It is relatively thin, very smooth, and comes in many colors. [Polyester](#) is my preferred choice. It's strong and colorfast. Your thread can match your appliqué fabric or your base fabric. When the thread matches the appliqué fabric the effect is subtle and any inconsistency in the satin stitching is less noticeable. When thread contrasts with the appliqué it pops off the fabric making the appliqué very prominent. You'll notice this in the final stitch sample. It's your choice, subtle or prominent. I suggest making a test sample of each one. **Note:** I used contrast color thread for better visibility in my appliqué example. The black thread in the bobbin is just for the purpose of illustration.
- Wind a bobbin to match needle thread or use bobbin weight thread. [Bobbin Weight Thread](#) is commonly used for machine embroidery and available in black and white. This is a good choice if you are stitching many different appliqué pieces in different colors. I also like Mettler brand 60 Weight Cotton thread for the bobbin. Simply use black bobbins with dark top threads, and or white bobbin with light top threads, and only change the top thread for various appliqué colors.



- Select a zig zag stitch. Set for a satin style stitch by decreasing the stitch length and adjusting the width to a medium setting. For most appliqué stitching I prefer a stitch width of 3 to 3.5 mm and a stitch length of 0.3mm. Proper satin stitch tension is achieved when you see approximately 2/3 of the top thread showing on the bobbin side of the stitch. Loosen the upper tension by decreasing the default number for your machine by 1 to 1 & 1/2. When properly adjusted you will see one third of the bobbin thread and two thirds of the top thread showing on the bottom side.



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Satin Stitching Tips:

- A satin stitch is a short, dense zig zag stitch. Adjust stitch length and width so it is appropriate for the size and shape of your appliqué. I usually use a width ranging from 2-4 around the appliqué shape. The length should be set as close as possible. If the stitch is not passing easily under the presser foot you may need to lengthen the stitch. Always do a test sample first to determine the proper width and length. This stitch density should be similar to that of a buttonhole stitch.
- If you have presser foot pressure adjustment on your machine on use one *lighter* than normal pressure. This will allow you to "drive" the fabric more easily through the machine. Select pivot function if available. Note: Pivot function is an option control that tells the machine to slightly raise the presser foot each time you pause stitching. This makes it easier to negotiate corners and curves.

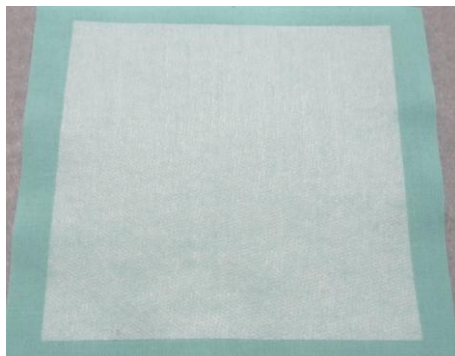


- Stabilize your fabric before stitching by adding a layer of tear away stabilizer to the wrong side of your base fabric.



Stitching the Appliqué:

- If your appliqué fabric is lightweight consider adding a layer of fusible interfacing to the wrong side. For cotton and cotton blends I like an interfacing designed for cuffs and collars called [ShirTailor®](#) by Pellon. Using a fabric marker, trace appliqué shape onto your desired fabric.



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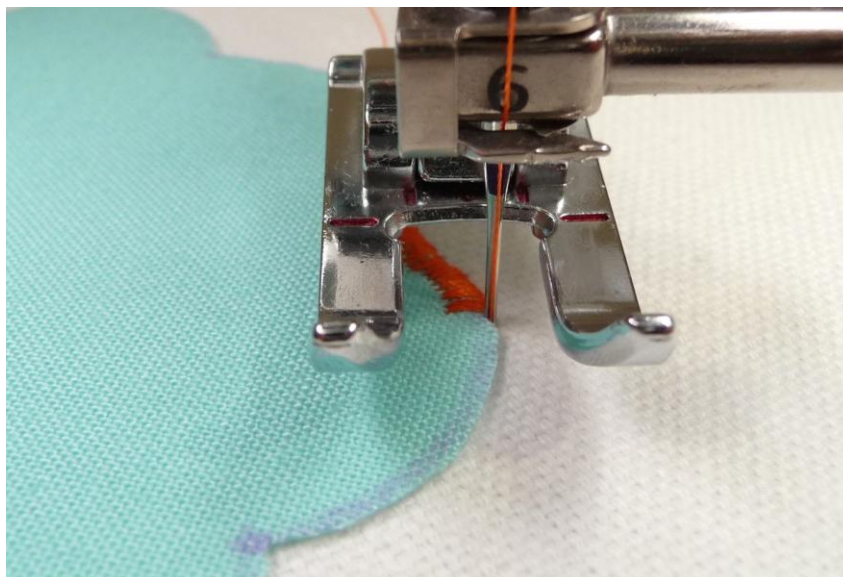
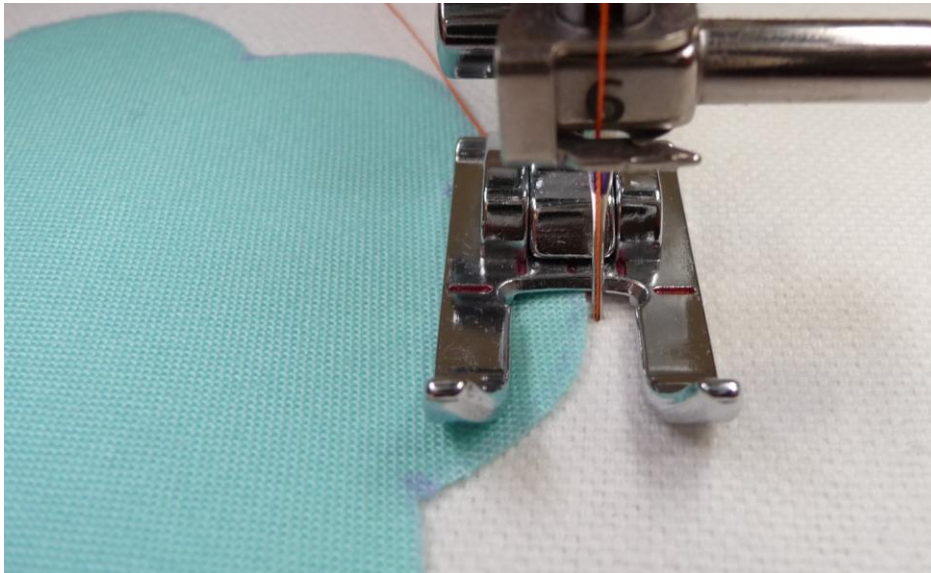


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- Carefully cut out the appliqué shape and position on your base fabric. For washable items you can temporarily secure the piece with washable glue stick or fabric glue, placing the glue in an area that will not be stitched through.

Tips for satin stitching the curves:

- Begin your stitching along an outside or convex curve. Try to select an area that is as broad as possible. This gives you a bit of time before you have to pivot and adjust as you maneuver the curve. Start stitching with the right hand swing of the zig zag stitch just outside the raw edge of the appliqué. It may be necessary to pivot the fabric often while stitching outside curves. For convex curves you want to always pivot with the needle on the **outside** edge of the appliqué. As you gain experience you will find yourself driving the fabric through the machine with your satin stitch sweeping across the outer edge as you automatically pivot without frequent stopping.

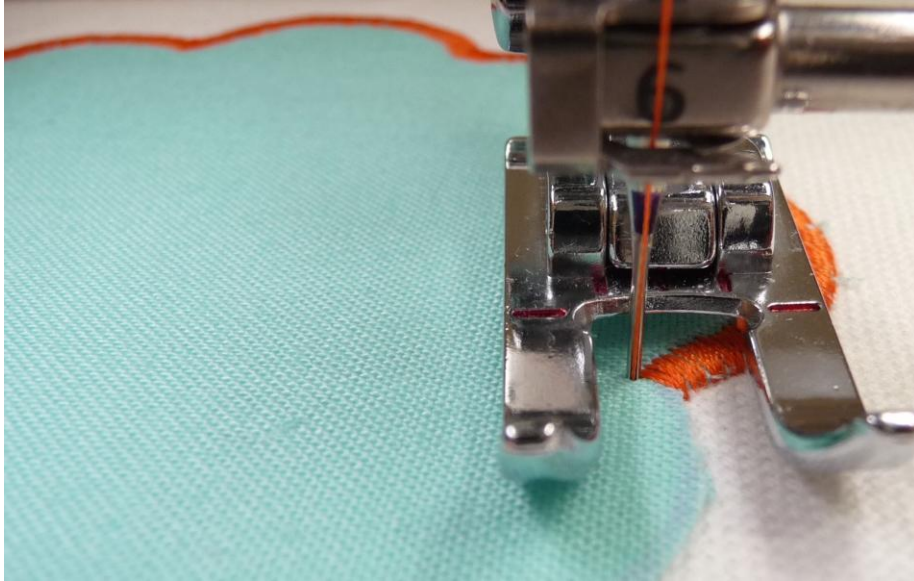


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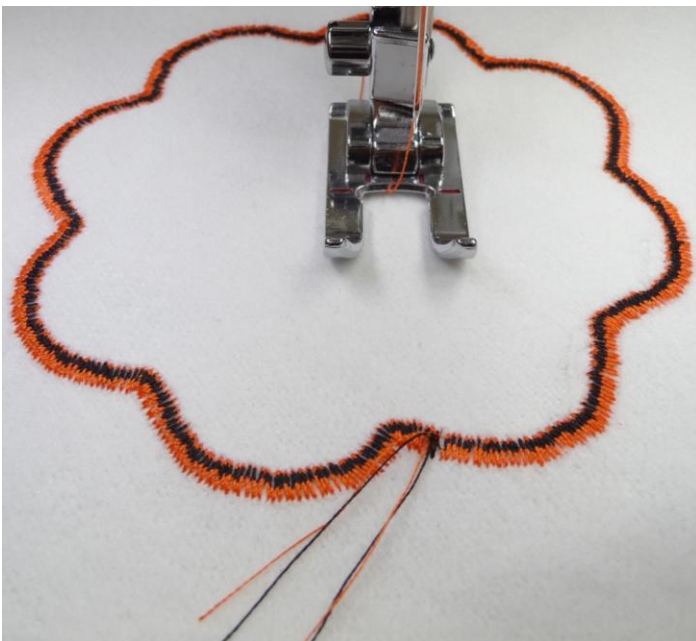


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- On inside curves you will need to pivot with the needle on the **inside** of the appliqué shape. For tight inner curves it will be necessary to stitch from left to right, having the left hand swing fall into the same location several times. This helps to fill in the inside curve. Follow the same process as above to complete the curve.



- At the end of your stitching overlap by one or two stitches. For the cleanest finish I prefer to leave a few inches of needle and bobbin thread at the end, pull both threads to the wrong side, and hand tie a knot to secure. This leaves a beautiful look on the topside of your appliqué.



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Now that you know the basics . . . where can you find shapes to turn into appliqué?

With the internet and search engines it's an easy task to find simple shapes. That's the key word here, I would advise sticking with simple shapes until you are quite comfortable with the stitching process. Look for coloring book type images to start. Of course you can find many commercial patterns for appliqué too. Above all, you'll enjoy stitching appliqué on garments, crafts, and home décor. Use plain or fancy fabric and feel free to dress up the appliqué with trim, buttons, or decorative stitching. You'll have fun creating your own original appliqué masterpieces along the way!

Options and Ideas:

One favorite source for appliqué patterns is my cookie cutter collection! In fact the sample you see in this tip sheet is from this simple flower shaped cookie cutter. Wouldn't it be fun to make a matching adult and children's apron using cookie cutter appliqué shapes for decoration? You can plan a cookie baking party and wear your matching aprons while baking cookies to match!!!

