

12 Surface stitches for hand embroidery

These are some basic stitches used in surface embroidery. There are many more which you will find online in my [stitch dictionary](#)

Back Stitch



Back stitch is an old and adaptable stitch which can be used as a delicate outline or as a foundation in composite stitches, such as [Pekinese stitch](#) and [Whipped back stitch](#)

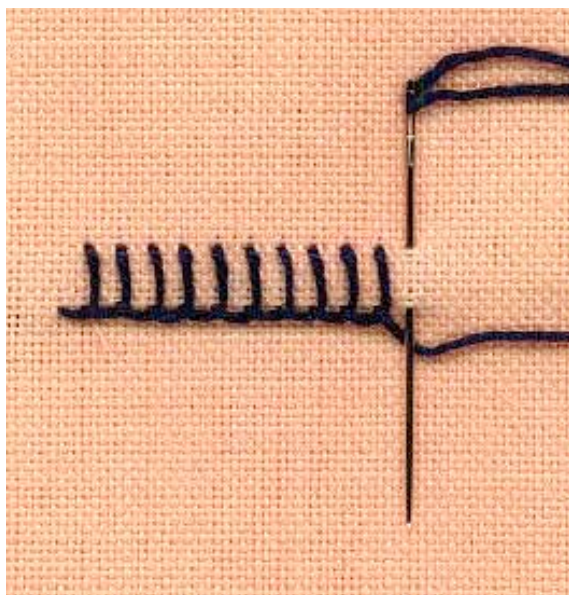
If the stitches are worked in small and even manner they will follow the line of a curve.

To start this stitch bring the thread up from the back of the fabric on the line that you want to create. Make a small backward stitch through the fabric.

Bring the needle through the fabric a little in front of the first stitch and still on the line. Pull the thread through the fabric. Make the second stitch backward, bringing the needle out a little in front of the second stitch and still on the line.

Repeat this movement and continue sewing in such a manner along the line.

Buttonhole/Blanket stitch



This stitch is worked from left to right over two imaginary lines.

Bring the thread out on the lower line, insert the needle in position in the upper line making a straight downward motion and then loop the thread under the needle point. Pull the needle through the fabric to form a loop and repeat this process along the line.

By altering the lengths of the upright stitches buttonhole can be both decorative and practical. It is an ideal stitch to use as a seam decoration in crazy quilting as the spines can be further decorated with [detached chain](#), [french knots](#), [colonial stitch](#) or beads.

Chain stitch



Chain stitch is also known as tambour stitch and point de chainette. Chain stitch is one of the oldest of the decorative stitches and is the basis of a large group of stitches.

Chain stitch is simple to work.

Bring the needle up through the fabric and hold the thread with the left thumb.

Insert the needle back into where it first came out.

Take the needle through the fabric bringing the point of the needle out a short space along the line to be stitched.

With the thread wrapped under the needle point pull the needle through the fabric.

Chevron stitch



Chevron Stitch is worked from left to right on two imaginary parallel lines.

Guide lines can be marked using a quilters pencil or water dissolvable pens.

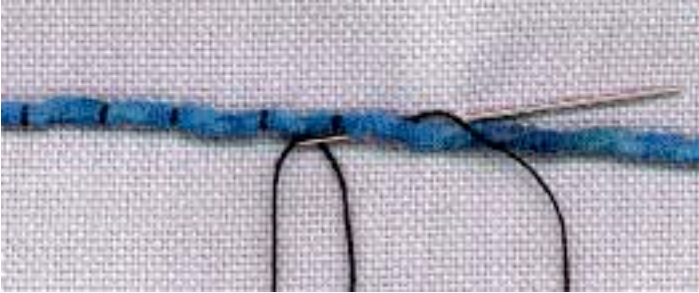
Bring the thread out through the fabric on the left of the lower imaginary line.

Insert the needle a little to the right on the same line, and with the needle emerging at the middle make a small stitch.

Take the needle diagonally up and insert on the upper imaginary line and make a small stitch a little to the left, take it across to the right and insert, bringing it once again out in the middle. Work this way along the row alternating up and down.

Since Chevron stitch has a strong geometrical construction it does not follow curves well unless they are very gradual. Rows of Chevron stitch worked closely together produce a lattice effect. An isolated stitch such as [French knot](#), or a bead can be placed in the centre to further decorate the filling.

Couching



Medieval embroiderers made full use of couching to be economical with expensive threads, such as gold thread, on the surface of the work. It is used, to this day, to attach threads which are too thick, or textured to pass through the foundation fabric. The term is from the French word 'coucher', which means to lay down.

Couching is extremely simple to work. Work with the fabric stretched in an embroidery hoop or frame.

To commence bring the heavy thread up from the back of the fabric with a large eyed needle. The surface thread is laid on the fabric, and then anchored by a second finer thread.

Small, straight stitches are taken over the thick thread and back through the fabric. Work along the thick thread until you have completed the line.

Take the heavy thread to the back of the fabric with a large needle and secure both ends of the heavy thread by using a few small stitches. Do not clip the heavy thread too close, otherwise it will pop up to the surface of the embroidery.

Cretan stitch



For centuries women on the island of Crete, have used this stitch to decorate clothing. Hence the name.

Cretan stitch can be worked with the stitches spaced apart in an open manner, or when worked closed a plait forms down the centre. It can be worked along two parallel lines or within a shape.

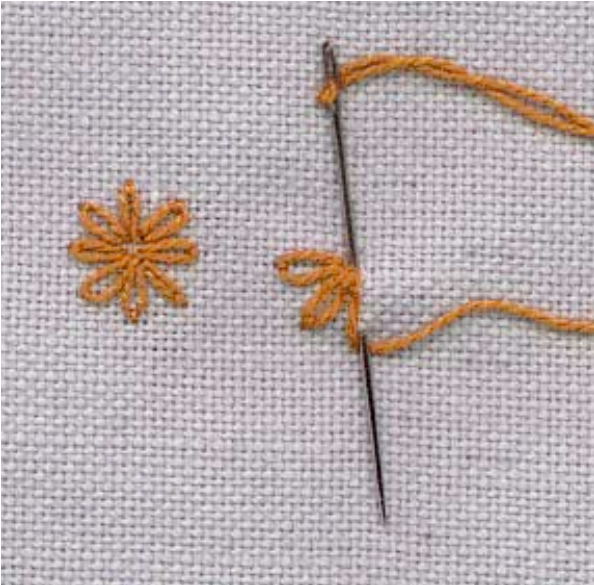
Bring the needle up through the fabric at the beginning of the line. Move along slightly, make a small stitch by taking the needle through the fabric, while pointing the needle to the centre. Keeping the thread under the needle.

Bring the needle out after making this small stitch.

Move to the lower line and repeat the action. Make sure that with each small stitch the thread is caught under the needle before the needle pulls the thread through. Continue working across the design until the shape or line is filled.

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Detached chain (Lazy daisy)



This stitch is often worked in a circle to form a flower motif and as a result known as lazy daisy stitch.

This stitch can also be worked either with a double or triple loop to form more complex designs.

To work this stitch bring the needle up through the fabric and hold the thread with the left thumb.

Insert the needle back into where it first came out.

Take the needle through the fabric bringing the point of the needle out a short space away.

With the thread wrapped under the needle point pull the needle through the fabric. Fasten the loop made with a small stitch.

Feather stitch



When working this stitch it is useful to imagine 4 parallel lines or mark the fabric with guide-lines using a quilters pencil or water dissolvable marker.

Bring the needle out at the top of the line.

Insert the needle a little to the right and make a small stitch downwards so that the needle point appears on the centre line.

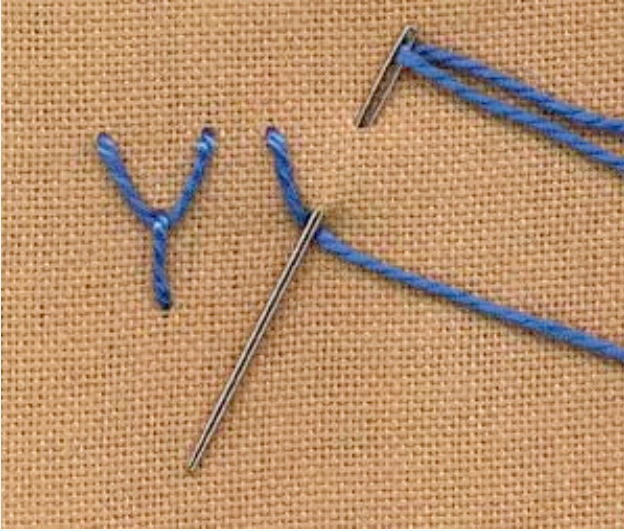
Keeping the thread under the needle point pull the thread through the fabric to make the stitch.

Next insert the needle a little to the left on the same level and make a small stitch downwards so that the needle point comes out on the centre line. Keeping the thread under the needle point, pull the thread through the fabric to make the stitch. Work these movements alternatively.

On crazy quilting the use of beads, or arrangements of [detached chain](#), or [French knots](#) at the top of each spine makes this stitch popular. Changing the spacing and number of spines can create ornate patterns and this stitch is very effective worked in hand dyed multicolored thread

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Fly stitch



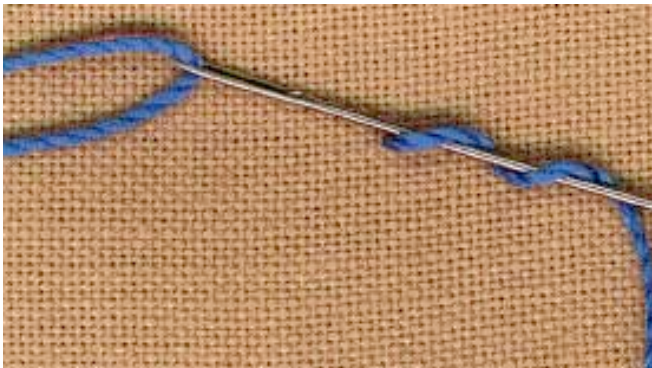
Fly stitch is made up of a V-shaped loop tied down by a vertical straight stitch.

Bring the thread through the fabric at the top and to the left, of the line that is to be worked.

Hold the thread down with the left thumb and insert the needle a small space, level and to the right of where the thread first came out.

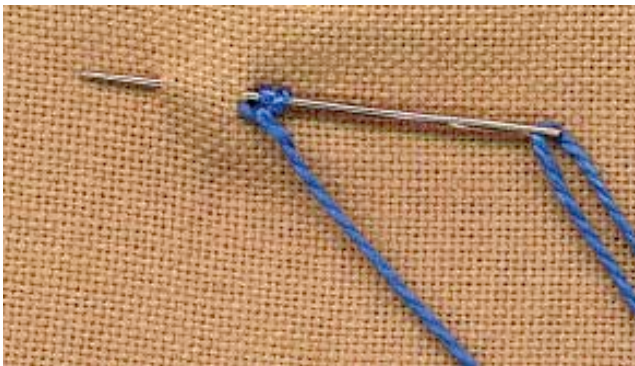
Make a small stitch downwards to the center. With the thread wrapped under the needle, pull it through the fabric and secure it in position with a small loop.

French Knot



A TIP: Some people find it better to work the knot with the fabric stretched in an embroidery hoop using a chenille or straw needle.

Bring the needle out through the fabric and holding the thread taut and flat to the fabric with your left thumb. With your right hand twist the needle round the thread twice.



Still holding the thread firmly take the needle back into the fabric one or two threads away from where the stitching thread emerges from the fabric and insert the needle.



At this point it is sometimes helpful to brush the knot down the shaft of the needle with the nail of your left thumb so that it is sitting firmly on the fabric.

Pull the thread through to the back of the fabric. You have completed the knot!

The weight of the thread will determine the size of the finished stitch.

Herringbone stitch



This stitch is worked from left to right along parallel lines. Guide-lines can be marked using a quilters pencil or a water dissolvable pen.

Bring the needle out on the left-hand side of the line to be worked.

Make a small stitch on the upper line which points to the left. Keep the thread below the needle and pull it through the fabric. Insert the thread on the lower line a little to the right and make a small stitch which points to the left. Pull the needle through the fabric with the thread above the needle.

Stem stitch



Stem stitch can follow a curve well when worked with small stitches.

Work from left to right taking small regular stitches along the line. The thread is kept to the right of the needle after picking up a small piece of material. This means that it always emerges from the left side of the previous stitch.

Bring the thread up from the back of the fabric on the line you want to stitch.

Make a stitch forward and bring the needle up, a little to the back of the first stitch.

Pull the thread through the fabric.

Make the second stitch forward, bringing the needle out a little to the back of the second stitch.

Repeat this back and forth movement along the line.