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May 24, 2014 by Eileen Bergen [Leave a Comment](#)

How to Print on Fabric



Picture on Fabric

A great way to express your creativity is by printing on fabric instead of on paper. Using do more than just make t-shirts – you can branch out into other craft projects, like decorated ribbons, quilting squares and much more.

However, the package instructions that come with [Bubble Jet Set](#) are pretty sketchy. It took a lot of trial and error to get results I was pleased with; but it was well worth the effort!

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Looking for Something?



The instructions say to use only 100% cotton or silk but I have printed successfully on other fabrics. If you're adventuresome, experiment. The following crafts tips will help you produce great results from the start.

How Bubble Jet Products Work

It's helpful to understand how the Bubble Jet products work in order to get the best results.

The steps are:

- Cut fabric;
- Soak in Bubble Jet Set
- Hang to dry;
- Adhere to backing;
- Print;
- Rinse with [Bubble Jet Rinse](#);
- Dry;
- Incorporate your custom-printed fabric into your project.

[Caution: If you have any printer (the newer Epsoms included) which uses pigmented inks instead of dye-based inks, Bubble Jet Set will not work. The chemicals in Bubble Jet Set are designed to react with dye-based inks.]

1. Cut Fabric

The maximum width of your custom-printed fabric is determined by the paper tray of your printer, i.e. 8 1/2 inches unless you have a large format printer. However the maximum length is determined by the printer's software.

Using the banner setting, I could print a strip up to 504 inches long! Check the print dialogue box to see what your printer will handle. Always leave at least a 1/4 inch margin for hemming. There's no point in printing to the edge and losing part of your design to hemming and trimming.

Generally, you should choose white or cream fabric with a tight weave in order to show your design to its best advantage. However, if you want an airy look, try a looser weave.

If you want to print on colored fabric, remember that an ink jet printer doesn't print white. So any white areas of your design will be the color of the fabric.

2. Soak in Bubble Jet Set

Soaking your cut fabric in Bubble Jet Set; allows it to absorb the chemicals that will react with the ink molecules and bond them to the fabric.

Heavier fabrics will absorb more. Using lightweight pima cotton broadcloth, I get about seventy 8 1/2 by 11 inch printable fabric sheets per bottle. A heavier cotton gabardine yields about fifty.

Shake Bubble Jet Set; well and pour a thin layer into a flat pan which is wider than your fabric strips. Wear rubber gloves and work in a well-ventilated area; remember you're working with chemicals here.



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Lay the first strip (or one end of the banner) into the liquid and press to be sure it is thoroughly covered. Add more Bubble Jet Set; and press more fabric into the liquid. Repeat until all your fabric is covered with Bubble Jet Set.

Let sit for five minutes.

3. Hang to Dry

This is a time to be gentle. You don't want to remove the reactive chemicals from your fabric strips. Do not wring. Do not dry in a clothes dryer. Your fabric strips **must** be hung to drip dry.

To capture and reuse excess Bubble Jet Set, place flat pans under the clothesline. Hang your fabric to dry.

Whatever Bubble Jet Set; is not absorbed or lost to evaporation can be poured back into the bottle and saved for your next project.

Over time, the chemicals will lose potency; so be sure to test any new project for colorfastness before printing all your fabric.

4. Adhere to Backing

The label directions say to iron the treated fabric onto the shiny coated side of a piece of freezer paper. I didn't have much success with that, but read that the same company which makes the Bubble Jet products has just come out with pre-cut freezer paper sheets to address the very problems I experienced.

This special paper is over twice the weight of the freezer paper you buy in the supermarket. The extra thickness is to prevent rolling and curling when ironed and printed. The coating feels like regular freezer paper but has been enhanced to make it adhere to fabric at a lower iron heat. No more scorched curling paper!

While I haven't tried the pre-cut freezer paper yet, I trust the company and intend to buy it as soon as I use up the full sheet labels I currently use as backing. The freezer paper sheets cost about 13 cents each while full sheet labels cost about 15 cents. Whichever you use, the sheets can be reused several times before the adhesive is no longer strong enough.

Lay a treated fabric strip face down on a smooth firm surface (not your padded ironing board). Take a label and peel the top edge of backing down about an inch. Align the sticky edge with the top edge of fabric and smooth carefully. Peel down another inch of the label backing and smooth again. Repeat the process, doing your best to avoid any air bubbles which could cause ink smudges when the sheet runs through your printer.

Turn the sheet fabric side up and use a small roller or cool iron to remove any wrinkles or air bubbles that you couldn't avoid. Never use steam. It can cause water spots.

5. Print

The label directions say to print immediately after preparing your sheets, but I have let treated sheets sit for a couple of weeks and didn't see any degradation in quality or color-fastness. Store flat in a sealed plastic bag.

Inspect each sheet and remove any lint or loose threads. Lint will leave unprinted dots on your project when the fuzz eventually falls off. Loose threads can jam your printer and ruin everything – including the printer!

Set your printer for plain paper and high quality. Though the printed image won't be as bright as what you see on screen, this seems to be the best setting for fabric printing.

I usually print a test fabric sheet for any new design. Using my graphics program, I reduce the design in size so I can fit six or eight on a page. Then I vary the settings. Increase the gamma on one; the contrast on another; then brightness; and saturation.

Next I try a couple of combinations. Since I know that what I print will be duller than what I see on screen, I'm seeking the optimal way to overcompensate. Print out your test fabric sheet and choose the one you like best. Erase the others and resize the chosen one for your project.

Print your sheets; let sit to dry for at least 30 minutes; remove the adhesive backing.

6. Rinse with Bubble Jet Rinse

The purpose of the Bubble Jet Rinse is to remove any ink molecules that did not react with the Bubble Jet Set.

If the Jet Set chemicals have not lost potency, the loss of non-bound molecules in the rinse process will not be noticeable. If this step is skipped, the first time the fabric gets wet, whether when washed or spilled on or rained on, the loose particles will lift and be deposited to other areas of your design. There they probably will bind and ruin all your work.

Since any lifted molecules need to be whisked away from your fabric, you need to use: **lots of water** so the sheets can move freely and not lump together or fold over trapping ink particles; and a **gentle detergent**.

The purpose of using detergent to wash dirty clothes is to lift the dirt and whisk it away. If you just use water, the dirt settles back into the clothes.

It's exactly the same here. The manufacturer recommends that you use their gentle detergent, Bubble Jet Rinse. As I said before, I trust the company, so I follow their recommendations. They do say you can use any gentle detergent, but to me it's not worth the risk.

I machine wash, using the gentle cycle and cold water settings. Use the small load setting if you have just a couple sheets to do. You can wash by hand but, because lots of water is required, it's easier to use the machine. Allow the machine to fill with water; then stop it.

Add Bubble Jet Rinse or detergent and put your prints in one at a time keeping them apart in the water.

Turn the washer back on and let it agitate, rinse and spin. If you want to be extra-cautious, you can lift the washer lid a couple of times to make sure your sheets are still separated and unfolded.

7. Dry

Dry the sheets in the dryer set at medium heat. Throw in a dry towel or two to keep your sheets from bunching up.

8. Incorporate Your Custom-Printed Fabric into Your Craft Project

Bubble Jet Set has done its part. The rest is up to you! Proceed with your craft project.

Craft ideas abound.

As for care instructions to provide to any friends or customers who will receive your finished work, tell them to feel free to machine wash and dry. As with any printed or dyed fabric, direct sunlight can cause fading over time.

Recommendation

Although these directions might sound a little complicated at first, they really aren't. You just soak the fabric in the set first, dry it, mount it, print it and rinse it.

When you're done you will have fabric sheets at a fraction of the cost of buying the pre-treated type. Furthermore, you have more options as to the type and size of fabric you can work with.

I have used this product a lot on my own craft projects and have been able to print some very nice full color pictures on fabric. I would rate this product highly and recommend it to anyone who wants to print on fabric.

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About Eileen Bergen

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