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QUILTING BLOG

# Your Complete Guide to Sewing & Quilting Threads

By **Lindsay Conner, Julia Garza, Christine Haynes, Rachel Hauser** and **Sherri McConnell** on May 14, 2018

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Thread holds everything together when you're sewing. Whether you're sewing by hand or by machine, it's important to choose wisely when considering the different types of thread for your project. But if you've ever found yourself in the fabric store, staring at a wall of spools, you know that's not always an easy choice!



Here's everything you need to know to choose the right thread for your sewing or quilting project.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT THREAD MATERIAL

Thread can be made in a number of different fibers. How do you know which one to use? We'll walk you through some of the most popular options here.

When in doubt, a good rule of thumb is to match thread content to fabric content: cotton thread for natural fibers, polyester thread for synthetic blend fabrics, silk thread for silk fabric — you get the idea.

### COTTON THREAD



Craftsy Pima Thread 50wt

Cotton thread can stand an incredible amount of heat from an iron, which is key when pressing cotton and linen fabrics. It's very versatile and works well for quilting, sewing delicate fabrics, lingerie projects, and working with medium-weight cotton.

Some brands offer coarse cotton threads, but others offer cotton thread with a silk finish, making it ideal for gathering, basting, and hand finishing as it glides through the fabrics with ease.

A few excellent choices for piecing are **Aurifil 50-weight Cotton Mako** thread and our exclusive **Craftsy Pima Thread**. Both threads are smooth and fine, while at the same time being strong and durable.

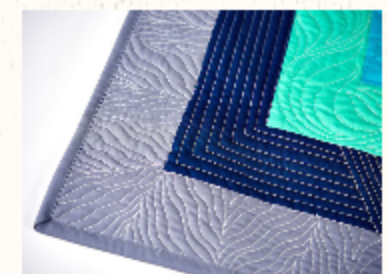
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## POLYESTER THREAD



Gutermann All Purpose Polyester Thread 547 yards

Polyester thread is a true all-purpose thread, and it's a good choice for most sewing projects, both machine- and hand-sewn. The thread has some give to it, so it won't break when you're working with stretchy knits. Polyester thread often has a wax or silicone finish that allows it slip through the fabric easily and gives it a little shine.

## HEAVY-DUTY THREAD

Most heavy-duty threads are actually polyester, but the weight of the thread is not suitable for most garment sewing projects. It is, however, the perfect choice when sewing upholstery and canvas, so you might find yourself reaching for it when you're tackling home decor sewing projects.

## SILK THREAD



Silk thread is very fine — perfect for sewing silk fabric. It's also ideal for tailoring wool. It can be molded into shape with the heat of an iron, and its natural fibers won't snap easily due to excessive ironing.

Silk thread also rarely leaves marks behind, so it's great for hand basting and fine fabrics. It's also flexible and won't leave holes, so it makes an excellent choice for basting thread.

## WOOL THREAD

Wool thread is most common for embroidery projects. It's an extremely strong thread that's a good choice when working with heavy fabrics like wool and canvas. It can be a good option for topstitching, too — just be sure to use a larger needle and adjust your sewing machine's tension appropriately.

## METALLIC THREAD

You can find thread in gold, silver and copper varieties. It's used often in machine embroidery and would be a good choice if you were looking a thread with a little flair for topstitching.

## COTTON-POLY THREAD

Often called all-purpose thread, this is a polyester thread that's been wrapped with an exterior of cotton. The idea is that since it's made up of both cotton and polyester, you could use it for nearly any project. But unless this is your only choice, it really is better to choose the specialty thread for the task at hand, instead of trying to use one thread for all your needs.

## MONOFILAMENT THREAD



Monofilament thread is a sewing thread that looks invisible when stitched into fabric. It's actually very similar to sewing with normal polyester or nylon thread — the main difference is the thread's weight. Monofilament thread is typically much thinner than most sewing threads (so it's best to use a smaller needle, too!).



Aurifil Monofilament Thread

You can purchase translucent monofilament thread in clear or a darker smoke color, both of which are see-through. The darker smoke color blends better with dark fabrics.

When using monofilament thread, the bobbin thread can be a regular polyester thread or more monofilament thread. If you do use monofilament in the bobbin, wind it slowly — the thread has some natural stretch.

## ELASTIC



Elastic thread is most commonly used for shirring. Wind elastic thread onto your bobbin by hand, then load it into the bobbin casing. Meanwhile, load regular thread onto the machine and through the needle. When you sew, the fabric will naturally gather up and remain stretchy due to the elastic. To shrink the shirring even more, hover your iron over the sewn area and hit it with some hot steam. The threads will tighten and the whole area will be more gathered.

## UNDERSTANDING THREAD WEIGHT

Most threads, regardless of their composition, come in varying weights or thicknesses. Typically, it's best to use a heavier thread for heavier fabrics and vice versa.

When it comes to weights, the measurement system is a bit backward! The lower the number, the heavier the weight. So a 40-weight thread is actually heavier than a 50-weight thread, and the 40-weight thread will be more visible and prominent in your sewing.

As always, be sure to check your tension when swapping a different thread weight. You might need to make slight adjustments.

## SPOOL SIZE

Most threads come in large, medium and small spool sizes. When buying thread online or in the shop, take note of how many yards of thread are included in the spool.

For instance, the Aurifil spools pictured above contain 1422 yards each, and they come in a set of 6 spools for a total of 8,532 yards. For smaller projects, you might be fine with a 125-yard or 250-yard thread spool. How many yards you'll need depends entirely on your project.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT THREAD FOR ANY SEWING TASK

### QUILT PIECING



From [Startup Project: Starry Path Quilt](#) with Christa Watson

The gold standard for piecing quilt tops is a 50-weight cotton thread. A few excellent choices for piecing are Aurifil Mako 50 weight cotton thread and our exclusive [Craftsy Pima Thread](#). Both threads are smooth and fine, while at the same time being strong and durable.

### QUILT BINDING

For binding, use the same thread weight as you use for piecing. Also be sure to match closely the color of your binding thread to the binding fabric.

### MACHINE QUILTING



Photo via [Craftsy](#) blogger [Sheri Cifaldi-Morrill](#)

For most quilting on a home machine, a 40-weight cotton thread is an excellent choice. Because

the 40 weight cotton thread is heavier than the finer 50 weight cotton thread, quilting stitches will show up more easily on the quilt. While the 40 weight cotton is heavier than the thread you'll want to use for piecing, it is still thin enough to easily be used in home sewing machines.

## FREE-MOTION QUILTING



From [Quilting with Rulers: Free Motion Made Simple with Angela Walters](#)

When it comes to free-motion quilting, the thread you choose determines how prominent your stitching is. A heavier weight in a contrasting color will stand out quite a bit; a lighter weight thread in a matching color should blend in well. Monofilament thread can work well if you want the fabric to stand out instead of the quilting thread.

As for fiber content, polyester, cotton or a cotton-poly blend are all good choices.

## HAND QUILTING

For hand quilting, use a heavy thread like a 28-weight cotton thread. The threads used for hand quilting need to be able to withstand the stress of pulling and stretching.

## APPLIQUÉ

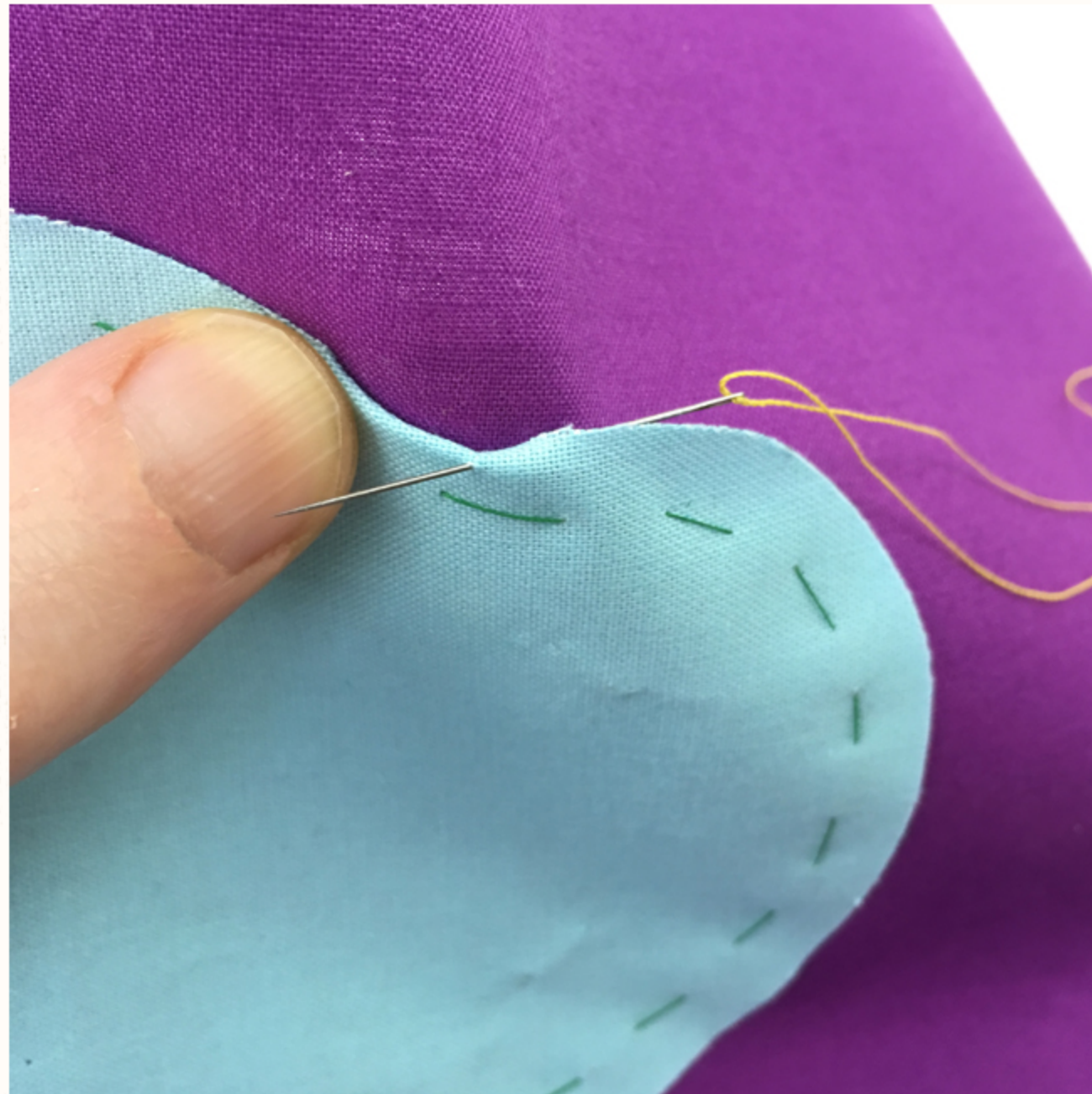


Photo via [Craftsy](#) blogger [Sheri Cifaldi-Morrill](#)

Lightweight (50- to 800-weight) cotton thread in a matching color is an excellent choice. Silk is another great choice since it's a strong natural fiber and comes in a variety of weights and colors. Silk threads practically "melt" into the fabrics, making them nearly invisible and the perfect choice for hand and machine appliqué. If you want really invisible stitches, opt for monofilament thread.

## GARMENT SEWING

There's no one-size-fits-all solution for all garments. The best thread depends heavily on the fabric you choose. Try to match the fiber and weight, or use an all-purpose thread when in doubt.

What's more important is color! Focus mainly on matching the color of your thread to your project. Whenever possible, bring your cloth to the shop to choose a thread in person.

## UTILITY SEWING

Some hand sewing projects need to be extremely durable. Perhaps you are sewing a button back

onto your favorite winter coat or repairing a strap that's pulling away from your beach tote. When hand sewing items that will see heavy use, select a heavy-weight thread in a synthetic fiber such as polyester.

If your utility sewing involves an outdoor item, such as canvas for a playground canopy or a decorative pillow for your patio, look for a thread designed specifically for outdoor use. These threads will withstand sun exposure and temperature fluctuations far better than typical thread.



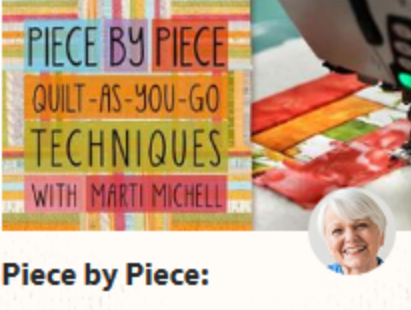


### INTRODUCING CRAFTSY PIMA THREAD

Featuring a curated array of strong 50wt pima thread in 60+ colors, it's ultra long-lasting and engineered for smooth movement on any machine.

[Learn More](#)

## EXPLORE QUILTING CLASSES ON CRAFTSY

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## 26 COMMENTS

 **Ann**  
September 19th, 2013

After years of sewing I knew that the thread made a difference but I did not know how to apply this to my new hobby of quilting. Thanks for answering all my unasked questions.

[Reply](#)

 **Linda**  
September 19th, 2013

Love Masterpiece by Superior threads. I've used Aurifil, Prescencia, Gutterman's, but the thread from Superior is, well, superior! They also have a huge amount of info on their website about thread, so you can get a good education by poking around there. Thanks to Wendy Butler Berns for mentioning it in her Craftsy class.

[Reply](#)

 **etquilter@gmail.com**  
September 19th, 2013

This article is very helpful. I always use fifty weight for my piecing. It really peices well. Do you have a recommendation of thread to use for machine embroidery? Thanks for your help.

[Reply](#)

 **Linda**  
October 14th, 2013

I've read through the tips about thread and which to use on different projects... I need to know if anyone has used floriani embroidery thread for machine quilting??

[Reply](#)

 **Sally Freshwater**  
July 17th, 2015

In answer to your question, I have used Floriani for machine quilting with no problem. I didn't encounter any breakage or pulling of thread.

[Reply](#)

 **Cassie**  
January 20th, 2016

I am a long arm quilter and have used Floriani embroidery thread on a couple of tops. Do you think it is strong enough to put onto a baby quilt? Like the sheen since it is similar to Magnifico with Superior and I already own over 150 spools of Floriani

Thanks,

[Reply](#)



**Sandra Grace Darlington**

February 26th, 2018

I haven't used it...yet, but I know people who do use it and are happy with the outcome. Test it out on a "practice" piece before committing to a large project.

[Reply](#)



**Bonnie**

February 26th, 2018

I have recently quilted with this thread and it was really nice. Looks great and had little to no breakage as I went. I love this brand!

[Reply](#)



**BeeGee**

October 19th, 2013

I agree that silk thread is perfect for applique, it really does "melt" into the project. I love Superior thread for all of my quilting projects. Like fabric, I can look at all the gorgeous colors and it makes me feel good. Next up is using the twin needle function on my machine, sounds like it will make a beautiful statement; but I'm also a tad anxious about doing it. Well nothing ventured, nothing gained. Thank you for all the info, it helps.

[Reply](#)

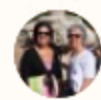


**Ida Wallace**

April 20th, 2015

I am new to Aurifil thread. I ordered some and it has arrived. I bought 50 weight before I realized that 40 weight was suggested for machine quilting. Do you think it will make a huge difference?

[Reply](#)



**Lynn Marie Buckley**

May 14th, 2015

I use 50 wt for both piecing and quilting. When using it for quilting, I personally love the way the 50wt sinks into the quilt. It is the BEST for piecing as it is the finest 50wt thread. Believe it or not there is no law that a thread labeled 50 wt has to be a certain thickness. It is left up to the manufacturer. The Italians really know how to make their thread the finest. They double mercerize so it has absolutely no nubs and it holds the color better than others.

[Reply](#)



**Pat**

May 21st, 2016

A friend of mine gave me a spool of Aurifil and I love it! The best thread for all my quilting needs. Thanks Aurifil.

[Reply](#)



**used combines**

June 8th, 2016

Hi, the whole thing is going sound here and ofcourse every one is sharing data, that's genuinely fine, keep up writing.

[Reply](#)



**Dona**

July 7th, 2016

Where did you get the round bobbin holder? I love it!

[Reply](#)



**Kirstin**

September 1st, 2016

Fat quarter shop has them. I just got one in my monthly see sampler kit. So handy!! #sewsampler

[Reply](#)



**Rene**

August 22nd, 2016

Considering I am a newbie to quilting and didn't know any better, I bought a bunch of Robison-Anton thread, along with a few spools by Sulky. All are rayon or polyester; no cotton. I am at a point where I will be 'quilting' my quilt (stitching in the ditch), which is 100% cotton (JoAnn Batik fabric). Will rayon or polyester work with 100% cotton? Thanks to anyone who responds.



Reply



**Veronica**

September 9th, 2016

You'll have better long term results if you use like materials. Use cotton thread on cotton fabric.

Reply



**Donna Lee**

May 1st, 2017

Most quilters believe that only cotton thread should be used on cotton fabric. Others say that polyester thread is fine or indeed better since it is less linty. In the end it's really your preference. Cotton is best for an heirloom quilt, polyester is fine for a child's quilt that will be washed again and again. I use a good quality cotton thread like Aurifil or Mettler just to be safe (plus my sewing machine is picky!).

Robison-Anton rayon is a great choice for machine appliqué, so you've already got it on hand for your next appliqué project.

Reply



**D Henry**

August 8th, 2017

Try breaking the thread between your fingers. You are going to find that the rayon is VERY fragile. I find it will not be hardwearing enough to hold a quilt together. It is usually made for machine embroidery only. All of the Sulky brand threads are also designed for decorative work and are not sturdy enough to serve as quilting threads—even their 30 weight cotton is pretty softly spun—so it breaks between the fingers fairly easily. Great for wall hangings or decorative quilting techniques (like background fills or thread painting) but not for holding the quilt together. If you plan on SID quilting to hold the quilt together, I recommend Superior So Fine or Bottom Line. Both are fine polyester threads designed to hold your work together. Bottom line is finer than So Fine so it may bury itself in the ditch, if that's the look you are going for.

And it is fine to use poly threads on cotton fibers. The modern threads are made to break like cotton so they will not cut the quilt, and modern sewing machines are tensioned at the factory to work with 50 weight poly thread in the default setting. Most importantly, pick a good needle to work with whatever thread you choose. Look for mfg recommendations on their websites. I find a topstitch needle works great because of the bigger eye—less stress on the thread!

Good luck!

Reply



**Meghan**

September 9th, 2016

I'm new to quilting but have over 100 colours of Thread Art embroidery thread (polyester 40wt). Do you think it will hold up for machine quilting? Thanks!

Reply



**Cindy Pieters**

February 26th, 2018

I have had a very bad experience with threads on my latest machine. A well known name brand thread no matter what I do continues to shred or break. How does Craftsy thread hold up? I have had success with Aurifil.

Reply



**Pat Evans**

February 26th, 2018

I believe Thread Heaven mentioned in #3, is no longer being produced. You may still be able to find it in some shops or online.

Reply



**Anne C**

May 15th, 2018


Can you talk about "ply" in relation to the thread weight? I understand the number of plies can impact the weight so the weight number doesn't always hold true. Thanks!

Reply




**Tiffany Locke**



 May 16th, 2018


Thanks for explaining what each type of thread is used for, such as how wool is a common choice for embroidery projects since it is strong and works well with thicker materials. When choosing one to use, you'd probably want to figure out what works best for the project and for the materials you're using as well as the sewing machine you're using. Once you've determined the type of thread you need, you'd probably want to look online and in sewing stores to find the kind you are looking for.

[Reply](#)

 **Joy Butler**  
May 16th, 2018

I'd be interested to learn more about the different quilt and sewing threads. I'd like to try this as a hobby and maybe, when the time comes, as an additional income. I can even make some samples that would be useful at home like appliances' covers, bed sheets, and the likes.

[Reply](#)

 **Colleen Finn**  
July 21st, 2018

This is a very helpful article, but how do I know the weight of the thread? Where do I find this info? Is it on the thread spool? Or just on the stand in the shop?. I have some Gutermann Cotton treat with C Ne 50. On the side up then I have Gutermann polyester that only has the length.





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