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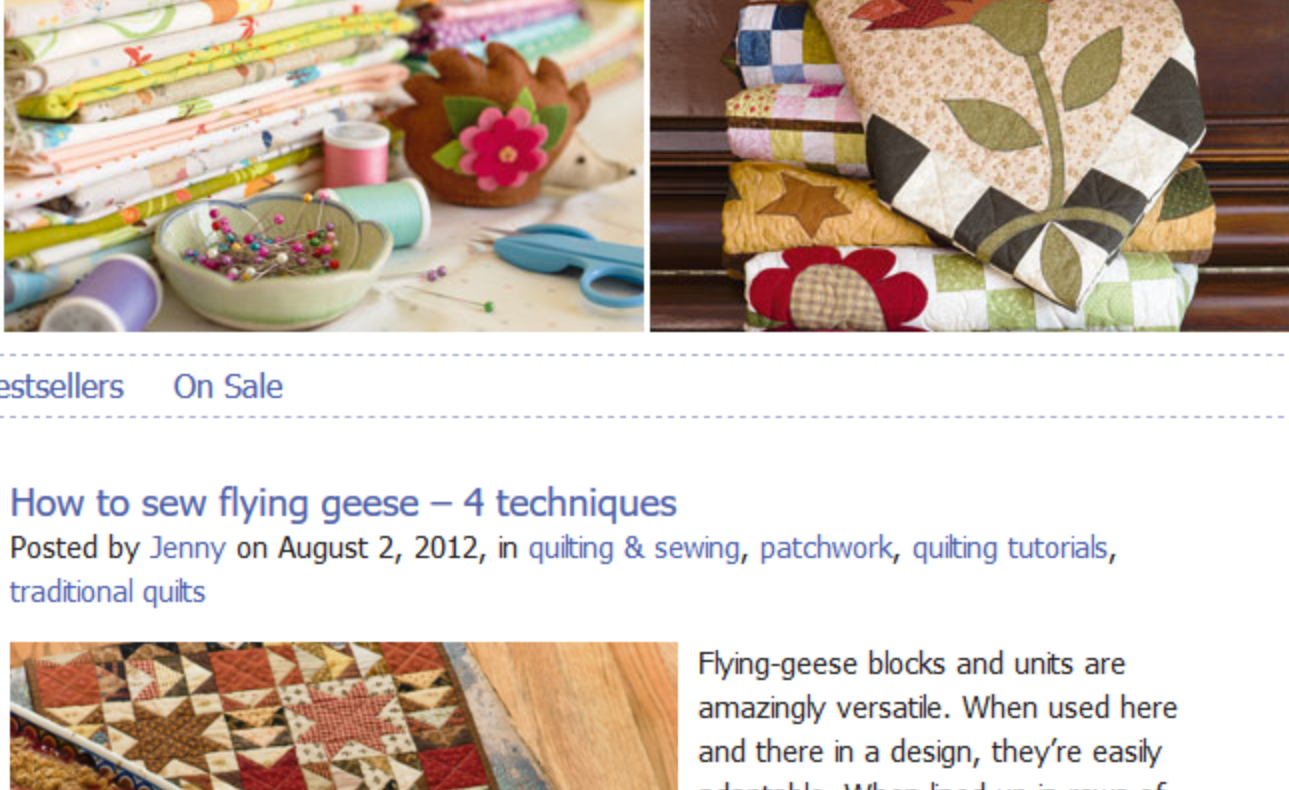
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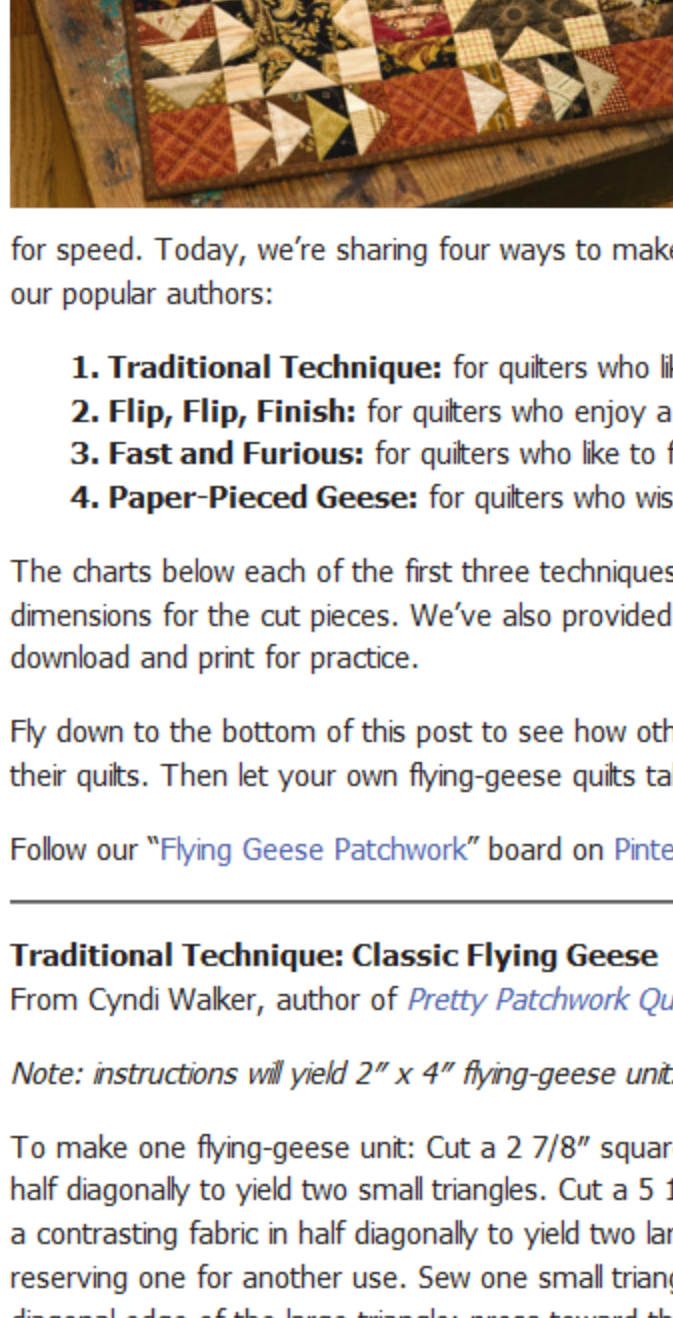
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How to sew flying geese – 4 techniques

Posted by Jenny on August 2, 2012, in quilting & sewing, patchwork, quilting tutorials, traditional quilts



Flying-geese blocks and units are amazingly versatile. When used here and there in a design, they're easily adaptable. When knid up in rows of Flying Blocks, they're simply stunning. Barbara Bradkman's *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* dates the first flying-geese patterns ever published back to 1894, when the Ohio Farmer featured them on their "woman's pages." Flash-forward almost 120 years later—these simple little units are used in all kinds of quilts, from traditional to modern.

Today there are several schools of thought on how to sew flying geese, and they all have their merits. A scrap quilter might want to put every thread of fabric to good use, while a quilter with a deadline might select scraps traditional to modern.

For speed. Today, we're sharing four ways to make patchwork flying geese from four of our popular authors:

1. **Traditional Techniques:** for quilters who like to use it up and make it do.
2. **Flip, Flip, Finish:** for quilters who enjoy a good of chain-piecing veg-out.
3. **Fast and Furious:** for quilters who like to finish fast—times four.
4. **Paper-Pieced Geese:** for quilters who wish to piece with the utmost precision.

The charts below each of the first three techniques give finished-unit sizes along with dimensions for the cut pieces. We've also provided a paper-pieced flying-geese pattern to download and print for practice.

Fly down to the bottom of this post to see how other quilters use flying-geese patchwork in their quilts. Then let your own flying-geese quilts take wing!

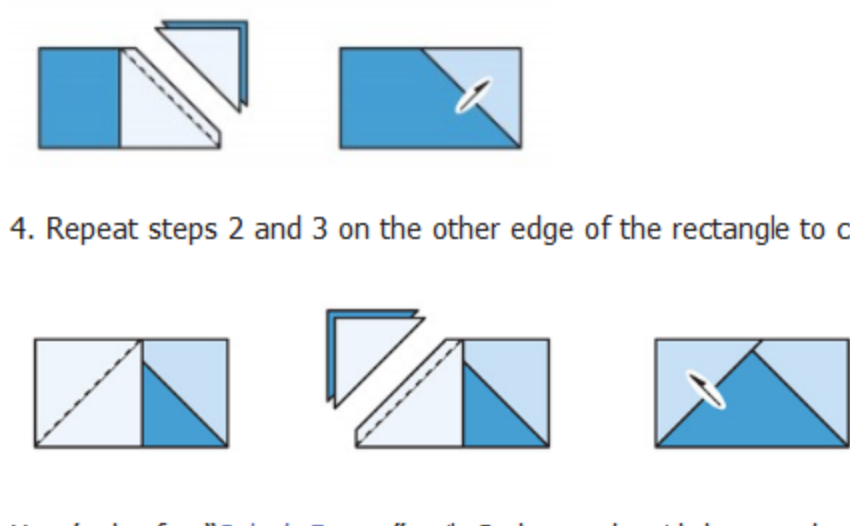
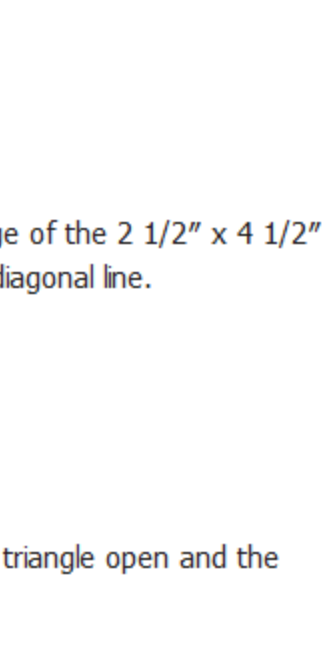
Follow our "Flying Geese Patchwork" board on Pinterest.

Traditional Technique: Classic Flying Geese

From Cyndi Walker, author of *Pretty Patchwork Quilts*

Note: instructions will yield 2" x 4" flying-geese units (finished).

To make one flying-geese unit: Cut a 2 7/8" square of fabric in half diagonally to yield two small triangles. Cut a 5 1/4" square of a contrasting fabric in half diagonally to yield two large triangles, reserving one for another use. Sew one small triangle to the diagonal edge of the large triangle; press toward the small triangle. Sew the second small triangle to the other diagonal edge of the large triangle to make a flying-geese unit; press toward the small triangle.



Cyndi used her traditionally pieced flying-geese patchwork to make the blue flower points in her quilt "Moonflower."



"Moonflower" by Cyndi Walker, from the book *Pretty Patchwork Quilts*.

Traditional Technique: Classic Flying Geese Made from Triangles

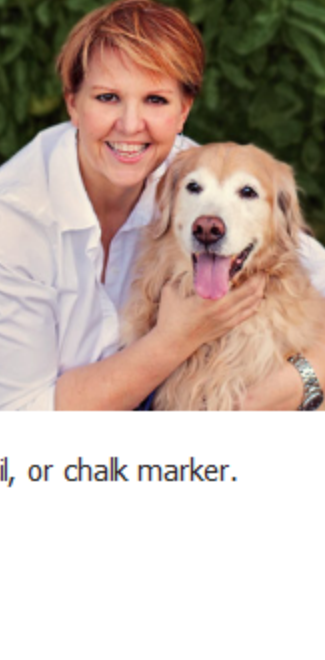
Finished Size of Units (excludes outer seam allowances)	Large Triangles (Cut squares diagonally into quarters)	Small Triangles (Cut squares diagonally in half)
1" x 2"	1 square, 3 1/2" x 3 1/2" (3 leftovers)	1 square, 1 1/2" x 1 1/2"
1 1/2" x 3"	1 square, 4 1/2" x 4 1/2" (3 leftovers)	1 square, 2 1/2" x 2 1/2"
2" x 4"	1 square, 5 1/2" x 5 1/2" (3 leftovers)	1 square, 2 1/2" x 2 1/2"
2 1/2" x 5"	1 square, 6 1/2" x 6 1/2" (3 leftovers)	1 square, 3 1/2" x 3 1/2"
3" x 6"	1 square, 7 1/2" x 7 1/2" (3 leftovers)	1 square, 3 1/2" x 3 1/2"
3 1/2" x 7"	1 square, 8 1/2" x 8 1/2" (3 leftovers)	1 square, 4 1/2" x 4 1/2"
4" x 8"	1 square, 9 1/2" x 9 1/2" (3 leftovers)	1 square, 4 1/2" x 4 1/2"

Flip, Flip, Finish: Flippy Corners Flying Geese

From Cathy Wierzbicki, author of *Twosie-Foursie Quilts*

Note: instructions will yield 2" x 4" flying-geese units (finished).

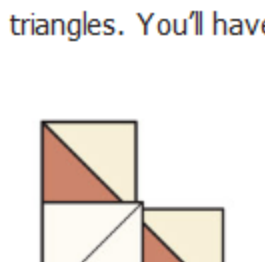
A "flippy corner" is a casual way to sew half-square triangles onto squares or rectangles without actually handling a triangle shape—cheater triangles, so to speak. This technique can be applied to a number of commonly used unit sizes and blocks. A good example is the flying-geese unit.



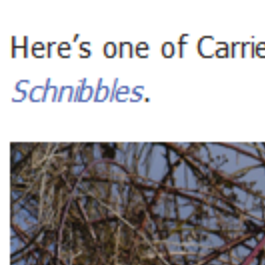
Traditionally, a flying-geese unit calls for one quarter-square triangle and two half-square triangles. If you prefer, however, you can make flying-geese units using the flippy-corner technique, as I did for the quilt pattern "Splash Dance."

To make finished-size 2" x 4" units, substitute a 2 1/2" x 4 1/2" rectangle for the quarter-square triangle and two 2 1/2" x 1 1/2" rectangles. Make the unit as shown in the following steps.

1. Draw a diagonal line on the back of each 2 1/2" x 4 1/2" square.



2. With right sides together, align one marked square with one edge of the 2 1/2" x 4 1/2" rectangle as shown. Stitch one thread width to the outside of the diagonal line.



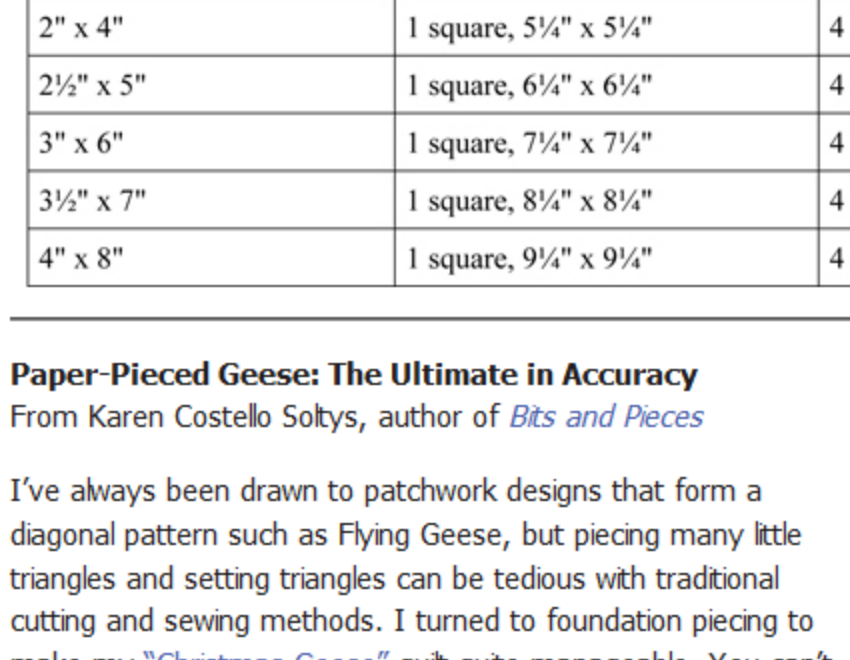
3. Cut 1/4" beyond the stitching line as shown. Press the resulting triangle open and the seam allowance toward the triangle.



4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 on the other edge of the rectangle to complete the unit.



Here's the fun "Splash Dance" quilt Cathy made with her patchwork flying geese—she used flying-geese units as frog's legs!



"Splash Dance" by Cathy Wierzbicki, from the book *Twosie-Foursie Quilts*.

Flip, Flip, Finish: Folded Corners Flying Geese

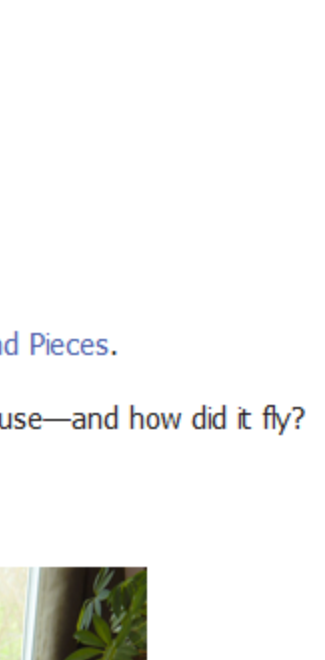
Finished Size of Units (excludes outer seam allowances)	Large Triangles	Small Triangles
1" x 2"	1 rectangle, 1 1/2" x 2 1/2"	2 squares, 1 1/2" x 1 1/2"
1 1/2" x 3"	1 rectangle, 2 1/2" x 3 1/2"	2 squares, 2" x 2"
2" x 4"	1 rectangle, 2 1/2" x 4 1/2"	2 squares, 2 1/2" x 2 1/2"
2 1/2" x 5"	1 rectangle, 3" x 5 1/2"	2 squares, 3" x 3"
3" x 6"	1 rectangle, 3 1/2" x 6 1/2"	2 squares, 3 1/2" x 3 1/2"
3 1/2" x 7"	1 rectangle, 4" x 7 1/2"	2 squares, 4" x 4"
4" x 8"	1 rectangle, 4 1/2" x 8 1/2"	2 squares, 4 1/2" x 4 1/2"

Fast and Furious: Four-at-a-Time Flying Geese

From Carre Nelson, author of *Another Bite of Scrabbles*

Note: instructions will yield 2" x 4 1/2" flying-geese units (finished).

Here are the steps for my favorite, no-special-ruler-required method of making flying-geese units. For each set of four matching flying-geese units, you'll need one large square and four matching small squares. The large square will become the large triangle in each unit and the four small squares will become the small side triangles in each unit.

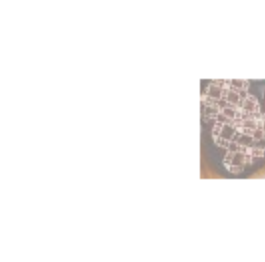


Let's use a 4 1/4" large square and four 2 3/8" small squares to try this technique.

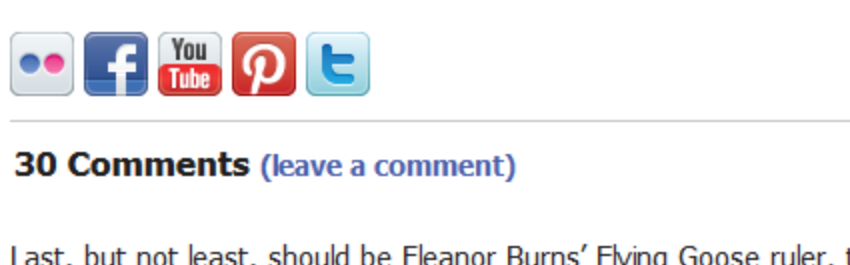
1. On the wrong side of each of the four small squares, draw a diagonal line from corner to corner using a permanent pen, pencil, or chalk marker.



2. With right sides together, place two marked squares on opposite corners of the large square. The points of the small squares will overlap just a little bit and the draw line should extend across the large square from corner to corner as shown.



3. Stitch a scant 1/4" seam allowance on both sides of the draw lines. Cut the squares apart on the draw lines. Press the seam allowances toward the small triangles.



4. With right sides together, place one of the remaining marked squares on the corner of each piece. The draw line should extend from the point of the corner to the point between the two small triangles. Stitch a scant 1/4" seam allowance on both sides of the draw line. Cut the pieces apart on the draw line. Press the seam allowances toward the small triangles. You'll have four flying-geese units. The units will measure 2" x 3 1/2".



Here's one of Carre's flying-geese patterns, "Winter White," from *Another Bite of Scrabbles*.



"Winter White" by Carre Nelson, from the book *Another Bite of Scrabbles*.

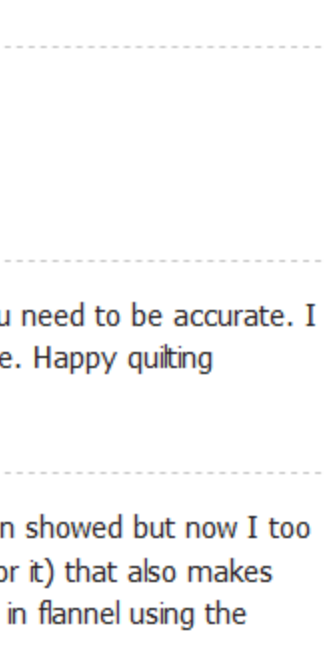
Fast and Furious: Four-at-a-Time Flying Geese

Finished Size of Units (excludes outer seam allowances)	Large Triangles	Small Triangles
1" x 2"	1 square, 3 1/2" x 3 1/2"	4 squares, 1 1/2" x 1 1/2"
1 1/2" x 3"	1 square, 4 1/2" x 4 1/2"	4 squares, 2 1/2" x 2 1/2"
2" x 4"	1 square, 5 1/2" x 5 1/2"	4 squares, 2 1/2" x 2 1/2"
2 1/2" x 5"	1 square, 6 1/2" x 6 1/2"	4 squares, 3 1/2" x 3 1/2"
3" x 6"	1 square, 7 1/2" x 7 1/2"	4 squares, 3 1/2" x 3 1/2"
3 1/2" x 7"	1 square, 8 1/2" x 8 1/2"	4 squares, 4 1/2" x 4 1/2"
4" x 8"	1 square, 9 1/2" x 9 1/2"	4 squares, 4 1/2" x 4 1/2"

Paper-Pieced Geese: The Ultimate in Accuracy

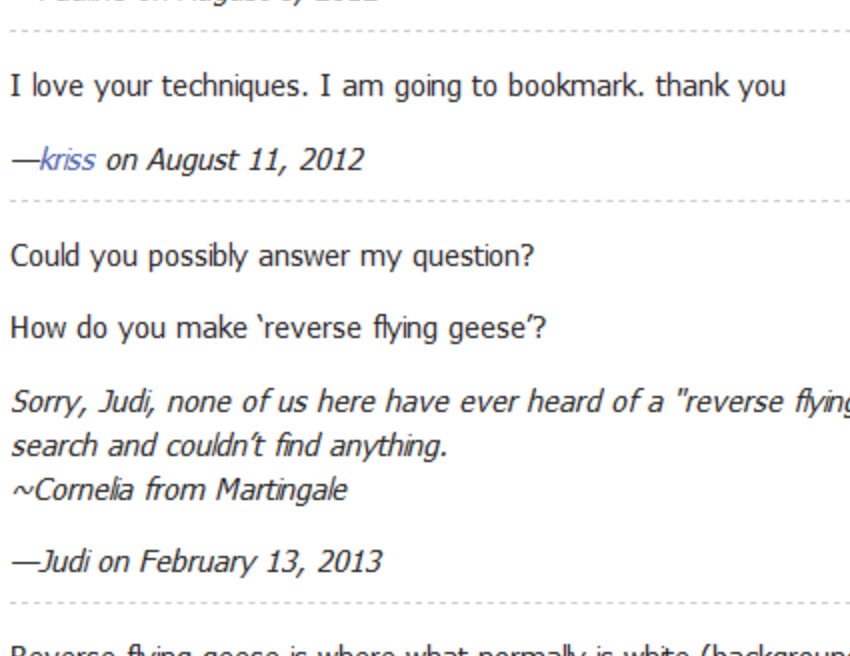
From Karen Costello Sobys, author of *Bits and Pieces*

I've always been drawn to patchwork designs that form a diagonal pattern such as Flying Geese, but piecing many little triangles and setting triangles can be tedious with traditional cutting and sewing methods. I turned to foundation piecing to make my "Christmas Goose" quilt manageable. You can't beat foundation piecing for accuracy—getting all those little triangles to be perfectly pointy and match up with those in the next block is a breeze.



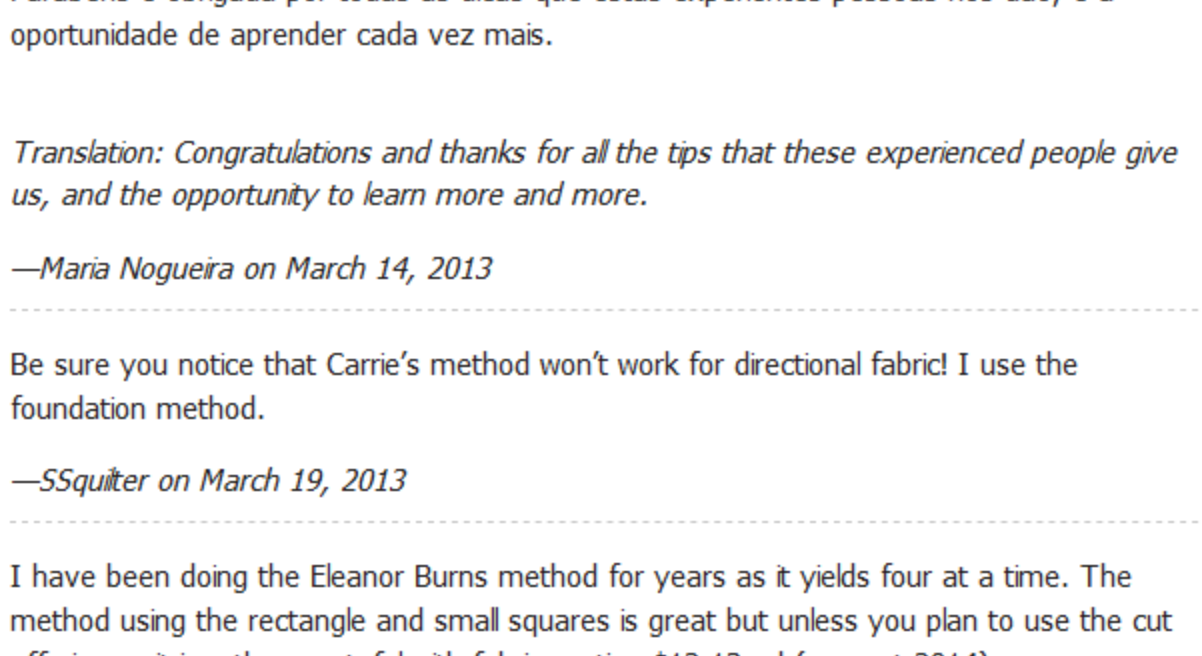
Download and print these paper-pieced flying-geese patterns to practice your skills. The pdf includes patterns for making 1 flying-geese unit, as well as rows of 2, 3, and 4 units. For instructions on how to paper piece, you can visit our How to Quilt page and download the "Paper-Foundaion Piecing: How to Make Paper-Pieced Quilt Patterns" pdf.

Karen used her flying-geese units to make a small Christmas quilt—the perfect size for a table topper or wall quilt:



"Christmas Goose" by Karen Costello Sobys, from the book *Bits and Pieces*.

Have you sewn flying geese quilts? Which technique did you use—and how did it fly? Share your quilt story in the comment!



"Don's Goose" from Urban Country Quilts

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30 Comments (leave a comment)

Last, but not least, should be Eleanor Burns' Flying Goose ruler; this is the most accurate I have ever found and you get 4 at a time.
—Sheila Galindo on August 2, 2012

thank you, love all the different ways of making flying geese, though the sew/flip works best for me, thanks for sharing.
—Donna on August 2, 2012

Ricky Timms does a one seam flying geese that a very easy and versatile.
—elizabeth on August 2, 2012

Love your instrctions had fun reading and downloading all so I knew I could get it right. Hugs and Cheers This really makes quilting FUN! Jeanne Wallace
—Jeanne Wallace on August 2, 2012

Thanks so much for the different ways to do flying geese. I'll try them all.
—Kris on August 2, 2012

I'm a paper piecer at heart, so that's what I used on Cinnamon & Spice quilt. It turned out to be an award winner, so it was the right decision for me.

If I'm making a quilt with a large quantity of geese that use the same fabric I do use the four at a time method, with a ruler from Lazy Girl.
Great info!
—Lynda DeTray on August 2, 2012

I made a wonderful flannel dimensional flying geese quilt using 2 squares and a rectangle with only one seam. It worked really well. I took a class and learned the technique there.
—Denise on August 2, 2012

I always wondered why the Eleanor Burns method is not ever shown except for her (in her books and on the TV show). Of all the ways, I find this to be the best by both accuracy and speed.
—Linda Gentry on August 2, 2012

First off, that cobble in the main picture looks yummy!
Thanks for all the geese instructions. This is one block I always have difficulty with. Having four methods to fall back on really helps!
Enjoy the weekend, ya'll!
—Jean on August 3, 2012

I just can't wait to start quilting those geese patterns
—patsy on August 4, 2012

Thank you, I will have this information closey.
Yasmin
—Yasmin on August 4, 2012

When using a kit of geese I do the four at a time method, but you need to be accurate. I have used the other methods too and they all have their own place. Happy quilting
—cathy on August 5, 2012

I used to use the "four geese at a time" method that Carre Nelson showed but now I too am a fan of Eleanor Burns "two squares" method (my name for it) that also makes four geese at a time. I made a wonderful flying geese scrappy quilt in flannel using the method and it was fast and easy.

I recently learned about the "one seam dimensional flying geese" method that the other commenters mentioned and hope to try it soon on an upcoming project.
—Nivan on August 6, 2012

I love "flying geese" and have found the Eleanor Burns ruler to be the best for accuracy and ease of use.
—Evelyn on August 6, 2012

Designed a BOM quilt with 4 at-a-time, Wing Clipper Tool and some flip-flip. Having lots of fun with it. Photo on my Facebook.
—Helen Hardwick on August 7, 2012

I have used the first three, but I find that the flippy method is the fastest, at least for me!
—Pauline on August 8, 2012

I love your techniques. I am going to bookmark. thank you
—kris on August 11, 2012

Could you possibly answer my question?
How do you make "reverse flying geese"?

Sorry, Jud, none of us here have ever heard of a "reverse flying geese". I tried an internet search and couldn't find anything.
—Cornelia from Martingale

—Jud on February 13, 2013

Reverse flying geese is where what normally is white (background fabric) is placed where the patterned fabric goes and what is the patterned is in the place of the white (background).
As shown in this picture here: <http://www.purbee.com/storage/miniflyinggeese-quilt-det-2.jpg> on the right side
It depends on the placement of fabric when sewn Jud =)
—Effany winchester on March 5, 2013

Parabéns e obrigada por todas as dicas que estas experiencias pessoas nos dão, e a oportunidade de aprender cada vez mais.
—Mara Nogueira on March 14, 2013

Be sure you notice that Carre's method won't work for directional fabric! I use the foundation method.
—SSquaker on March 19, 2013

I have been doing the Eleanor Burns method for years as it yields four at a time. The method using the rectangle and small squares is great but unless you plan to use the cut off pieces, it is rather wasteful with fabric costing \$12-13/yd (August 2014).
—Helen Ross on August 5, 2014

I'm making Eleanor's Orion's Star and just realized I have the wrong ruler. I have the 3x6 not the 2x4. Is there any way that I can adapt the larger ruler or use my Orms ruler instead?
Hi Roseann,
Since we are not the publisher for Eleanor's books and patterns, I'm sure they'll know the answer to this question! Go to and click on "customer service". I'm sure they'll have the answer for you!
—Cornelia/Customer Service

—Roseann on October 5, 2014

Thanks so much for the useful information. I tried the 4-at-a-time method like Eleanor Burns' uses without using her ruler and found that even though the points of my geese were centered, there were uneven amounts of fabric on the sky. I tried the other Fast-N-Furios 4 at a time and loved it, but when I try to make a geese in the unfinished size of 2x4, the point of the geese is cut off when I sew it together. I must say I love this method for the dimensions given, as it is extremely accurate and wastes NO material. The geese I made were to perfection in size, as I used the calculation method given in the QUILTMAKER Sept/Oct '94 edition, page 19. Can you share with us how to calculate different sizes of flying geese with other methods, or does the shape only lend itself to certain measurements?
—Sky on October 13, 2014

I have favorited your site. It will be a great reference for me.
—Aneta Stewart on November 24, 2014

I'm so glad that I found this site...I have great plans for flying geese and needed good "how to" advice. And there you were with four different "how to's". You are now on my favorites list.
—Wendy on January 21, 2015

These are so so pretty. I can't wait to try one for my own.
—Wendy on February 19, 2015

I have a link to a magazine (possibly American Patchwork and Quilting)and there used to be the pattern to the hubarb crop on their website. I printed the recipe and made the crop. It was delicious! I have lost the recipe and would be thrilled to get another copy if anyone has it or can tell me where to find it.
—Janette on June 9, 2015

Creative Gids has an excellent Flying Geese ruler.
—Phyllis on June 13, 2015

I hate the Eleanor Burns way of making flying geese, they never turn out right no matter how many times I try, or watching the video. I find the Fast and Furious works the best for me every time.
—Anne Arthur on October 27, 2015

Leave a comment

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Email* (will not be published)

Website

*Indicates required field