

A
slapdash
guide
to embroidery



Introduction

Dear Readers,

This wee zine is meant to be a jumping-off point, a tiny spark of inspiration from someone who fell in love with the art of stitchery almost five years ago & has been learning ever since.

I wandered into embroidery from illustration, as it allowed me to pull two-dimensional drawings up off the paper and bring them into the world in a new way.

The contents of this book are gleaned from my slapdash style of working, so please don't take them as law — they're more of a set of tools on which you can build a new creative adventure, a place to start in a discipline that's been around for millennia.

So! Now you have this zine in hand and want to start your own stitchery. Here's what you'll need:

Embroidery thread: Available online, in fabric stores, or at your local dollar store (Dollarama has pretty decent colours, for example). Better-quality thread tangles less, but the cheap stuff still works!

Fabric: Generally, the thinner/looser weaves require more care (and the opposite-side stitches can show through), and thicker fabrics can be difficult to get a needle through. Play around and see what works!

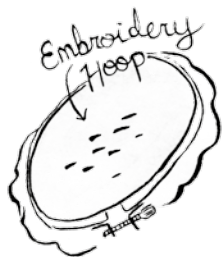
Needles: I use a few different needles depending on the detail-level of the stitching. To start out, a regular small sewing needle and a larger embroidery needle are good to have.

Something to draw your pattern with: The type of pen/pencil you use can depend on whether the mark will be fully covered or not. You can get dressmaker's pencils/chalk/markers from fabric stores if you want to rub the marks off, or use a sharpie/softer (4B-6B pencil) if you're not worried about seeing the marks. If you're using very dark fabric, a white coloured pencil will do!

Scissors: Any type will do as long as they're sharp enough to cut thread cleanly (a clean cut makes it easier to thread the needle)

A hoop or stuffed shape: See next page for how I decide which to start on!

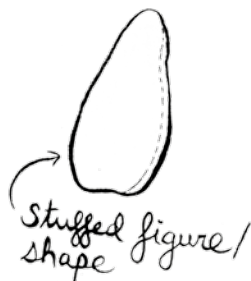




You can get embroidery hoops (usually made from wood or plastic and available in many sizes) at fabric stores. I use mine when I'm making an embroidery that's staying flat/2D, or when I need complete control over a detailed piece of a 3D sculpture (eg. a face, an eye, or a wing).

The hoop stretches the fabric tight and flat, which makes stitching easier, and allows access to the backside of the piece so you can control where each stitch emerges onto the front. This is particularly useful for French knots (a fancy stitch discussed later on in this zine).

Working on sewn/stuffed figures or shapes* can be challenging, as directing your stitches on an uneven surface can be a bit fiddly. Despite this, I find that some of my most exciting stitchery discoveries come from working this way, as the form can inform the flow of your stitches in unexpected and beautiful ways.



**See next spread for some shape-sewing suggestions!*

Notes on Le beginning



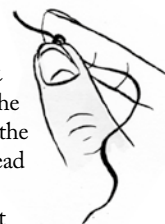
- Threading a needle is never easy, but wetting the end a bit with spit will help it hold a point and go through the eye a bit more smoothly.
- You can split the embroidery thread into various numbers of strands (most have six in all) depending on the level of detail you want to achieve. I tend to work with between 3-1 strands in my projects.
- When starting a new piece of thread, you'll want to tie a knot at the very end to stop it slipping through the fabric.

This is an easy way to do it:

- 1 Loop the end of the length of thread 2-3 times around your index finger



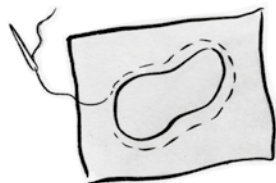
- 2 Roll the loops up your finger between your index finger & thumb. Slide the loops towards the end of the thread while holding tightly - a knot should appear!



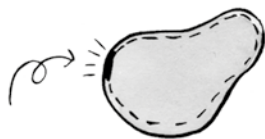
Even simple shapes can become fancy creatures! Starting off with basic, blobby forms is a good way to practice both pattern-making and embroidering on 3D shapes.



- 1 Draw your chosen shape directly onto a piece of fabric (if the fabric has a front & back, draw your shape on the back), or work up a pattern on paper, cut it out, and trace it into the fabric.



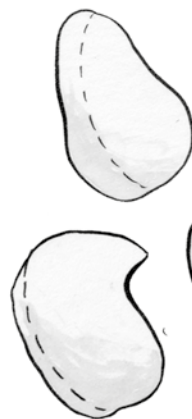
- 2 Draw a second outline about 0.5-1cm outside the first one and stitch around this new line, leaving a 2-4cm gap (this will let you turn your new pal right-side out).



- 3 Knot off your thread and carefully turn the shape right-side out. The blunt end of a pencil or pen can help push out smaller curves/protuberances.



- 4 Stuff firmly with polyester stuffing (found at fabric stores) & sew up the gap. The more firmly you stuff the shape, the easier it will be to embroider on its surface.



the shape of things

Once you're comfortable with sewing friendly blobs, you might start branching out into more elaborate shapes. My main tip? Do a test of the form on cheap/scrap fabric, because sometimes smaller bits just don't want to turn inside out, and finding that out after an hour of sewing *really* isn't fun!

Think up some shapes here!

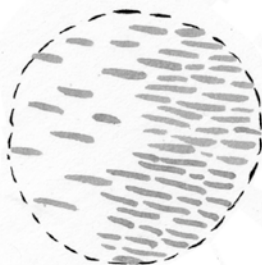
Drawing with thread

If you think of a single straight stitch as a pencil mark, it's a bit easier to start drawing with thread. If you get stuck, don't be afraid to switch back to paper and use your pencil to think about how to transform something into a stitch, as I have in the top diagram on the facing page.



A good place to start is with filling shapes/spaces with various sorts of straight stitches. Filling in a shape is similar to colouring with a pen or pencil (but much more slow!)

To solidly fill in a shape/part of a form, the easiest way is to start with spaced out straight stitches...



...then fill the spaces with more stitches, nestling them side by side until you've got a solid fill.

try different lengths + densities of stitches!



How would you stitch...

scales?

feathers?

fur?

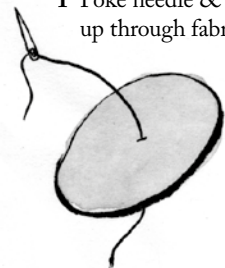
spots?

hair?

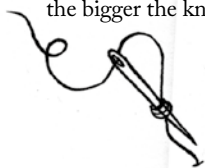
think of the needle + thread as a (very slow) pen + have fun!

Getting Fancier ::French Knots::

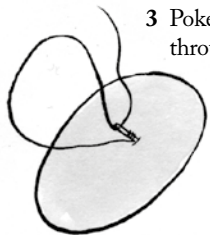
1 Poke needle & thread up through fabric



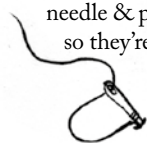
2 Loop the bit of thread closest to the fabric around the needle 2-3 times (the more loops, the bigger the knot)



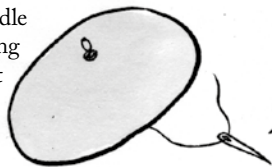
3 Poke needle back through fabric close to where the thread came out



4 Pull thread to tighten loops around the needle & push down so they're level with the fabric



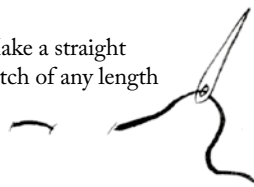
5 Carefully pull needle back through, going slowly so as to not jostle the knot



A lovely little knot!

Split stitch

1 Make a straight stitch of any length



2 Take the needle back & poke it through the middle of the stitch you just made



3 Pull the needle through to the back side of the fabric & bring it back out one stitch-length away



+ repeat!



it will make a chain-like line!

French knots can be used to make eyes, bumpy spots, and stars, and can be grouped together into brains and bouquets of flowers. Split stitch can outline shapes, 'draw' hair, and make ribcages. What would you use them for?

Use this space
to plan a project!

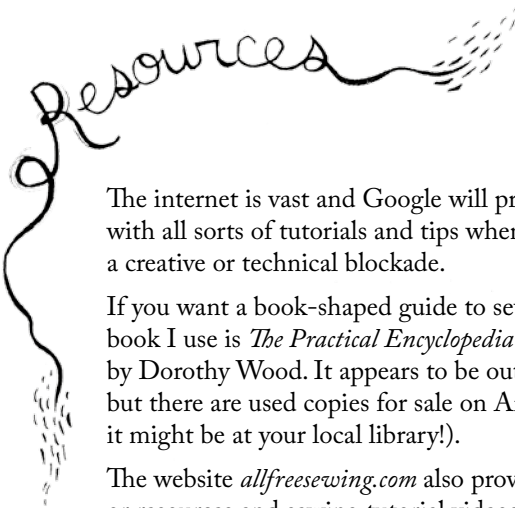


Things to think about: what fabric will work best? What colours of thread do you need? How much fabric will the project take? How much thread? Do you need to do a test version of the pattern? Do you need any other materials besides thread & fabric?

*What do you want it to look like?
How many legs does it have? Arms?
Is it inspired by anything in particular?
How big do you want it to be?*

Use this space
to plan a project!





Resources

The internet is vast and Google will provide you with all sorts of tutorials and tips when you reach a creative or technical blockade.

If you want a book-shaped guide to sewing, the book I use is *The Practical Encyclopedia of Sewing* by Dorothy Wood. It appears to be out of print, but there are used copies for sale on Amazon (and it might be at your local library!).

The website *allfreeseewing.com* also provides a wealth of resources and sewing tutorial videos in case you don't want to wade through pages of search results.

Zine created by Jessica Bromley Bartram

To see more of her work (embroidery & otherwise), visit jessicabartram.ca

Please feel free to copy and distribute this zine.
Please do not sell it or post online without attribution.

A digital version of the zine is available at:
jessicabartram.ca/slpldashembroidery