

Machine-embroider on velvet

A professional's advice for stitching that stands out

Velvet is sumptuous, with an elegance unlike any other fabric. It was once affordable only for royalty due to its expensive and unusual construction. It is woven on double looms, creating a dual-layered fabric that is cut apart, yielding two pieces with the soft pile that we associate with velvet and its close relations. This pile gives velvet its wonderful hand and weight but presents a challenge for sewing and embroidering. There are several pitfalls to embroidering on velvet. Simple designs with medium fill stitching tend to vanish into the fabric's dense pile. Stabilizing velvet for embroidery can require some trial and error to create the desired result. You'll also need to secure the velvet in an embroidery hoop without damaging the weave or crushing the pile. The secret to successful machine embroidery on velvet lies in careful design selection, fabric preparation, and handling of the fabric during stitching.

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An embroidery motif with the appropriate density preserves velvet's drapery hand.

Pattern: KwikSew 3161 (modified).
Embroidery pattern: Pfaff 470, Romantic Décor.
Fabric: rayon/silk blend velvet, author's stash.

Choose a suitable design

A textured fabric such as velvet requires bold embroidery designs. The dense pile can easily obscure fine lines and small details. Choose designs that feature strong lines and moderately dense fills, a term referring to the stitching that fills in outlines. Appropriate designs use underlay stitches in satin or fill areas to help hold down the pile before applying the final, decorative layer of stitching. This technique creates bold effects.



The dense stitching in the leaves and along the vines cause this embroidery design to stand out from the velvet's pile.

tip

Cut fabric after embroidery. If your motif is near the planned garment edge, cut the garment section after embroidering the fabric.

Select a stabilizer

The type and amount of stabilizer used for embroidery depends on several factors. Consider how you want the finished garment to drape before picking the stabilizer. Test a portion of the design on a stabilized fabric scrap to ensure your choice is suitable.

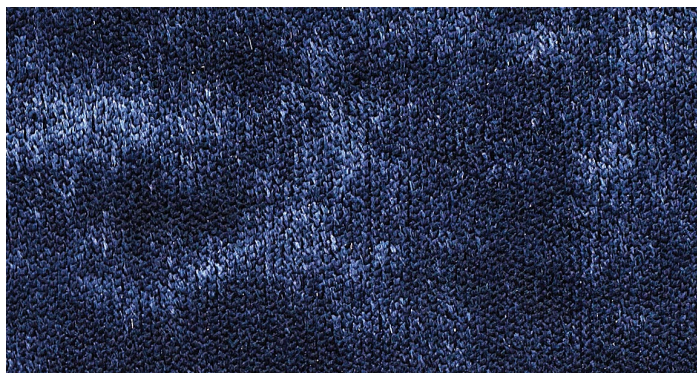
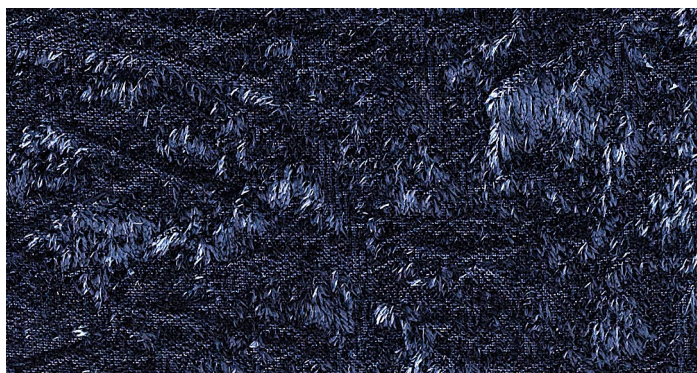
LIQUID

Liquid stabilizer is used solely for prestabilizing, or stiffening, the fabric. Prestabilizing makes the fabric easier to handle, but the fabric still needs to be further stabilized to support the stitching.

Most velvets, even those made from silk or silk/rayon blends, can be hand-laundered. Wash a sample. If you find the results satisfactory, then the velvet can be prestabilized with a liquid stabilizer. Liquid stabilizers are available in many formulations, from the spray starch available in grocery stores to specialty products such as PerfectSew (PalmerPletsch.com) or Terial Magic (TerialMagic.com).

To prestabilize the velvet, first hand-wash it to release excess dye. Gently roll the velvet in a towel to remove the excess water, then saturate the fabric with liquid stabilizer. Spray starch or Terial Magic can be used as is; PerfectSew is concentrated, so dilute it in a 1:1 solution with water before applying. Place the velvet in a bowl and spray or pour the stabilizer onto the fabric, turning the fabric and gently kneading the stabilizer through it until the fabric is evenly saturated. Lay it flat or carefully hang it to dry, keeping the selvages as straight as possible. When the velvet is dry, it can be steamed to straighten it and remove any creases or wrinkles.

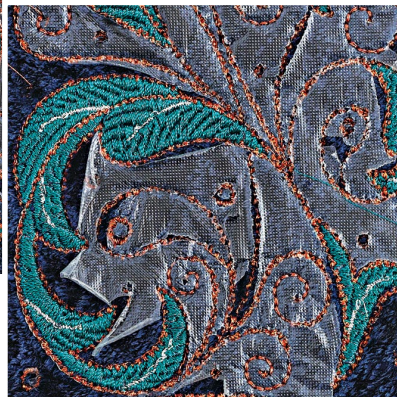
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Liquid stabilizer stiffens the fabric's pile and creates a spiky, stable surface (top). Unstiffened velvet may be more difficult to embroider (bottom).



A light wash-away topper lifts the stitches out of the pile. The topper may become perforated and peel away from the stitches after embroidery.



TOPPER

When embroidering pile fabrics, a lightweight and water-soluble stabilizer film, also called a topper, is often used on the right side to help the stitches float above the pile. If the velvet can be washed, a water-soluble topper may be used. Otherwise, avoid using a topper. Instead, compensate by using bold stitching techniques such as stitching light satin-stitch areas or running stitches more than once to increase coverage. Designs with adequate underlay stitching and density should yield the best results.

WASH-AWAY

If the velvet was pretreated by washing, wash-away stabilizers can be used on the fabric's wrong side. Wash-away stabilizers give the least stitch support after removal but allow for the most drape.

CUT-AWAY AND TEAR-AWAY

If the velvet cannot be washed, then a cut-away or tear-away stabilizer should be used on the wrong side. For the best long-term support on delicate or stretch velvets, cut-away stabilizer is recommended. To preserve the fabric's drape, consider using two layers of soft, lightweight cut-away stabilizer rather than a single layer of heavier stabilizer. If using tear-away stabilizer, choose a soft, easily removed product. As with the cut-away stabilizers, it is often better to use two layers of lightweight tear-away stabilizer for additional support rather than one heavy layer.



Two layers of cut-away stabilizer keep the stitching neat but must be graded after embroidery.

Hoop the velvet

Securing velvet in the interlocking rings of a standard machine embroidery hoop can cause permanent damage to the fabric pile and weave structure. There are several ways to avoid marring the fabric.

ALTERNATIVE HOOPS

Instead of two interlocking shapes, a magnetic hoop has two layers of plastic that are held together with strong magnets. This enables you to secure the fabric without creating "hoop burn," but be sure to test a scrap. Magnetic hoops are available in limited sizes.

TRADITIONAL HOOPS

The safest approach is to avoid hooping the fabric directly. Instead, hoop stabilizer and use a basting stitch or adhesive to secure the velvet to the hooped stabilizer. Self-adhesive stabilizers (wash-away or tear-away), temporary basting sprays, or even washable glue sticks are all options for sticking the velvet onto hooped stabilizer. Temporary basting sprays have the advantage of evaporating without needing removal. If basting stitches are used, test them on a velvet scrap to ensure that no marks remain after they are removed.

Stitch the motif

Once the fabric has been hooped, select the needle and thread appropriate for the project. The correct needle and thread combination makes stitching smoother and more successful.

THREAD CHOICE

Velvet can be embroidered with a variety of threads, including rayon, polyester, silk, and even metallic, if the correct needles are used. Textured fabrics such as velvet generate more needle heat due to friction than smoother faced fabrics. Needle heat can cause threads to melt and break. Similarly, the increased friction can cause delicate embroidery threads to fray. Using adhesives for basting can add to the friction issues. Look for high-quality threads and test the design with the thread.

NEEDLE SELECTION

A titanium topstitching or embroidery needle helps prevent thread breakage. Titanium and similar coatings distribute and disperse heat during embroidery more effectively than a plain steel needle. Plus, the larger eye and deeper thread grooves found in topstitching and embroidery needles protect the thread from abrasion. If the thread breaks frequently, try using a larger needle. A size 90/14 or larger topstitching needle may be necessary to protect the thread during stitching. Reducing the embroidery speed also reduces friction and improves stitch quality. Always begin stitching with a fresh needle.

Finish the embroidery

Once stitching is completed, carefully remove the excess stabilizer. For cut-away stabilizers, use pinking shears and grade the stabilizer layers for soft edges. If you used wash-away stabilizer, wash the velvet gently. Wet velvet is heavy and can be stressed if the full weight of the fabric is left unsupported. Be careful when hanging the fabric to dry and ensure that the fabric's weight is well distributed. Add liquid fabric softener to the rinse water to restore the fabric's hand. If any stiffness remains after hand-washing and treating with fabric softener, tumble-dry for a few minutes on your dryer's low- or no-heat setting to resolve the problem.

The sparkle of metallic threads pairs beautifully with the rayon/silk velvet's sheen.

*Pattern: KwikSew 3161. Embroidery pattern: Pfaff 470, Romantic Décor.
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