Scrap lace

Create a fabulous openwork fabric

A bin full of leftover fabric scraps is like a box full of crayons to me, the many colors and textures signifying a world of possibility. The fabric pieces aren't big enough for a whole project, but they're perfect for making what I call "scrap lace."

Scrap lace is rich in surface texture and color. Making it is easy, and it satisfies my urge to combine different textiles. It doesn't demand perfection; you can make it as simple or complex as you wish. The results are always a surprising combination of delicacy and strength. Best of all, scrap lace is versatile: use it as part of a garment or by itself as a lovely scarf.

The key to holding rows of machine stitches and fabric scraps together is water-soluble stabilizer. Lightweight silks like crepe, dupioni, and taffeta are ideal for scrap lace, but soft linen, rayon challis, cotton, and wool create interesting effects, too. The scraps should be similar in weight and hand. I also like to incorporate pieces of yarn and heavy decorative threads to add dimension and variation.

In this article, I'll show you how to create scrap lace for a garment using a pattern as a guide and offer tips for working with this one-of-a-kind creation.

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Don't toss your fabric scraps —transform them into lovely, unique lace.

Pattern: Vogue 8786; fabric: silk noil, Waechters.com.

Scatter and sew

Water is an integral part of the scrap lace process, and shrinkage or color bleeding can be an issue, so it's a good idea to wash and preshrink the fabric first. You'll need: enough bits and pieces of fabric to loosely cover the intended garment surface, plus extra for filling in around the edges; strips of yarn and/or thick thread; water soluble stabilizer (my favorite is mesh stabilizer like AquaMesh Embroidery Stabilizer by OESD, because it's more like fabric than the clear varieties); pins; sewing thread to coordinate with the fabrics and yarns; and pinking shears or a rotary cutter with pinking blade (optional).

1 **Choose fabrics that have similar hand and drape.** I think that if fabrics, yarns, and decorative threads look good together in a pile on my table, they'll work well together as scrap lace. If the lace is intended as part of a garment, include pieces of the garment's main fabric so that the final result appears cohesive and intentional.

Evaluate fabric scraps, yarns, and decorative threads together before deciding on the best combination for your scrap lace.

2 **Cut the water-soluble stabilizer to the desired size.** If you are making a scrap lace panel for a garment section, trace the applicable pattern piece onto the stabilizer, adding an extra inch around the edges to accommodate distortion during stitching.

Garment section outline

STABILIZER
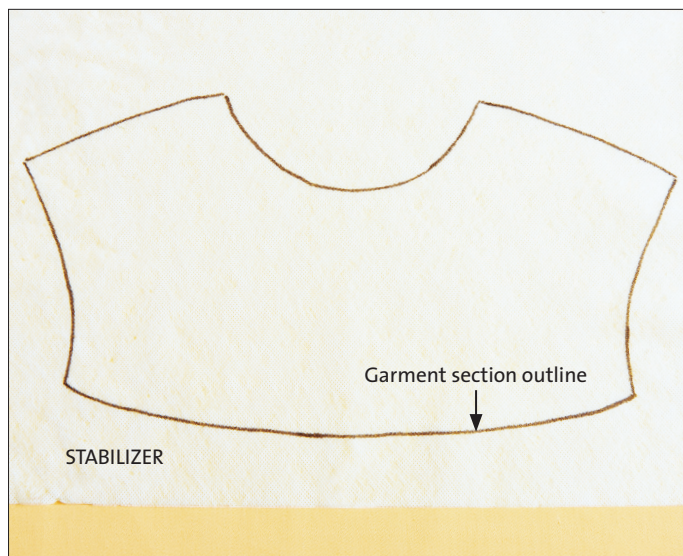
3 **Cut or tear the fabric into strips, squares, rectangles, or random shapes.** Pink the edges, if desired. If one of the fabrics has a printed or woven design, you can cut out the design motifs to incorporate into your lace.


4 **Arrange the fabric pieces on the stabilizer randomly or in a pattern.** Open spaces are critical for a lacy effect, so avoid overlapping the fabric pieces too much. However, if the pieces are too far apart, the lace may not be stable enough. Incorporate yarns or thick decorative threads to add dimension and fill in blank spaces without creating an opaque effect.


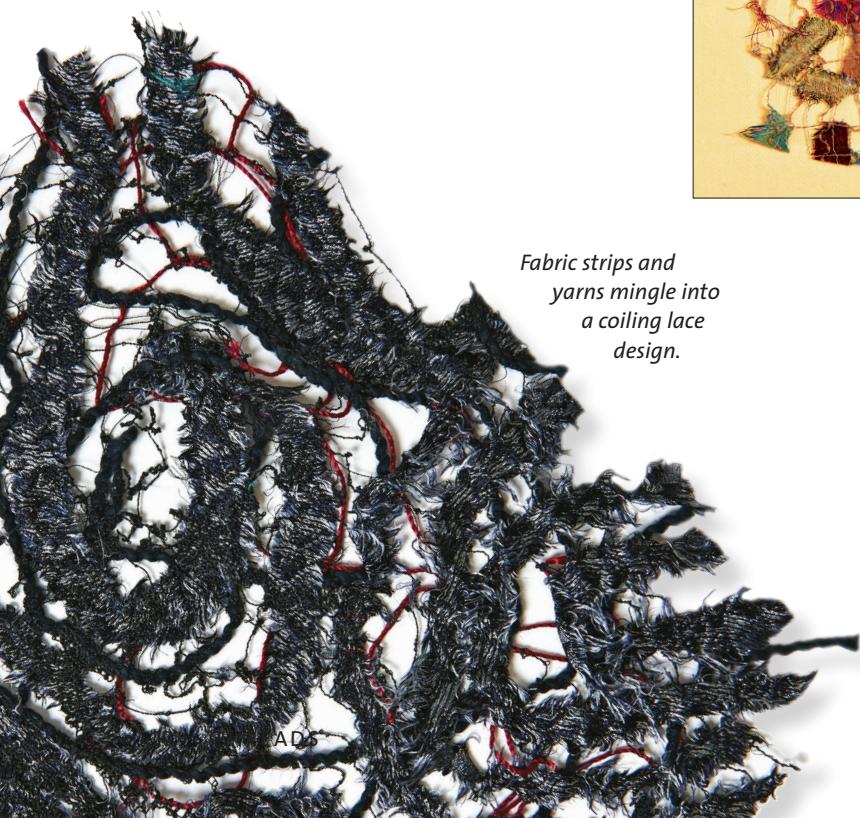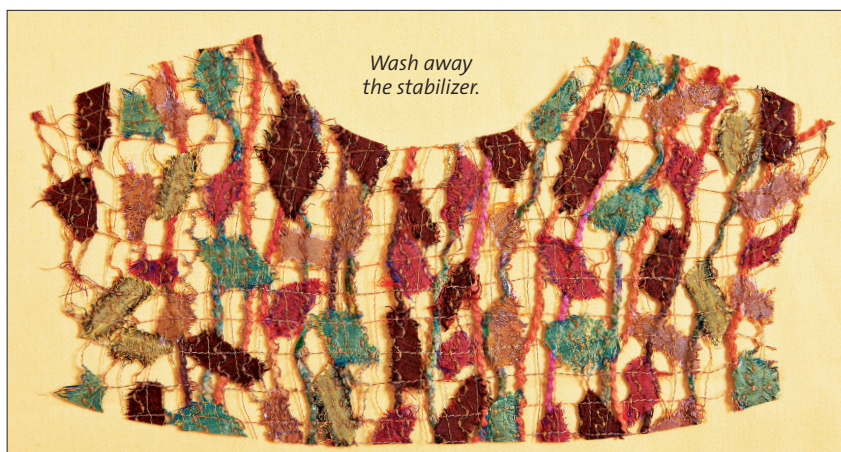*Arrange scraps and yarns on the stabilizer.*

5 **When you're satisfied with the effect, cover the scraps and stabilizer base with another piece of stabilizer.** Pin the layers together, starting at the center and working toward the edges.

Cover stabilizer in scraps, top with another stabilizer layer, and pin.
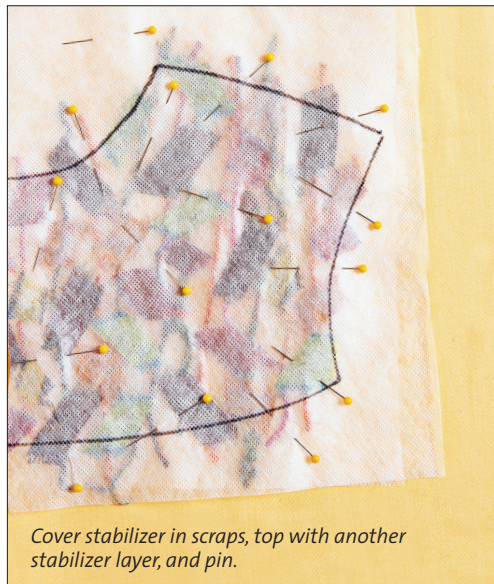
6 **Sew through the layers as if machine quilting.** Sew horizontally and vertically to cover the surface and ensure that all of the scraps and yarns are secured and connected. If you are creating a lace panel for a garment, sew around the section's perimeter. A 3-mm straight stitch is sufficient, but using decorative stitches adds another textural element and mimics the look of fine lace.

Sew straight and decorative stitches through all layers to secure the scraps.
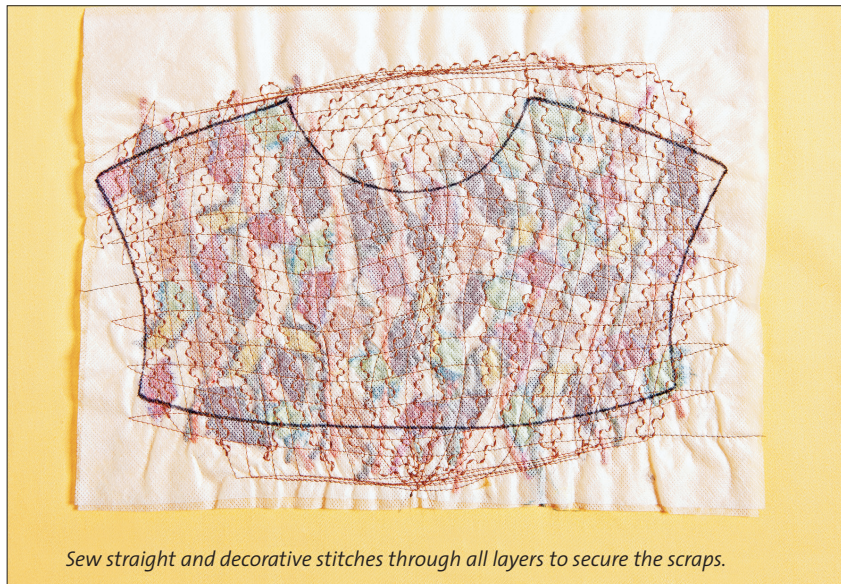
7 **After stitching, wash away the stabilizer.** Follow the stabilizer manufacturer's directions. Agitate the panel gently in water, then rinse until all the stabilizer is washed away. Roll the scrap lace in a towel, and gently squeeze out excess water. Let it air-dry, or press the lace panel while still damp. Then recut it using the pattern piece.

Wash away the stabilizer.

Fabric strips and yarns mingle into a coiling lace design.

Random fabric strips and yarns create a fringed effect.

WORKING WITH SCRAP LACE

Making scrap lace is experimental, and the results are always somewhat surprising. The completed lace is very strong because the fabric pieces are all stitched together once the stabilizer is washed away, and it makes a lovely scarf, embellishment, or larger element of a garment. Working with scrap lace may seem tricky, so let the following tips guide you.

Finishing
If you're making a garment or an accessory from scrap lace panels, there are two possible ways to finish the edges:

Bias-bind the scrap lace edges in a complementary fabric . . .

. . . or leave the edges unfinished for a loose, fringe-like effect.

Joining garment sections
Trim the scrap lace garment section edges so they are even and regular. Match the adjoining seamlines and pin the lace sections right sides together. Use a piece of tissue paper to keep the scrap lace from catching on your machine's feed dogs. Sew the seam using a straight stitch. Then zigzag-stitch the seam allowances together. Remove the tissue paper.

Joining multiple panels
To create a large panel from several smaller scrap lace panels, align the lace panel edges atop a piece of stabilizer wide enough to cover the seam. Fill in any gaps, or trim the area as needed. Place another piece of stabilizer on top, and sew as before, using similar rows of stitching.

Lace panel-to-panel seam