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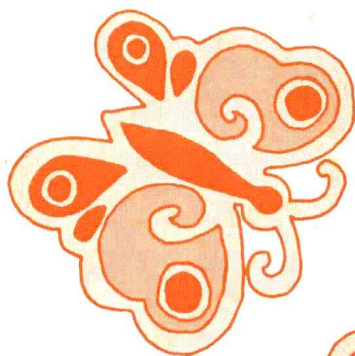
# *Arts and Crafts*





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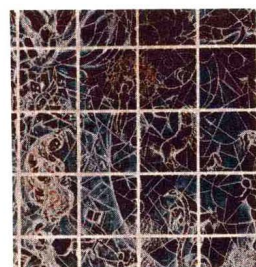
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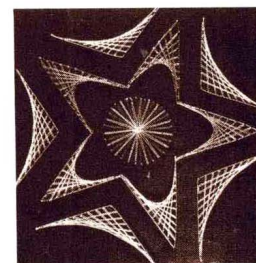
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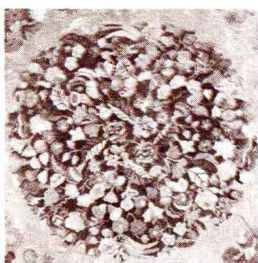
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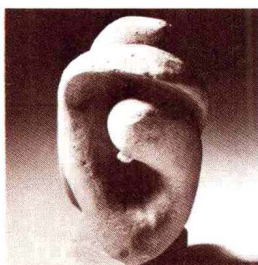
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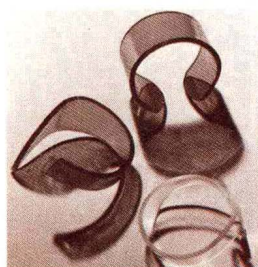
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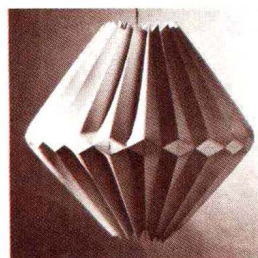
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*This lovely example of crewel work, from a picture worked by Lynne Knoll, uses a traditional design, the "tree of life."*



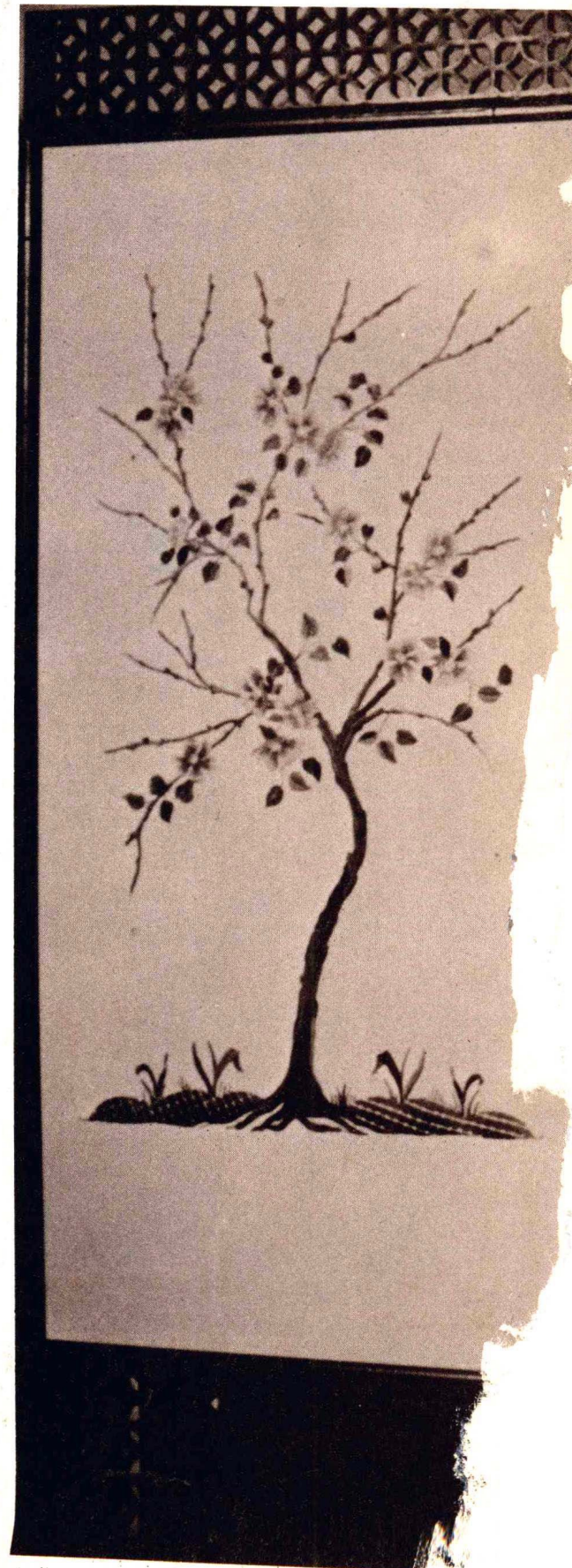
# Crewel

*An ancient worsted embroidery technique, created out of a need for warmth and a desire to imitate Oriental styles, crewel work has once again become a popular craft.*

The earliest embroidery styles originated in England and were determined by the preferences of the court. In the latter part of the sixteenth century, Queen Elizabeth I displayed a preference for embroidered roses and other typical English flowering plants, thus establishing the subject matter for the needlework of the day. When Oriental styles became the desire of the court — as during the reign of James I, who followed Elizabeth I — a new embroidery trend was set. And, if the court wished to emphasize religious or mythological motifs, these were created for needlework designs.

Because flax was commonly grown, spun, and woven into linen cloth in many English households, crewel was originally worked on linen used mainly for bed furnishings. In fact, linen was primarily used until 1764, when James Hargreaves, inventor of the Spinning Jenny, discovered a method for spinning cotton that yielded a thread strong enough to provide the warp for English weavers.

**Figure 1. This attractive folding screen (opposite) displays three panels which have been embroidered with crewel yarns and silk threads. Oriental motifs were used to create the different designs.**









The crewel stitches first used were plain tent stitches — short stitches slanting to the right forming solid backgrounds. These were worked to cover the cloth completely, assuring the thickness necessary for warmth.

Often, certain stitches were preferred because they used less wool. Surface embellishing stitches became popular and the solid background was only intended to show amidst the different flat, looped, and knotted stitches.



**Figure 2.** *This eighteenth-century Queen Anne sidechair is a fine example of early upholstered furniture. The fabric design is typical of this period. (Courtesy, Victoria and Albert Museum.)*

In the latter part of the seventeenth century, there was a drastic change in the style of needlework. Embroiderers began using silk and, simultaneously, crewel work began to lose its heavy look. Popularity for this type of needlework lagged a bit in England until the early eighteenth century when, during the reign of Queen Anne, upholstered furniture became more commonly used. Indeed, at this time, crewel work seemed to

reach its pinnacle: it acquired a delicate look, highlighted with touches of silk threads.

Shortly thereafter, crewel work in England subsided and was not revived until Victorian times. Unquestionably, the masterful English pieces which have survived to this day were often the result of the work of several people under the close supervision of one British gentlewoman. Eventually, the popularity of crewel spread across the Atlantic to America, but patterns, oddly enough, contained a great deal of Oriental influence. Typical motifs were of herons and other waterfowl as well as water plants.



**Figure 3.** *American colonists continued the English tradition of crewel embroidery, as shown in the wing chair above, but they modified the technique by using different stitches and a less formal design. (Courtesy, Mission House, Stockbridge, Mass.)*

The early American colonists, remembering how fashionable crewel work had been in England, continued the craft long after their ancestors had tired of it. Furthermore, the crewel of American women developed its own light style, involving less work and the use of fewer kinds of stitches.

Along with renewed interest in such colonial communities as Williamsburg, Virginia, came a revived interest in early-American styles. It is the restoration of colonial customs and practices that



accounts for much of the recent attention being given to crewel work.



*Figure 4. These early American embroidered bed coverings provided privacy for the sleeper and helped to protect against the cold. (Courtesy, The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.)*

## Common Terms Used In Crewel

**Couching:** a method for tacking threads to a fabric's surface: first, long stitches are sewn or placed on the area to be covered and then short stitches, generally of another color and/or fiber, are used to tack the longer ones in place.

**Crewel Work:** embroidery worked with fine, 2-ply yarns.

**Double Threading:** a technique for embellishing stitches already embroidered into the fabric; accomplished by working first in one direction and then back in the opposite direction. Embellishing stitches are sewn through the fabric only when beginning and ending the technique; the contrasting or secondary thread is brought under and over those stitches already sewn.

**Interlacing:** another embellishing technique which gives a circular lacy effect. (See also Double Threading.)

**Laid Work:** similar to couching, this work is generally used to create a pattern such as cross-hatching within an outline..

**Tapestry Needle:** a needle with a smooth rounded tip used in canvas work.

**Tent Stitch:** a common short stitch worked at a diagonal.

**Threading:** an embellishing stitch worked in one direction. See also Double Threading.

**Warp:** the series of vertical threads on a loom which run the full length of the material to be woven.

**Whipping:** an embellishing stitch in which the secondary yarn wraps the first by sliding under each stitch. The effect is like a fine rope. See also Double Threading.

**Working Yarn:** yarn being used to make stitches; not the yarn already worked.



*Figure 5. The Long and Short Stitch was used to fill in the flower petals. This stitch is most attractive when different shades of one color thread are worked in the shape.*



## Basic Equipment And Supplies

Materials used in crewel work are easy to obtain and can usually be purchased in needlework shops and art/needlework sections of department stores. Kits are available, containing background material, yarn, needles, and instructions. Following is a list of basic items that may be used for a crewel project, including explanations about each. In addition to the following items, one will also need a staple gun, staples, and a sprinkler bottle.

### BACKGROUND FABRICS

Linen is generally suggested as a background fabric because it is neutral in color and substantial in texture. A blend of cotton and linen, heavy cotton, and wool are also acceptable. There are also linen and synthetic blends, but unless used with a hoop or frame (explained below), these will not block well. British Satin, although a lovely fabric, is not as readily available as linen and is three or four times more costly. Because the right side has a sheen, it is quite formal.

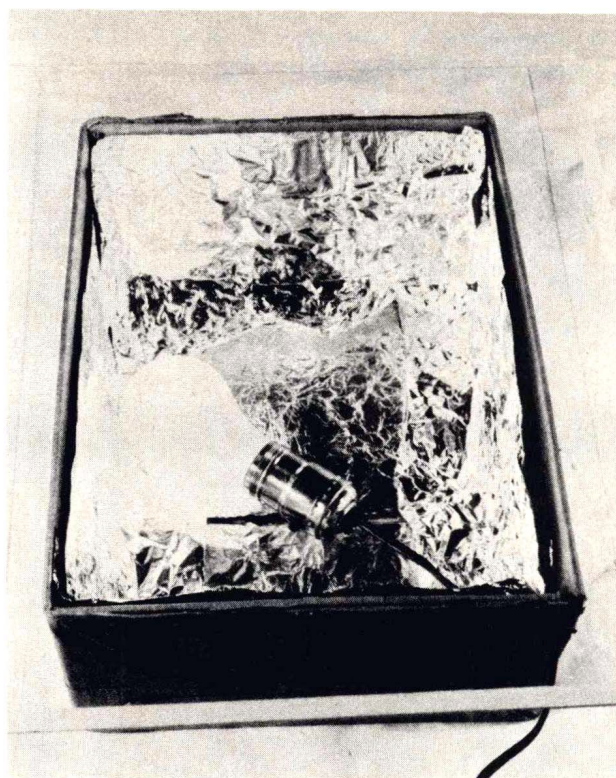
If it is necessary to block the crewel work upon completion, the background fabric should be washable.

### TRANSFER PATTERN AND TRANSFER PENCIL

These items, used to apply designs to the background fabric, are necessary because few companies provide background materials with patterns, unless in a kit. Transfer patterns and pencils are available in needlework shops and department stores. The former, which are easier to use, are drawn on a tissue-like paper in colored ink. The pattern is transferred by placing it, inked-side down, onto the right side of the fabric and pressing over it with a hot iron. Transfer pencils are used to draw original patterns and the result is the same as that achieved with a transfer pattern.

### SHADOW BOX

A shadow box is an inexpensive method for transferring a design to fabric. It works on the same principle as placing a drawing against a bright window and then holding a plain piece of paper



**Figure 6.** A shadow box (above) is easily constructed from an ordinary cardboard box, glass, foil, and a lightbulb. The pattern and fabric are tacked against the box to transfer the design (opposite).

over it; the drawing is easily traced on the plain paper. The following items are necessary: a box (without cover) at least 4" deep and approximately 14" square; aluminum foil; a piece of clear glass to rest on top of the box; masking or freezer tape; a 60-watt bulb fitted into a socket and a cord long enough to reach an outlet so that it is at a comfortable height. (A "drop" or "lead" light is also appropriate.)

Line the box with the aluminum foil to avoid scorching. Place the light bulb in the box and cut a 1-inch wide vertical slot near one corner through which the light cord can pass. Tape all sides of the glass for safety.

In order to copy a design onto a background fabric, a non-running fine-point pen is needed. Also have handy a fine felt-tip pen. This will *not* be used on the background fabric, but rather to emphasize the pattern's lines, making them more easily seen for transferring.

### HOOPS AND FRAMES

Hoops are oval or round; frames are square or

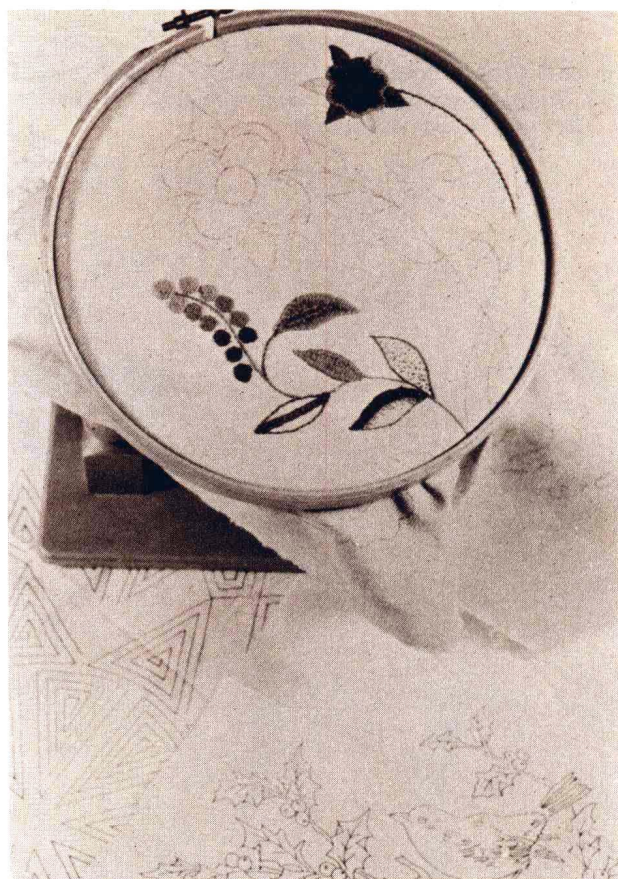




rectangular. The purpose of each is to hold the material taut. There are "lap" or "table" hoops and frames; others that stand on the floor give the embroiderer greater freedom. When shopping for a hoop or frame, the finished wooden types with a side tightening screw are preferable to those made of metal. Because it is not essential to work with a hoop or frame, the only way to decide if one will be useful is to experiment. However, using a hoop or frame is usually desirable for the Long and Short Stitch, French Knots, laid work, and couching. Moreover, when the embroidery is taut at all times, it is possible to have a better perspective of the entire piece. On the other hand, a project without a hoop or frame is easier to move around when it is worked other than at home.

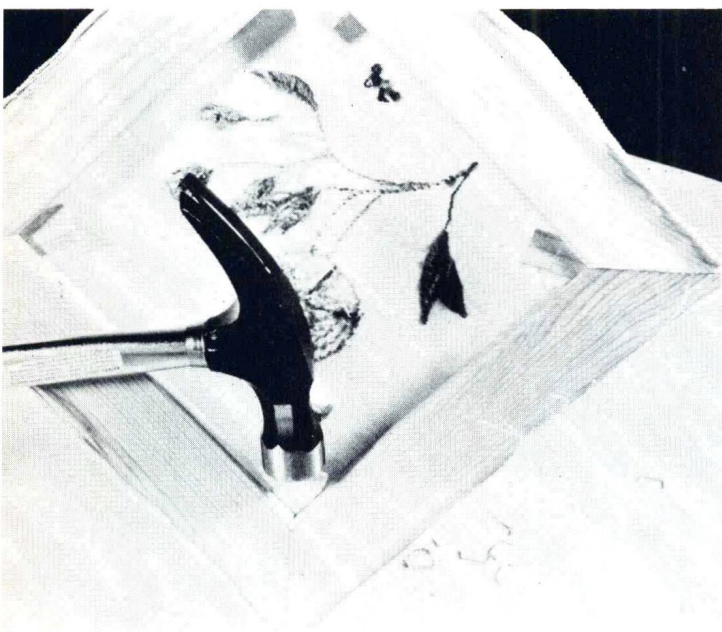
### STRETCHER BARS

These are wooden bars to which the fabric is stapled after it is blocked as part of the finishing process. They also can be used to hold the fabric taut during embroidering, but there must be sufficient fabric surrounding the design so that the bars are clear of the work area. When used, these bars become part of the finished piece and are placed in a recessed frame with the completed embroidery.



**Figure 7.** It is advisable to use a hoop or frame when working most crewel projects. This wooden lap hoop is one example of the many different types of hoops that are available.





**Figure 8.** One method of holding the fabric taut is to staple the material to a stretcher bar. Wedges hammered into the corners keep the fabric from sagging while the embroidery is being worked.

## CREWEL YARNS

Because the thickness or weight of crewel yarns varies, it is helpful to experiment with several different weights in choosing a satisfactory yarn. Generally speaking, a bolder, more contemporary piece looks best with a heavier yarn; fine detailing, as in a human figure or a dainty bird, is better worked with a finer yarn. In some shops, crewels may be purchased by the strand; however, it is more common to buy either a card of 30 yards or skeins of 1/4, 1/2, or 1 ounce.

## NEEDLES

A crewel needle is sharp, has an elongated eye, and is available in packages sized 3 to 9 and 5 to 10. The smaller the number, the larger the needle. The needle should be large enough to bring the crewel yarn through the material easily. If the yarn has to be yanked through, a larger needle is needed to make a larger opening in the cloth. A tapestry needle may also be used, but only on the

**Figure 9.** Crewel equipment can be purchased wherever needlework materials are sold. Supplies include linen fabric, an assortment of yarns and needles, a hoop, and a pair of embroidery scissors.





surface of the fabric, not to sew through it. These needles, which range in size from 18 to 22, are sold either in assorted sizes or all one size. Again, the smaller the number, the larger the needle. A size 18 will usually suffice unless the embroidery is very delicate.

## BLOCKING BOARD

This should be a board to which either freezer paper, with the waxed side against the board, or waxed paper can be easily stapled. Freezer paper is preferred because it is easier to draw on and to see pencil lines for guiding the blocking of the embroidery.

## Basic Procedures

No matter how anxious one is to begin a new project, certain precautionary measures will assure against unnecessary problems. Imagine how discouraging it would be to complete a lovely piece of crewel work, only to discover a nonfast color had been used, thus ruining the piece when it is washed. The following suggestions, therefore, are meant to help avoid such situations; their implementation takes only a little extra time.

## THREADING THE NEEDLE

Hold the needle so that the narrow portion of the eye end is horizontal. *Fold* the yarn over the eye end; pinch it between the thumb and forefinger so tightly that the yarn is not visible. Slide the needle out without moving the thumb and forefinger, then turn the broad side of the eye end toward the thumb and forefinger. Gently push the eye between the thumb and forefinger and *slowly* open them. Because the yarn has been flattened, it will go into the eye as the eye is pushed into it. This procedure is relatively easy and takes only a minimal amount of practice.

## PREPARING THE BACKGROUND FABRIC

It is not necessary to wash linen or British Satin, but do wash any blended material. Before applying the pattern to the fabric, be sure that the fabric is free of any creases and that all style numbers and other miscellaneous markings such as trademarks have been cut away.

If a hot iron transfer is to be used, place the inked or penciled side down on the right side of the fabric. After centering the transfer, pin it in each corner to prevent sliding when iron is applied. To see if the pattern has been transferred, after ironing, unpin one corner and gently lift the pattern.

Before beginning the embroidery, turn the edges of the fabric under about 1/2" and baste with running stitches, using regular cotton sewing thread. This keeps the fabric from ravelling. Then, place the fabric in a hoop or frame if desired. If using stretcher bars, stretch the material over the bars and staple it.

## TESTING THE CREWELS

As with the background fabrics, it is necessary to be sure that the crewel colors will not run during blocking. To test the yarn, cut a 2-inch piece of each color; hold the pieces under lukewarm water for a few seconds; place them on a paper napkin; cover them with another napkin; let dry. If no dye is absorbed by the napkin, the crewels are fine to use.

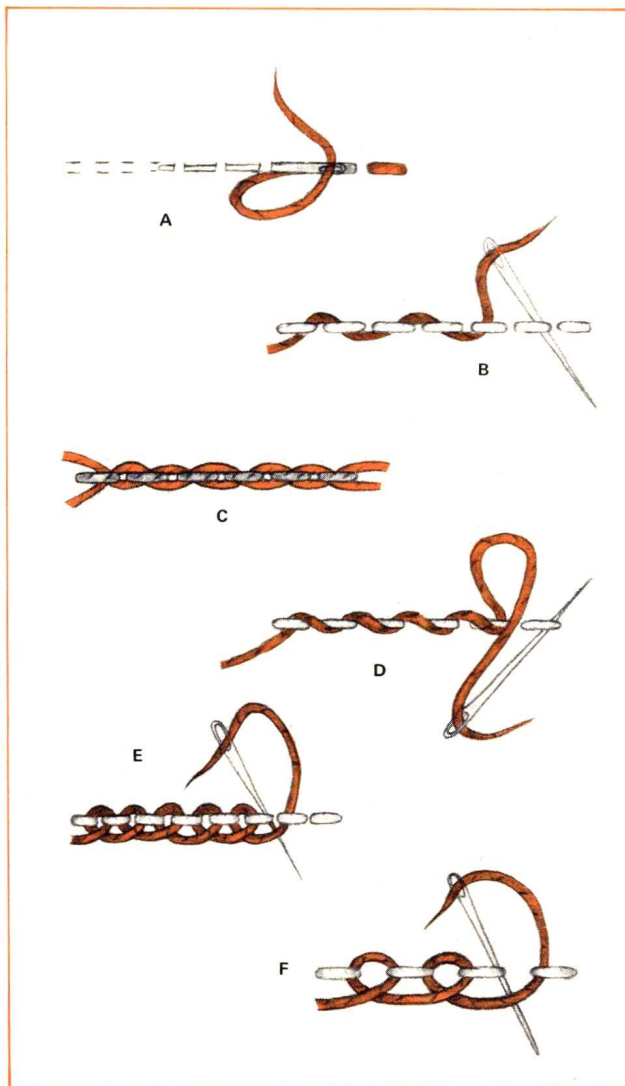
## TESTING THE PEN

Even a "waterproof" pen used to transfer a design onto fabric should be tested. Make a few marks on one corner of a paper napkin. Wet the opposite corner and fold the napkin so that the wet portion is over the markings. If the markings do not transfer, the pen is safe to use.

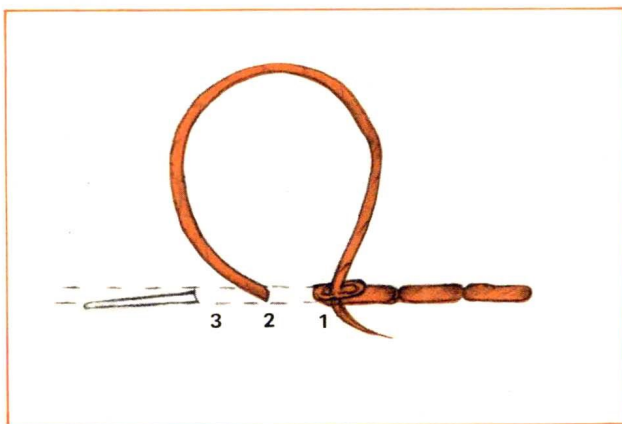
## FLAT STITCHES

There are hundreds of embroidery stitches, some of which are particularly common to crewel work. Although each *variation* of every stitch has its own name, the list of basic stitches is not overwhelming. Furthermore, each crewel worker has favorite stitches and usually does not use every possible stitch. Keep a small piece of fabric nearby for experimenting with new stitches and for testing color combinations. Some of the more popular stitches are Satin, Surface Satin, Stem, Chain, Buttonhole, French Knot, Herringbone, Fly, Fishbone, Seed, and Feather. Each of these is discussed below. Some of the related diagrams show two different lines. These signify the use of more than one color or shades of one color.





**Figure 10.** Pictured above are various kinds of Running Stitches: Running Stitch (A), Threaded Running Stitch (B), Double Threaded Running Stitch (C), Whipped Running Stitch (D), Pekinese Stitch (E), and Spaced Pekinese Stitch (F).



**Figure 11.** When sewing the Back Stitch, bring the needle up at 1, down at 2, and up at 3. Pull the thread through to complete the stitch.

## Running Stitch

Generally used for outlining, this simple stitch can also be used attractively in parallel rows to fill a shape. For a plain Running Stitch, use a crewel needle; for a whipped or threaded Running Stitch, also use a tapestry needle. The Pekinese Stitch shown here is simply another type of Running Stitch.

## Back Stitch

The Back Stitch, like the Running Stitch, can also be threaded, double threaded, or whipped.



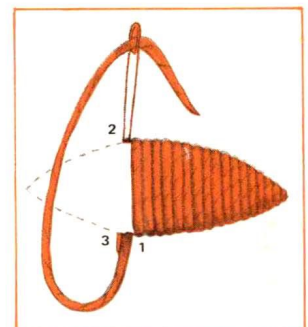
**Figure 12.** Bring the needle up at 1 and down at 2 to make a single Seed Stitch. To make a double Seed Stitch, make two stitches side by side.

## Seed Stitch

This version of the Back Stitch is sewn in different directions, has an airy look, and appears smaller than a Back Stitch.

## Satin Stitch

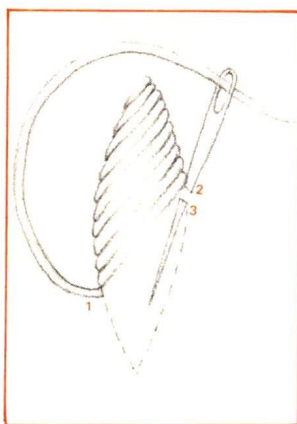
A familiar stitch used in monogramming linens, this stitch completely covers an area and uses as much yarn on the back as it does the front. It is prettiest when worked at an angle. Begin in from one end of the area to be worked and work to the



**Figure 13.** To do the Satin Stitch, bring the needle up at 1, down at 2, and up at 3. Pull the thread through, and continue working.



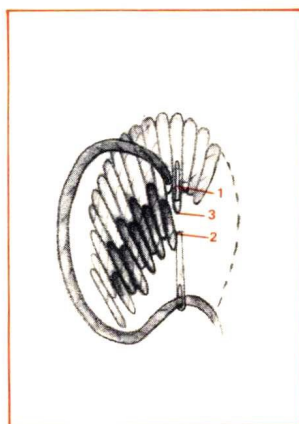
**Figure 14.** For the Surface Satin Stitch, bring the needle up at 1, down at 2, and up at 3. Pull the thread through and make a similar stitch on the opposite side. Continue working from right to left.



opposite end. Then turn the work around and complete the covering.

### Long and Short Stitch

This effective stitch gives a sense of dimension but requires practice. It is a Satin Stitch worked in stitches of alternating lengths, with each succeeding row piercing the one above.



**Figure 15.** To begin the Long and Short Stitch, alternate long and short stitches in the first row. Work the second row with stitches of equal length by bringing the needle up at 1, down at 2, and up at 3.

Using a hard pencil, lightly draw broken lines on the fabric in the direction the stitches are to take. Then, starting at the center of this area, work to either the right or left, using the pencil lines to indicate the stitch direction. In the first row, bring the needle out at the bottom of the stitch and insert it just above the line to be covered. In succeeding rows, the needle is inserted just above the base of the stitch of the previous row. The first row of stitches is of alternating lengths, i.e., short, long, short, long. All succeeding rows until the last are of long stitches. The last row is again short and long.

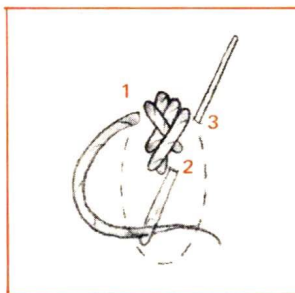
When it is not possible to take a full-sized stitch because the pattern's shape narrows, make a

smaller stitch or none at all. When a smaller stitch is used, it is referred to as a *compensating stitch*.

A suggested length for the Long Stitch is approximately  $1/3$ "; the Short Stitch should be half that. However, the final determination of the size of the stitches really depends upon the size of the area to be filled and the preference of the embroiderer.

### Fishbone Stitch

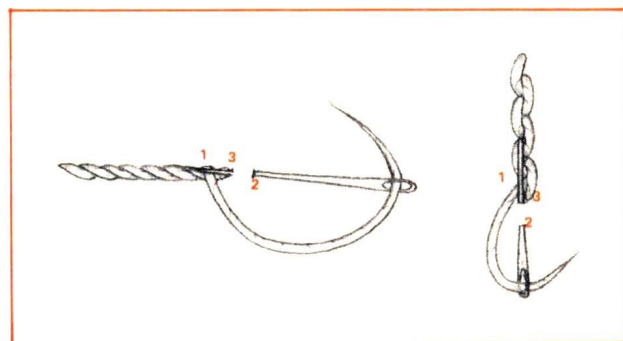
This is similar to the Satin Stitch. But, unlike the Satin Stitch, each Fishbone Stitch extends a bit beyond the center of the area to be filled so that the succeeding stitch crosses it, creating a depression in the center of the shape. Start with a vertical stitch at the top to cover any open space (see diagram) and then begin the Fishbone Stitches to the left of the first stitch.



**Figure 16.** To make a Fishbone Stitch, bring the needle up at 1, down at 2, and up at 3. Pull the thread through and insert needle on opposite side. Continue working to the right and left of center until the shape is filled.

### Stem, Crewel, or Outline Stitch

With the working yarn held above or below the needle, a very fine line is created by the use of this stitch. For an Alternating Stem, the position of the yarn is changed for each stitch.

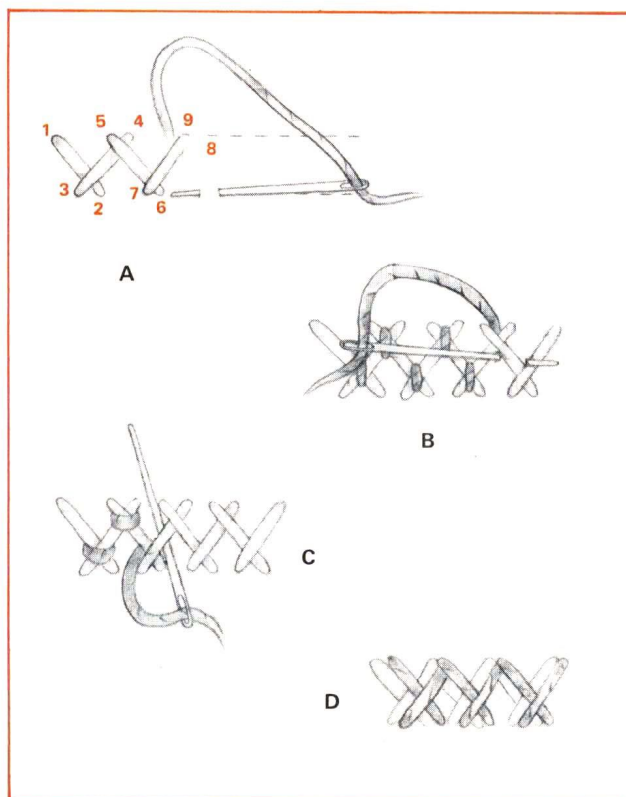


**Figure 17.** For the Stem Stitch (left), bring the needle up at 1, down at 2, and up at 3. Pull thread through and repeat. For the Alternating Stem Stitch (right), bring the needle up at 1, holding thread to the left of the needle, then, down at 2 and 3. Now, holding thread to the right, insert needle down at 4 and up at 5. Repeat, alternating thread from left to right.



## Herringbone Stitch

This is a very fast stitch to work and has many variations. The needle is always moved horizontally across the back of the fabric.

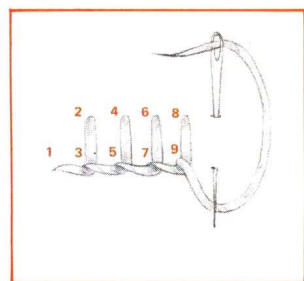


**Figure 18.** To sew a Herringbone Stitch (A), bring the needle up at 1, down at 2, and up at 3. Pull thread through, and repeat at 4 and 5. Continue, following the numbered sequence. Variations of the stitch include the Tied Herringbone (B), Interlaced Herringbone (C), and Double Herringbone (D).

## LOOPED STITCHES

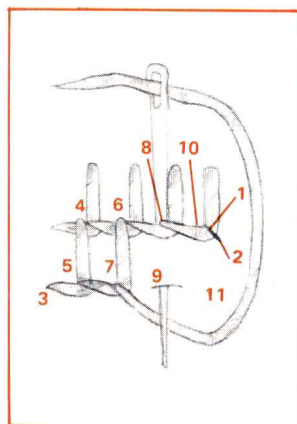
### Buttonhole or Blanket Stitch

Hold the needle vertically and bring it up to the left of the yarn at numbers (3), (5), (7), etc., as shown. The stitches may be spaced far apart



**Figure 19.** To do the Buttonhole Stitch, bring the needle up at 1, down at 2, and up at 3. Holding the thread under the point of the needle, pull the thread through and follow the numbered sequence.

(Open Buttonhole) or close together (Closed Buttonhole).



**Figure 20.** Make a row of Buttonhold Stitches to begin the Attached Buttonhole Stitch; tack the last stitch down at 1 and 2. Bring the needle up at 3, down at 4, and up at 5. Holding the thread under the needle point, pull the thread through and follow the numbered sequence.

### Fly Stitch

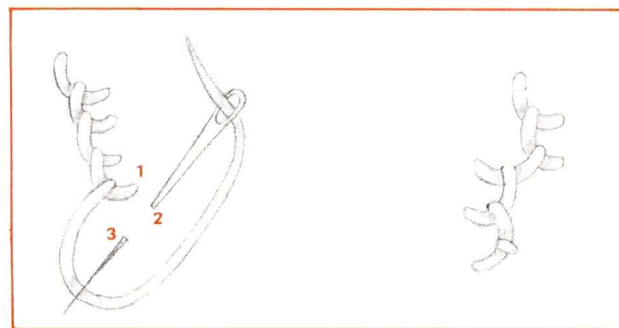
Separate Fly Stitches resemble birds on the wing. When worked closely (Closed Fly), a center vein is created. This is a particularly good stitch for depicting feathers, pine tree boughs, or leaves.



**Figure 21.** For the Fly Stitch (left), bring the needle up at 1, and, holding the thread under the thumb, down at 2 and up at 3. Pull thread through and make a stitch to 4. A row of Closed Fly Stitches (right) is made by shortening the stitch between 3 and 4.

### Feather Stitch

This is a slanted Buttonhole Stitch. It may be regularly spaced or the fabric may be turned alternately to the left or to the right to effect a look of openwork.



**Figure 22.** For the Feather Stitch (left), bring the needle up at 1, down at 2, and up at 3. Pull the thread through and follow the numbered sequence. To vary the stitch (right), make two Feather Stitches to the right and turn the fabric to make two to the left.