

Inserting Bands of Lace

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What is insertion lace?

If you look carefully at a length of lace, you'll see that some laces have one scalloped or shaped edge and one edge that's straight and finished. These are edging laces, meant to be attached by one edge only.

Other laces have two scalloped or shaped edges. These are meant to be stitched onto fabric along one or both edges as trim.

Insertion laces have two straight (or almost straight) edges. They can be handled as trim or sewn between fabric edges to become an integral part of the material. Generally, the seams attaching insertion lace are very fine so that they are almost invisible.

How to add a lace insertion

1. Position the lace right side up on the right side of your fabric. Use pins or basting tape to hold the edges in place.
2. Set your machine for a straight stitch, regular sewing length (2.0 – 2.5 mm). Match your thread color to the lace. Sew along both lace edges, about 1/16" inside the lace edge.
3. Working from the wrong side, cut through the fabric between the lines of stitching. Be careful not to cut the lace. Press the cut edges away from the center of the lace along the stitching.
4. Turn the work over and work from the right side, making sure the fabric edges remain as pressed, away from the center of the lace. Stitch along the edges of the lace, very close to the edge.
5. Trim the fabric seam allowances very close to the second rows of stitching. This will leave narrow seam allowances, not more than 1/8".
6. Set the machine for a narrow zigzag, about 2.0 – 3.0 mm wide and 1.0 – 1.4 mm long. Working from the right side, zigzag over the lace edges, catching the fabric seam allowance as well. Ideally, the zigzag will overcast the edges of the fabric, but that's not essential; just be sure that the stitching catches the fabric seam allowances and holds them in place away from the lace. Change the zigzag settings as necessary for your fabric and lace. The aim is to allow the stitches to disappear into the lace edges.

Making your own lace

If you own an embroidery machine, look online for "freestanding" lace designs digitized to hold their shape without background fabric. They are embroidered on water-soluble stabilizer which is removed after embroidery to leave only the stitched lace behind. Freestanding laces range from thickly embroidered satin-stitch motifs to delicate designs that cleverly mimic hand crochet. Making your own lace is a great way to match lace to fabric or produce motifs for lace appliqué. Embroidering freestanding lace yardage is time consuming but creates a lovely and unique product for your projects.

Carefully consider the thread used in your freestanding lace. Begin by reading any documents the digitizer includes with the design files; often, the digitizer will specify a thread weight or type that works best with the design files. Using a heavier thread will make the lace stiff and thick, while a lighter-weight thread may cause the design to fall apart. This doesn't mean you can't use a different thread for your lace, but do make samples first to check the design integrity and how the lace performs once the stabilizer is removed.

A wide variety of threads make wonderful lace. Many freestanding lace designs are digitized with 40-weight machine-embroidery thread in mind; trilobal polyester machine-embroidery thread produces lace with a lovely sheen. Metallic machine-embroidery threads can also be used for some motifs, and make fabulous holiday ornaments. If you're hoping to match lace to a fabric color, sewing threads like Coats Dual Duty XP All Purpose provide a wide range of color options without the shine of machine-embroidery threads. Cotton, polyester, and rayon threads can all be used. Quilting threads like Coats Quilt+ are another great choice; a bit thicker than all-purpose threads, Quilt+ cotton is wonderful for faux-crochet or heavy lace. Best of all, it is packaged on mini cones, providing more yardage for high-stitch-count freestanding lace designs. You can also experiment with threads labeled Fine to create lightweight lace, and nothing compares to real silk thread for the most luxurious laces of all.

Remember that you'll need a lot of thread for freestanding lace designs. If your embroidery design or cataloging software provides an estimated yardage, use that figure to calculate the thread you'll need for both the needle and bobbin threads (they are usually the same in lace motifs). If you're making lace yardage, stitch a few extra inches for shrinkage; the lace may relax as the stabilizer is removed. An extra 10% is a good estimate.

For the embroidery base, choose a water-soluble stabilizer that looks like sheer fabric. Clear water-soluble stabilizers can be used, but will often require several layers to support the number of stitches in freestanding lace designs. They are also prone to tearing after multiple needle penetrations in a small area. With mesh-like water-solubles, often only one layer of stabilizer is needed. Read the instructions for water temperature and other recommendations for use and removal. I prefer the water-soluble stabilizers from RNK Distributing, sold under the Floriani and Jenny Haskins names.

Don't resize or edit freestanding lace files unless you understand them well. Remember that the digitizer has carefully arranged the stitch order to ensure design integrity after the stabilizer dissolves. That said, if you change the thread weight for your lace, you may find that resizing the design slightly – 10% or less – accommodates the difference in thread diameter. Always stitch and wash samples using the exact thread, design, and size you're considering, especially if you've made changes.

When the embroidery is complete, cut around each lace motif or section to remove most of the stabilizer. Don't cut too close. If you have sections of lace to be joined together, do it before removing the stabilizer (and check the instructions that come with your designs). Remove the stabilizer by first rinsing the lace under running water and then soaking it – possibly overnight – in water. If your lace dries stiff, there is probably still stabilizer in the lace. Rinse and soak it again.

TIP: Be sure to remove the stabilizer before attaching the lace to your project to eliminate the possibility of later shrinkage.

No embroidery machine?

Experiment with making your own lace, freehand. Place water-soluble stabilizer in a hand-embroidery hoop to keep it taut. Trace a design onto the stabilizer. Stitch on the lines with a short straight stitch, going over the design several times. Finish by stitching a narrow zigzag over the straight stitches. With a bit of practice, you may find yourself making laces that are uniquely your own!

Embroidery Designs Seen On Set

Sleeve lace: My Embroidery Haven, Jennifer's Dream; stitched with Coats Dual Duty XP All Purpose

Pillow flap: Zundt Designs, Quilt 04

Filet crochet square: Advanced Embroidery Designs, Christmas Star

Pansy doily, leather inserts, gold snowflake, and many others: Criswell Embroidery & Design

Handkerchief edging: Sue Box Designs

"Battenburg" snowflakes: Embroidery Library

The green shirt is made from Vogue #8691 by Katherine Tilton

For other design credits, please send me a message at rkbrent.com.