

English Paper Piecing Hexagons

By Kathleen Tracy

A hexagon is a six-sided shape. Making these little pieces from fabric scraps is easy and can be a lot of fun.

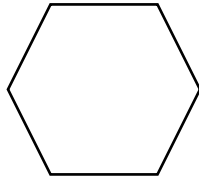


Quilts made with hexagons have been around for centuries and may be one of the oldest pieced patterns. Hexagon quilts were actually very popular during the 19th century even though we are more familiar with them as Grandmother's Flower Garden quilts from the '30s. Sometimes they were called Mosaic or Honeycomb quilts. The project in my *Civil War Sewing Circle* book was inspired by some of the antique quilts I saw in books and online collections.

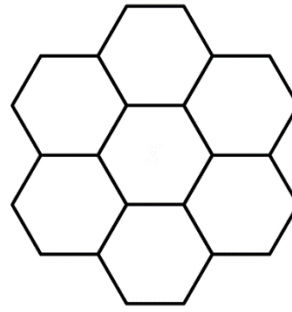


← Don't you just love the scrappy look of this quilt?

The technique used to make this is called English paper piecing or EPP. The fabric is stitched by hand onto a paper foundation template. The pieces may take a little time to prepare but they're fun and easy. Hexagons make a perfect take-along project for when you have a few minutes and are away from your sewing machine. Many quilters find that working with these little pieces can be very relaxing.



Hexagon



Hexagon flower

Here are the projects from my books. You can make one of these or choose one of your own.



Hexagon Garden from Small & Scrappy book



Hexagon flowers from The Civil War Sewing Circle book

The instructions for making these quilts are in the books. But I'll show you how to make the hexagons and hexagon flowers and you can make your own design if you prefer not to use my patterns. You may also make your hexagons a little larger if you like. Then just cut your background squares larger too and leave about 1/2 " all around.

Here are the supplies you'll need -

Supplies

1. Fabric scraps (2" squares will work)
2. Paper hexagon pieces (5/8" one side)
3. Pins (I like to use short applique pins)
4. All purpose thread for basting and a finer thread for sewing the hexies together
5. Sharp or Milliners needle
6. Scissors - paper scissors, fabric scissors and embroidery scissors
7. Optional: Glue stick, clear or opaque plastic template for fussy cutting, hole punch



Get started

1. The first thing you need to do is prepare the paper hexagons. You can either buy these precut at your local quilt shop or online. You can also print out your own. For the hexagon quilts in my books, you'll need size 5/8" hexagons. This is the measurement of each side of the hexagon and usually how they are measured and listed on the package if you purchase the precut pieces. (Flat side to flat side they measure 1".)

Most quilters purchase the precut pieces but it's also very easy to print out your own from the internet by downloading a grid of hexagons of any size and then printing them out on cardstock.

<https://incompetech.com/graphpaper/hexagonal/>

Set the hexagon size to .06 inches (or .60, which is as close as you can get to 5/8"). Check the black box for line color and check "put a dot in the middle". If you wish to make your hexagons larger, adjust the measurement. Then click Download. It will come up as a .pdf file. Print out the page and measure the shape flat side to flat side to make sure it is 1". Cut the rows into vertical strips using paper scissors, not fabric scissors. Then cut the individual hexagons from the strips. Sounds like a lot of work but it really only takes me about 15 minutes and you can get 68 hexagons from one sheet. The paper you use must be a little thicker than regular printer paper which is why I like cardstock. You can also reuse them several times because the thicker pieces hold up. There's also a template in the books for a single hexagon shape you can trace onto cardstock.

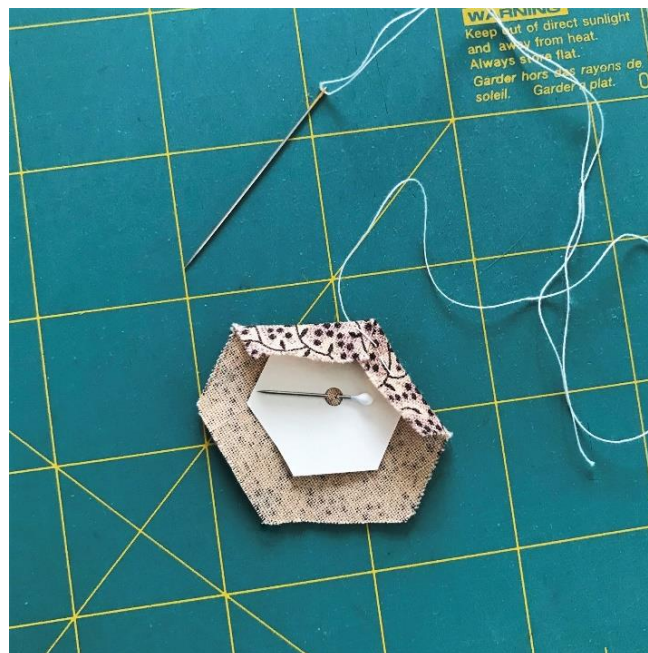


Printing out the pieces with a dot in the center of each piece allows you to punch a hole to place a small applique pin. The pin keeps the fabric in place while you baste and the hole makes it a lot easier to insert the ball end of a seam ripper to remove the papers when you're finished sewing the flowers together.

2. Place a paper hexagon on the wrong side of a small fabric scrap (a 2" square is sufficient) and cut $\frac{1}{4}$ " around the shape. It does not have to be exact, just enough to fold the fabric over the paper. Start by folding fabric on one side over the paper edge. Hold it down, then fold the side next to it and baste the fold with a tacking stitch to hold it together. Take two tacking stitches then go around the paper until all the edges are basted where they meet at the folded corners. The stitches should not go through the paper. Leave the papers inside but remove the pin. I use a multipurpose thread for this basting step. Look at the link to the video tutorial below if you need help.



If I'm working on these away from my sewing room, I'll sometimes use a hexagon shape cut from template plastic (1/4 " seam allowance included) for fussy cutting or just as a template for tracing the shapes onto the back of my fabric. Then I cut the shape with scissors. You can see it's the same size as the fabric with paper hexie pinned to it.



Folds tacked at the first corner



Second corner



I prefer the thread basting method myself but many quilters today like to use a Sewline glue pen to hold the fabric down because it's quicker, especially if you're making hundreds at a time. I timed myself and it takes me approximately one minute to thread baste a single hexagon and about 40 seconds to glue baste one. So the time difference is sort of negligible for me. And my fingers don't get sticky if I use thread. I also find it a little more difficult to remove the papers if they're glued. Try both methods and see which one works best for you.

It takes seven hexagons to make a flower. Choose the same fabric for all six "petals" and a different color for the center. Or, you can make all of the pieces from different colors for a scrappier look. Some shops even carry precut fabric hexagons. You can use a clear plastic template you make yourself or buy an acrylic fussy cut ruler to help cut specific designs for your pieces if you like.



3. Begin to make a flower by sewing one petal to the center hexagon, matching up the flat sides, right sides together. Sew with a whipstitch, catching the fabric only and not stitching through the paper. (See video listed below for closeups.)



Continue to sew each of the other hexagons to the center hexagon in a circular fashion, like spokes on a wheel. I like to use a finer thread like Aurifil, in a neutral beige or tan color, for this part. The finer thread nestles into the fabric and makes your stitches almost invisible. As you sew, make sure your needle picks up only a few threads of the fabric and does not go through the paper.



4. Once all of the hexies are stitched to the center hexagon, work around to connect the sides in the same way, folding the center paper to connect them. Press when done.





Voila! One finished hexie flower.



You'll find that there are many tutorials online. Everyone seems to use a slightly different method but the end result is the same. One of the best tutorials I've found for making hexagons is by Alison Stothard of Hexadoodle quilts. Since I wrote this, I found out she's in the process of moving her website so if the first link doesn't work, go to the second YouTube video.

<https://hexadoodle.com/blogs/articles/how-to-thread-baste-hexagons-for-epp>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAbcR1isTLU>

Here's how to sew the hexagons together to make the flowers -

<https://hexadoodle.com/blogs/articles/how-to-sew-a-hexagon-flower-english-paper-piecing> OR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOPEKgNpu4w>

If you prefer to glue baste your hexagons instead of using thread, here's a tutorial for doing it that way -

<https://hexadoodle.com/blogs/articles/how-to-glue-baste-hexagons-for-epp>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ffydv-PT07Y>

As mentioned, there are many English paper piecing or Hexagon video tutorials available online so check out YouTube. Here's an introduction to English paper piecing with Sue Daly -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nqa70gU-E9U>

Have fun learning about EPP! We'll begin our Hexagon sew along in January so watch the group for updates. It's okay to get a head start if you have time before the holidays but please do not post any pictures of your progress until the sew along actually begins. Thanks!

- *Kathy*