

How to cross stitch - basic instructions

Thank you for buying a Catkin and Lillie pattern! If you already know how to cross stitch then you can dive straight into it. If you are new to stitching or need a refresher then here is some basic information to help you.

Fabric

There are many different fabrics to cross stitch on but the 2 main types are;

Aida: this has threads woven into little blocks so the holes are really easy to see. The count of the fabric indicates the size of the stitches, so 14 count has 14 holes per inch, 16 count has 16 holes per inch, and so on. The higher the count, the smaller the stitches. Aida is the easiest fabric for beginners to start with.

Evenweave: this has roughly evenly spaced threads with each cross usually stitched over two threads. The count of the fabric is much higher than aida, but if you stitch over two threads, 28 count evenweave is equivalent to 14 count aida, 32 count evenweave is equivalent to 16 count aida etc.

I work all the main samples for Catkin and Lillie patterns on 16 count aida, but I occasionally make samples on other fabrics just to see what it looks like!

Needles

Tapestry needles are ideal for cross stitch as the rounded point goes easily through the holes without splitting the fabric. Generally you want a smaller needle for higher count fabrics to avoid stretching the holes which can make them more visible in the finished piece.

I tend to use the following;

14 count aida / 28 count evenweave – size 24 needle

16 count aida / 32 count evenweave – size 26 needle

18 count aida – size 26 needle (size 28 often recommended but I find it too fiddly!)

Threads

Cross stitch is usually worked with stranded cotton, often called embroidery thread or floss, consisting of 6 strands which can be gently pulled apart into individual strands. Cross stitch is most commonly worked in 2 strands but check the instructions of the kit or pattern you are using as this may vary.

All the samples for Catkin and Lillie patterns are worked in 2 strands of DMC thread. If you prefer to use a different brand of thread you can find colour conversion charts online.

If you use very long pieces of thread it can more easily become tangled and weakened the longer you stitch with it. However, using very short pieces means you will have to start and stop a lot! I start with about 1m of thread and double up a strand so I am stitching with about 50cm of thread, but you may prefer a little shorter than this.

Chart basics

Each square on the chart represents one cross stitch, which is worked over one block of Aida or usually two threads of evenweave. Cross stitches are worked adjacent to each other, sharing holes, so there are no gaps between the stitches.

Each square with a printed symbol represents a cross to be stitched, and the key (or legend) will tell you which colour each symbol represents. Blank squares have no cross stitch in them!

Catkin and Lillie patterns generally only consist of whole stitches.

Starting a project

You can start stitching anywhere you like on the pattern, but I prefer to start my stitching in the centre of the pattern to make sure the design ends up in the middle of the fabric. On Catkin and Lillie patterns the centre lines are marked in red and also indicated by arrows on the top and left of the grid.

To find the centre of your fabric:

For a small design fold your fabric in half in both directions and find the point where the creases cross each other. Start stitching a section of the pattern close to this, counting out from the central point.

For larger designs you may wish to stitch a line of running stitch along the horizontal and vertically centre lines using standard sewing thread (not embroidery thread). When your work is finished, you can gently pull these threads out.

Starting a thread

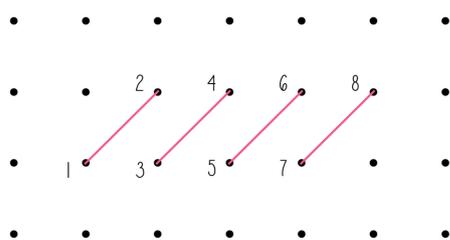
It is best to avoid starting with a knot on the back of your work as this can cause unevenness on the front of your work. Try one of these methods;

Loop method: pull a single strand out from the length of 6 strands and fold it in half. Thread the needle with the 2 cut ends of thread then bring it up from the back of the fabric where you want to start stitching. Pull the thread almost all the way through but leaving a small loop of thread at the back. Push the needle back down through the fabric, making the first half stitch, and take the needle through the loop of thread on the back to secure it. This works particularly well with longer pieces of thread.

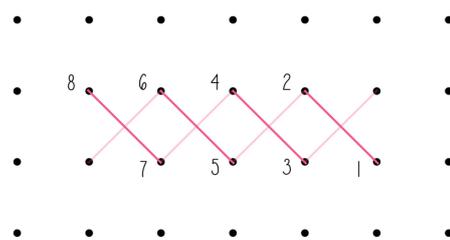
Tail method: individually pull two strands of thread out from the length of 6 strands and then lay them back together. Run the thread through 3 or 4 stitches on the back, next to where you plan to start stitching. For the very first stitches of a project or to start in an area where you don't have any nearby stitches, leave a tail of thread at the back of your work, then work the first few stitches over this to hold it in place, then trim the tail end close to the fabric.

Making the cross stitch

You can work complete individual stitches or make a row of half stitches then go back across the other way. Make sure the top thread of all your crosses slant in the same direction for the neatest result i.e. all your crosses should be crossed in the same way.



Work a row of half cross stitches by bringing the needle up from the back to the front at odd numbers and down from the front to the back at even numbers



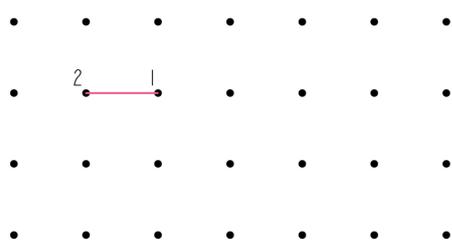
Work back along the row, again bringing the needle up from the back to the front at odd numbers and down from the front to the back at even numbers

Finishing a thread

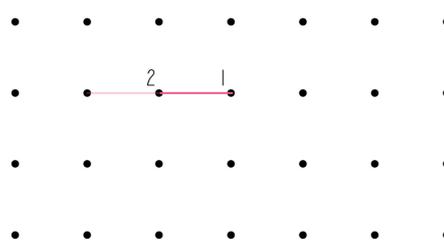
When you have completed a section, run the thread through the back of 3 or 4 stitches and snip the thread off close to the fabric. If the ends are left too long they may catch and pull through to the front when you continue stitching.

Backstitch

These are straight stitches used for outlining and adding detail to images after the cross stitch has been completed. They can be worked with one or two strands of thread as dictated by the pattern. They are shown on the pattern by a solid line and can go across one or more squares. When a line is longer than one square you can either work this in individual stitches of one square length or single longer stitches across multiple squares, whichever you prefer the look of.



Bring the needle up from the back to the front at number 1 and down at number 2



Again, bring the needle up from the back to the front at number 1 and down at number 2. Continue like this so you will work each stitch back towards the stitches you have already worked

Hints and tips

- When cutting your piece of fabric, check the design size then allow approximately 10cm extra on each side to allow for framing. You can allow less if using for greeting cards.
- If the design is large you may wish to hem around the edge of your fabric first so it doesn't fray as you work
- If the pattern covers more than one page you can tape the pages together, overlapping the margins which are usually shaded grey
- You may find it helpful to mark off completed stitches on the pattern as you go, using a pencil, pen or highlighter
- If you have to count across a gap to find where to place the next stitch try to count across the shortest gap possible to help avoid errors from mis-counting!