

MAKING THE STEMS

Just like real flowers, after the ground (our background) is prepared, the first things we see are the stems. Learn several ways to prepare the stems and how to make your hand appliqué stitches disappear.

Preparing the Background:

Before we start making stems, let's prepare the background fabric. Fold the background square in half and finger press a fold. Unfold and refold the square the other direction and finger press another fold. Center the freezer paper stem template on the background block, matching the folds of the background and the stem template. Using a medium-hot iron, press the freezer paper stem template onto the background fabric. After we make our stems, you will be ready to place and stitch the stems to the background.

Cutting Bias Strips:

The stems will be made using bias strips. Lay the stem fabric and cut a 45° angle on one end – this is the bias of the fabric. To cut bias strips, lay a ruler along this bias edge to cut bias strips for the stems.

There are several ways to make stems – from very narrow $\frac{1}{8}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " stems.

Method 1: Clover Bias Maker

You can purchase Clover Bias Makers in several sizes.

2 times $\frac{1}{4}$ " = $\frac{1}{2}$ " cut strip

2 times $\frac{1}{2}$ " = 1" cut strip

It helps to starch the fabric before the cutting the strips and they will feed into the bias maker easier. Insert the $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide strip into the bias maker; use a pin or a stiletto to push it through, if needed. Pin the end of the fabric to your ironing board. Place the tip of the iron next to the bias maker; press as you pull the bias maker.

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Method 2: Bias Bars

For the Bias Bar method, you will cut your strips:

2 times $\frac{1}{4}$ " + $\frac{1}{2}$ " = 1" cut strip

2 times $\frac{1}{2}$ " + $\frac{1}{2}$ " = 1½" cut strip

Fold the strip in half lengthwise with wrong sides together. On the raw edge, stitch with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance to form a tube. Trim this seam allowance to $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Insert the Bias Bar and twist it so the seam is on the backside. When stitched to the background, this method will make the stem slightly rounded to give some dimension to the stem.

Method 3: Cardstock

You can use a piece of cardstock by marking the finished width of the bias stem; cut on the mark to make a slit. The fabric strips should be cut 2 times the finished width of the stem.

2 times $\frac{1}{4}$ " = ½" cut strip

2 times $\frac{1}{2}$ " = 1" cut strip

From the backside of cardstock, feed the fabric through the slit. Pin the cardstock to the ironing board. Press as you pull the fabric through the slit.

Method 4: Fold and Sew by Machine

Cut the strips:

2 times $\frac{1}{4}$ " + $\frac{1}{2}$ " = 1" cut strip

2 times $\frac{1}{2}$ " + $\frac{1}{2}$ " = 1½" cut strip

Press the strip in half lengthwise with wrong sides together. Align the raw edge with the edge of the freezer paper stem template which has been centered on the background fabric and pressed to adhere it; a few pins or a little fabric glue stick will hold the stems in place. With your sewing machine (or by hand), sew the stems in place with $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance. Start sewing the $\frac{1}{2}$ " stems to the background. After the large stems have been sewn to the background, remove the stem template and trim the seam allowance to $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Now you can add the $\frac{1}{4}$ " stems that will have the end encased in the wider stems. Fold the folded edge of the $\frac{1}{2}$ " stems over to cover the ends of the narrow stems and the seam allowance. This method is a real timesaver if you have a lot of stems.

Method 5: Folded and Basted (great for narrow stems)

This method for making bias stems makes it easier to handle narrow stems. You do not cut the stem away from the fabric piece until you have folded, pressed, and basted the stem.

You can use this method to make stems in any width. Determine the finished width of your bias stem and multiply that number by two. On the wrong side of the stem fabric, draw a line that distance from the 45° angled cut.

For a 1/4" stem, $1/4" \times 2 = 1/2"$ (the distance to draw the line from the 45° cut angle).

For 1/2" stems, $1/2" \times 2 = 1"$ to draw the line from the 45° cut angle.

Fold wrong sides together, placing the angled edge next to the drawn line. Press, being careful not to stretch the fabric. Fold the fabric again and press. There will be three layers of fabric. Baste down the center of the folded fabric, going through all three layers. Trim close to the basting stitches to separate the bias stem from your fabric piece.

Stitching Tip: When appliquéing undulating vines or stems, always stitch the inside edges of the curves first. Since you are using bias strips, after you have stitched the inside curves, the outside curves stretch easily to make the stem flat and smooth. Sometimes you will need to skip from one side of the stem to the other to stitch the inside curves first.

Next Lesson: Appliqué by Hand or Machine – The Leaves



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