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how to sew on felt

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How to Sew on Felt: A Complete Guide for Beginners and Hobbyists

Felt is one of the most versatile materials in the world of crafting. From making plush toys to creating decorative wall hangings, it offers a unique texture and durability that can elevate any project. However, because felt is a dense, non-stretchy fabric, attaching it to other materials or to itself can be a bit tricky if you don't know the right techniques. This guide will walk you through every step of sewing on felt, covering tools, methods, tips, and creative ideas so you can master the craft with confidence.

Why Sew on Felt?

While felt can be glued or glued with hot glue for quick fixes, sewing provides a stronger, more flexible bond that can withstand wear and tear. Sewing also adds a subtle, decorative touch that enhances the overall aesthetic of the finished piece. Whether you're making a quilt, a stuffed animal, or a felted jewelry piece, knowing how to sew on felt can transform your project from simple to stunning.

Essential Tools and Materials

Before you start, gather the following items. Having everything at hand will keep your workflow smooth and reduce frustration.

- Needles: A sharp, medium size sewing needle (size 12–16) works best for felt. For thicker felt, consider a ballpoint needle or a quilting needle.
- Thread: A polyester or nylon thread that matches or complements the felt color. For a stronger bond, use a slightly thicker thread or a double stitch.
- Scissors: Sharp fabric scissors to cut felt cleanly.
- Ruler and Measuring Tape: Accurate measurements are essential for symmetrical cuts.
- Cutting Mat: Protects your work surface and keeps scissors sharp.
- Rotary Cutter (Optional): Ideal for cutting straight lines quickly.
- Needle Threader: Helps you thread the needle, especially when using thick thread.
- Fabric Chalk or Pencil: Mark outlines before cutting.
- Seam Ripper (Optional): For quick corrections.
- Seam Roller (Optional): Smooths seams for a professional finish.

Types of Felt and Their Sewing Characteristics

Not all felt behaves the same. Understanding the type of felt you're working with will help you choose the best sewing technique.

- Commercial Felt (Pre cut or Roll): Typically 1.5–2 /mm thick. It's smooth, dense, and holds stitches well. Ideal for quilting and applique.
- Craft Felt (Soft, Decorative): Usually 0.5–1 /mm thick. It's more pliable but can fray if not handled carefully.
- Felted Wool: Made by felting wool fibers. It's thicker and more elastic, requiring a larger needle and a stronger thread.
- Hand Felt: Created by hand, it can vary in density. Test a small section before sewing to gauge stitchability.

Preparing Your Felt for Sewing

Proper preparation ensures clean seams and a polished final product.

1. Cutting the Felt: Use a ruler and fabric chalk to trace your pattern. Cut along the outline with sharp scissors or a rotary cutter for straight edges.
2. Marking the Seam Line: Lightly sketch the seam line on the back of the felt. This helps you keep stitches straight.
3. Reinforcing Edges (Optional): For felt that tends to fray, you can lightly tape the edges or apply a small amount of fabric glue along the cut line before sewing.
4. Aligning Pieces: Pin or clip the pieces together before stitching to keep them from shifting.

Hand Sewing on Felt: The Classic Method

Hand sewing gives you full control over stitch placement and is perfect for delicate or small projects.

Step by Step Hand Sewing

1. Thread the Needle: Cut a 30–40 /cm length of thread, knot the end, and use a needle threader if needed.
2. Start with a Backstitch: Insert the needle from the back to the front at the start of the seam. This lock ensures the stitch doesn't unravel.
3. Use a Straight Stitch: For felt, a straight stitch works well. Keep the stitches about 0.5–0.8 /cm apart for a neat finish.
4. Finish with a Knot: Tie a secure knot at the end of the seam, then trim excess thread.
5. Seam Finishing: Press the seam with a seam roller or a dull edge of a ruler to flatten it.

Tips for Smooth Hand Sewing

- Use a ballpoint needle to prevent the needle from damaging the felt fibers.
- Keep the thread tension even; too tight can crush the felt, too loose will leave gaps.
- Practice on a scrap piece first to get a feel for the stitch length and tension.

Machine Sewing on Felt: Speed and Precision

When you have larger projects, a sewing machine can save time and produce a uniform seam. Not all machines handle thick felt, so choose wisely.

Preparing the Machine

- Use a walking foot or heavy fabric foot to keep the felt from shifting.
- Select a medium stitch length (about 3–4 /mm) for durability.
- Choose a long throat needle or a felt needle if available.

Machine Sewing Steps

1. Place the felt pieces together with the wrong sides facing each other.
2. Pin or clip them along the seam line.
3. Set the machine to the chosen stitch length and needle type.
4. Feed the fabric slowly, keeping the needle down to avoid puckering.
5. After sewing, trim the seam allowance and press the seam flat.

Common Machine Sewing Issues and Fixes

- Skipping Threads: Check the tension; it might be too high for thick felt.
- Puckering: Use a walking foot and slow feed speed.

- Needle Breakage: Switch to a larger needle or a needle specifically designed for heavy fabrics.

Iron On Adhesive as a Hybrid Technique

For projects where a clean look is essential, iron on adhesive can provide a seamless bond. While not a true stitch, it can be combined with a small number of hand stitches for added strength.

- Apply a thin layer of adhesive to the felt edges.
- Press with a hot iron (no steam) for 30–45 /seconds.
- Let cool before adding hand stitches for reinforcement.

Special Techniques for Thick Felt

When dealing with felt thicker than 2 /mm, standard needles may not suffice. Here are specialized methods.

Needle and Thread Selection

- Use a larger needle (size 10–12) with a long eye.
- Choose a heavy weight thread such as 1 /mm nylon or polyester.

Stitching Method

- Perform a backstitch or a running stitch with longer stitch lengths (1–1.5 /cm).
- Alternate the direction of stitches to balance tension across the seam.

Finishing Touches: Seam Sealing and Reinforcement

A well finished seam not only looks professional but also extends the life of the felt piece.

Seam Sealing

- Apply a thin line of fabric glue along the seam before sewing to reduce fraying.
- Use a seam sealant pen for precise application.

Reinforcement Techniques

- Insert a seam tape (felt or fabric) over the seam before stitching for extra strength.
- Use a double stitch or a lock stitch for high stress areas.

Troubleshooting Common Felt Sewing Problems

- Needle Breaking: Use the correct needle size and avoid forcing the needle through dense felt.
- Thread Tension Issues: Adjust the machine tension or practice hand tension on a scrap piece.
- Seam Puckering: Use a walking foot and slow feed speed. Press the seam flat after stitching.
- Felt Fraying: Apply a small amount of fabric glue along the cut edges before sewing.

Creative Applications of Sewn On Felt

Once you master the basics, you can explore a wide array of projects.

- Felt Appliques: Sew colorful shapes onto clothing, bags, or quilts for a personalized look.
- Stuffed Toys: Sew the body and head separately, then attach them with a strong seam.
- Wall Hangings: Create geometric patterns or mandalas by sewing layers of felt together.
- Jewelry: Sew small felt charms onto lanyards or keychains.
- Quilting: Use felt as a backing or top layer to add texture to a quilt.

Maintenance and Care for Sewn On Felt

Proper care will keep your felt projects looking fresh.

- Cleaning: Spot clean with a damp cloth. Avoid harsh detergents that can degrade the fibers.
- Storing: Store flat or rolled to prevent creases. Keep away from direct sunlight to avoid color fading.
- Reinforcement: If a seam weakens, add a small patch of felt and stitch over it.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I sew on felt with a standard sewing machine?

Yes, but you'll need a heavy fabric foot and a larger needle. A walking foot helps keep the felt from slipping.

What thread works best for felt?

Polyester or nylon threads are strong and flexible, making them ideal for felt. For a more decorative look, use contrasting thread colors.

Is it possible to sew very thin felt without it fraying?

Yes, apply a small amount of fabric glue to the edges before sewing, or use a fine needle and a tight stitch to minimize fraying.

Can I use a needle with a large eye for thick felt?

Using a needle with a large eye is not recommended because it may cause the thread to slip and create uneven stitches. Instead, use a needle with a slightly larger eye but still suitable for the thread thickness.

Do I need special needles for felt?

Ballpoint or quilting needles are excellent for felt because they

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