

STITCHING THE QUILT BACK

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Sewing panels of backing fabric together can be intimidating. The instructions below are how I stitch my backing fabric together. Yes, these instructions are different than any other instructions you may have seen or used. With my method you will get seams that lay flat and the backing fabric will be straight at the top and the bottom.

How Much Backing Fabric?

First, figure out how much fabric and how many panels you will need for your quilt backing. Be sure to add a minimum of 6 – 8 inches to the quilt length and width measurements. (3 – 4 inches extra at the top, bottom and sides).

Example, if your quilt is 75 x 100 inches, adding 8 inches to the length and width will make your quilt measure 83 x 108 inches. From these adjusted measurements we know we will need 6 yards of fabric for the backing. (Two panels of 45 inch fabric, each panel 3 yards --108 inches – long for a total of 6 yards of fabric. Personally, I would probably buy an extra $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ yard of fabric).

Backing Fabric Shrinkage

If at all possible, **machine wash, dry and press your backing fabric!**

Most fabric shrinks about 3 - 5 % with washing! This may not be a problem when making the quilt top, but it **CAN** be a problem with the backing!

Example - Your backing fabric is 100 inches long. 3% shrinkage is 3 inches, 5% shrinkage is 5 inches!

The shrinkage could cause a “flat” quilt to become wrinkled and yucky looking after washing.

If you are unable to wash a customer quilt back, I would note that on the Customer Worksheet.

Vertical Backing Seam, Vertical Backing Seam, Vertical Backing Seam!!!

If at all possible, have a **vertical** backing seam!!! Here’s why -

Much easier to put the backing fabric on the quilting machine matching the center back seam to the center markings on the leaders.

You can tell almost immediately if you are going to have problems with the backing laying flat and smooth!

If one side of the backing “sags” and the other side is flat and smooth, this can cause a problem when quilting. You will NOT know this if the backing seam is horizontal!

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If the backing sags on one side, roll the backing back and forth on the quilting machine once or twice to see if the backing smooths out. If, after 2 "roll ups" the backing is still sagging, take the backing fabric off the machine and re-measure and re-stitch the backing seam!

Is this a pain, yes!!! But do it anyway!! In the long run, it will save you a bunch of time and make the quilting much easier!

Avoid like the plague backing with LOTS of piecing!!

You don't know where the back seams will line up with the quilt top. Having a lot of seams on the back and a lot of seams on the front is setting yourself up for thick, nasty seams that you may not be able to quilt over!

NO Horizontal Backing Seams -

If there is "backing sag" with a horizontal seam, you may not notice it until the quilt is quilted and there are pleats quilted into the backing fabric!!

IMHO - It is **much** harder to determine where the center of the backing is and there is much more "quilter's math" involved.

Quilter's Math for a horizontal center backing seam -

Total length of backing _____ inches. Length of quilt top _____ inches.

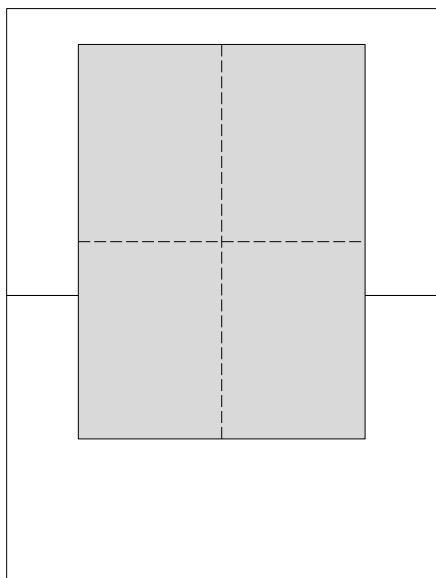
Subtract length of the quilt top from the total backing length.

Divide this number in half (one half for the top and bottom.) Now add about 2 - 3 inches to this number for the fabric needed at the top of the quilt for pinning on, etc. But .. For this calculation we need to subtract this number from the amount trimmed from the top of the backing (trust me, this makes sense.)

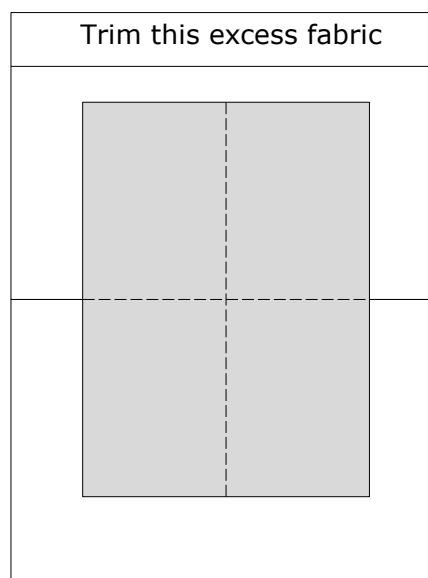
This is the amount of fabric you will need to trim from the **TOP** of the backing fabric before putting it on the quilting machine.

Example - Backing fabric length - 82 inches minus length of quilt top - 60 inches, equals 22 inches. Divide in half = 11 inches. Subtract 3 inches for pinning on the quilt, etc., = 8 inches.

You will need to trim **8 inches** from the **TOP** of the backing fabric so that the horizontal seam is approximately in the center of the quilt!



"Normal" positioning of a quilt top on a horizontal backing seam



Centered positioning of a quilt top on a horizontal backing seam

Cutting Backing Fabric to Size - Vertical Seam

1. Take your scissors and make a small "nip" across the selvedge on one end of the fabric and TEAR across fabric. The tear should go completely across the fabric. If it doesn't, nip, then tear again; slightly lower than the first nip. Tearing your fabric makes a straight edge and makes measuring easier.
2. Measure down the length of the fabric and make another nip at your adjusted quilt length measurement. Example – 108 inches. Tear fabric again.
3. Measure down the length of the fabric again to the adjusted quilt length, nip and tear again. You should have two length of fabric. Fold any remaining fabric and reserve for other projects.

Sewing the Panels Together

4. Go back to the first panel you tore. Take and fold in half along one long selvedge edge (lengthwise) and make small diagonal cut. This will form a notch at the center of the fabric. Fold in half again, to fold into quarters and make two more notches. This divides the length into quarter sections. Instead of making notches, you could use straight or safety pins to mark quarter sections.

5. Take the other fabric panel and divide the length into quarters. Make sure the edges marked will be the edges that will be sewn together.
6. Place fabric panels, Right Side Together (RST), matching, then pinning edges and notches.
7. Begin sewing RST using a seam that is large enough that the selvedge can be trimmed away and that no "selvedge printing" is showing. You may have to make your seam up to **1 inch wide or larger**. After stitching, both the top and bottom edges should be even.
8. Trim away the selvedge edges. I prefer to use pinking shears but a regular scissors will work. Press seam OPEN.
9. Quilt backing is now ready to be used in your quilt. Note – if you are making a three panel quilt back, repeat these steps for the third panel.

For a (free) video mini class on Sewing the Backing Fabric go to -

<https://www.longarmuniversity.com/Tutorials/Backing-Basics.html>