



Perfectly Prepared Backings

Tips and tricks for perfect backings!

While most of the time we only look at the front of a quilt, the backing fabric and getting it ready is just as important as all the work we put into the front of the quilt!

1. ORIENTATION OF QUILT ON THE FRAME

You will need to make some decisions before you decide how much fabric you will need for the backing.

- Is your quilt top directional? For example, trees are directional.
- Have you chosen a design that is directional? Like the quilt top, choosing a quilting design (pantograph or computerized) that is directional will determine how the quilt is loaded onto the frame.
- Are you planning to use a wide back fabric or sew widths of yardage together?

2. SIZE OF BACKING

The size of the backing is very important if you are quilting on a longarm frame. The backing needs to be attached to fabric leaders at the top and bottom as well as have enough room for clamps on the sides of the quilt.

A simple rule of thumb is 10" longer and wider than the quilt top.

If you are basting your quilt on a table or floor for stationary quilting, you may only need 3-6". In both cases, more is better. This extra fabric can easily be used in scrap quilts or even as the binding of this quilt.

3. PREPARATION OF BACKING

Once you know how big to make your backing and which way the top will be loaded, you have a couple of decisions to make.

- Are you planning on a wide back fabric? Most wide backs are approximately 108". Measure to make sure that is really what you are working with, especially if you have washed the backing fabric
- Will you be piecing your backing?

Pieced backings should be loaded on a frame with the seam running parallel to the poles.

You may notice that the quilt backing has little bows or dips either side of the seam if the quilt back is loaded with the seams perpendicular to the poles. This can cause tucks in the backing as you stitch. You may also notice that the area where the seam has been sewn will be thicker as it rolls on the poles and can cause some fabric tension issues.

Also, loading the selvage edge to the quilt poles means that the crosswise grain has the same amount of tension across the quilt. When you load the backing with the crosswise grain to the leaders and attach the side clamps there is uneven tension and the quilt may pull and pucker causing tucks in the quilt back. Loading the selvage edge (the lengthwise grain) reduces any chance of pulls and puckers.

4. PIECING THE PERFECT BACKING

If you choose to use yardage you will need to sew the strips together.

Cut the fabric yardage to the desired length. Measure and tear instead of using rotary cutting tools, the tear is on the grain line and these edges will be nice and straight.

Leave the selvage on and sew with a 1 – 1½" seam allowance. Press the seams flat and then cut or tear off the selvage. This way is simpler and faster than cutting the selvage off and then trying to sew a narrow seam along that long length.



Sew as many lengths together as needed. Some quilters like to match the print on the backing so that it looks like one whole piece of fabric. Be aware that this will require extra fabric.

Leave the selvages on the unsewn edges. This helps the longarm attach the backing to the fabric leaders. There is a nice firm straight edge to work with.



4. HOW MUCH FABRIC DO I NEED?

Now we get into the most important part of preparing your quilt backing. Refer to the questions in Step 1 to help you make decisions.

Here is a sample quilt that measures 57" wide by 87" long. We know we need an extra 10", so our backing should be at least 67" x 97".

Load Lengthwise

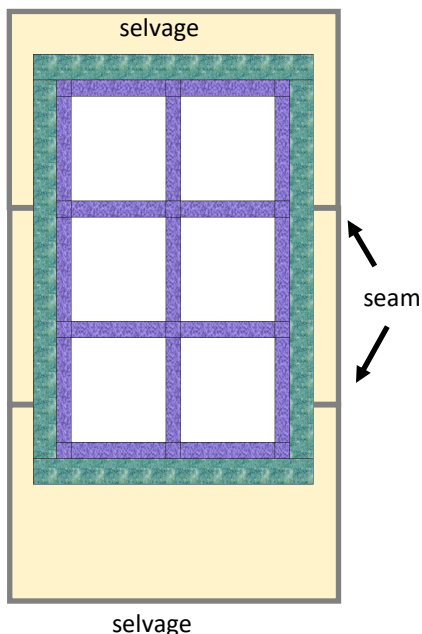
If we are going to load the quilt widthwise (have the 57" lengths attached to the frame), we will need to piece the backing fabric accordingly. Most yardage is labelled 45" wide. I use a 40" usable width as my working measurement.

I need a 97" length of pieced fabric. I simply divide the 97" by the usable width of my fabric 40" and determine I will need 3 pieces of fabric.

$$97" \div 40" = 2.4 \text{ lengths.}$$

Round up the number of full lengths to 3.

I will cut 3 pieces of fabric 67" long. Sew them together along the lengthwise grain and load the shortest edges to the quilt frame.



Load Widthwise

If we are going to load the quilt widthwise (have the 87" lengths attached to the frame) and need to piece the backing fabric we'll follow the same steps.

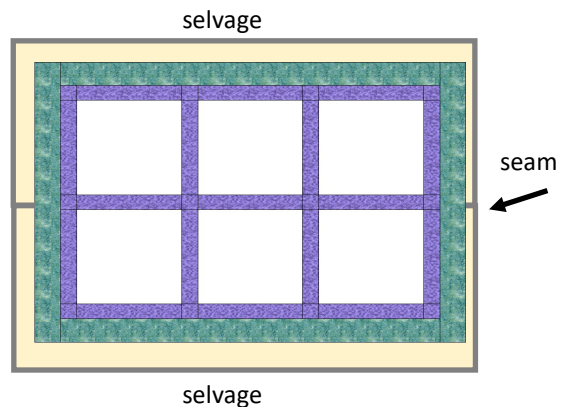
Most yardage is labelled 45" wide. I use a 40" usable width as my working measurement.

I need 67" length of pieced fabric. I divide the 67" by the usable width of my fabric 40" and determine I will need 2 pieces of fabric.

$$67" \div 40" = 1.675 \text{ lengths.}$$

Round up the number of full lengths to 2.

I will cut 2 pieces of fabric 97" long. Sew them together along the lengthwise grain and load the longest sides to the quilt frame.



FINAL WORDS

- Sometimes the amount of fabric available will determine the piecing and loading direction of your quilt backing.
- Please understand that this is how *I* prepare my quilt backs to load on my longarm frames.
- You will take many classes, watch many videos and read lot of books and tutorials and sometimes it will seem that educators contradict each other. It's up to you to choose what works for you to give you the best results.