

Red Work

Background

Red work is a form of embroidery used to stitch simple line drawings. The term ‘red-work’ comes from the red cotton thread – usually embroidery floss – that is used to create embroidered pieces that are used for many purposes, including quilting, pillowcases, table linens, or clothing for example. Sometimes stitchers use pearl cotton or other types of threads for this embroidery.

Cotton processors in Turkey were able to develop a colorfast red thread, which came to be known as ‘Turkey red’ which was the color of choice in the early 1900s for this stitching. Colorfastness was important because the embroidered items were going to be washed repeatedly, and one wouldn’t want the white background to be spoiled by running colors from the embroidery.

Red work seems to have been introduced in America in the mid to late 1800s. While silk was an expensive fabric to use, cotton was relatively inexpensive and readily available. People could easily afford to prepare embroideries to decorate their homes. Further, it was customary for young girls to learn simple embroidery and red-work ‘penny squares’ (small squares of cotton fabric with pre-printed embroidery patterns became quite popular. As other colorfast threads became available stitchers branched out and used blue thread (known either as blue red-work or blue-work) or other colors.

Traditional patterns included floral themes, animal themes, childhood themes and kitchen themes. In addition to traditional patterns, stitchers can now find more contemporary patterns, might use simple line pictures such as could be found in coloring books, or may create their own patterns by creating line drawings or tracings. Also, some quilt shops carry pre-printed panels for red-work and blue-work

Red work uses basic embroidery stitches like the outline or stem stitch, split stitch, back stitch, lazy daisy, and French knot.

If you don’t use a pre-printed panel, there are a number of ways to get a design on a piece of fabric:

1. Draw a picture directly on the fabric using a #2 pencil or other very thin-line fabric marker
2. Trace a pattern onto the fabric, which is placed over a light source (a light box, or a bright window)
3. Use an iron-on transfer pattern (either purchased or self-created using iron-on transfer pencil to draw pattern on paper then iron onto fabric)

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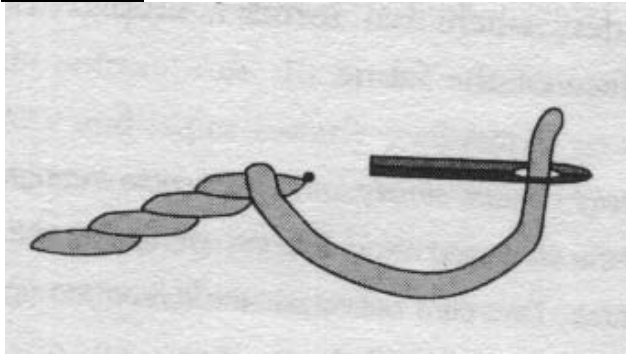
HOOPS - use a hoop that keeps the fabric tight. Using size 7 & 6 inch hoops, or smaller, makes it easy to hold in your hand and be able reach the center of the design, unless you are using a hoop frame than 10" hoop works well. *Hint; If you tend to pull your stitches too tight, keep the fabric a bit lose in the hoop so you can see if the stitches are pulled too tight.*

NEEDLES - Embroidery/Crewel needles size 5 - 10, select the needle size that will easily glide through your fabric and has an eye large enough for the strands of floss.

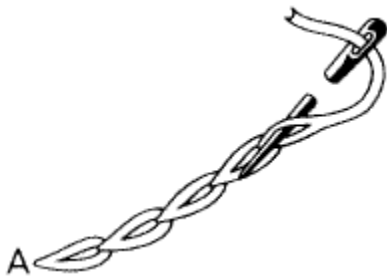
FLOSS - I like six stranded cotton floss. Cut off about 18 inches of floss to work with and pull out one strand at a time, before threading the needle. This helps the threads to lay flat while you are stitching, stop and untwist the strands once in awhile. Most embroidery uses 2 to 3 strands of floss.

PRESSING - When embroidery is finished press face down on a terrycloth towel. This makes your embroidery work stand out.

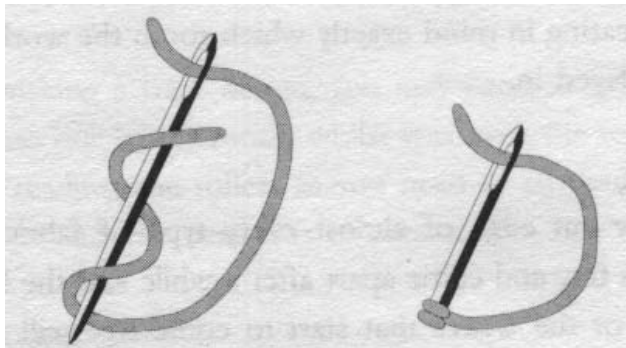
Stitches



Stem Stitch / Outline stitch



A Split Stitch



French knot

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Resources for patterns and instructions:

1. what you could do your self

- Coloring books
- Other pictures that can be outlined traced

2. Books from your local quilt shop, on-line bookstores, etc.: * means book is EQ library

- * Red & White : American Redwork Quilts & Patterns (Volumes 1 & 2); Debra Harding - not just a pattern book; also gives history in America
- Nature's Beauty in Redwork; Debra Feece
- Santa's Parade of Nursery Rhymes: A Historic Redwork Quilt from The Kansas City Star; Jeanne Poore
- Shadow Redwork with Alex Anderson: 24 Designs to Mix and Match' Alex Anderson
- Favorite Redwork Designs; Betty Alderman
- Redwork 101: Red Embroidery Designs for Quilting; Suzanne McNeill Design Originals; No. 5070
- Penny Squares Redwork: 250+ Iron-Ons; Suzanne McNeill Design Originals; No. 5101
- Historical Penny Squares: Embroidery Patterns; Willa Baranowski
- Kitties to Stitch & Quilt: 15 Redwork Designs; Nancy J. Martin
- Teddy Bear Redwork: 25 Fresh, New Designs, Step-by-Step Projects, Quilts and More; Jan Rapacz

3. patterns from your local quilt-shop, or on-line providers – examples:

- www.redwork.info – you can purchase patterns; they also have free patterns
- www.grandmasatticquilting.com has a section for redwork patterns, books, block of the month club
- www.rocksea.org has clear tutorials for embroidery stitches and information about red work
- www.patternbee.com/freevrw.html click on images and print.

There are lots of other resources online – just start browsing and have fun!

