

# How To Hand Piece (Tutorial on Hand Piecing)

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Do you have a special method of piecing? Over a period of time we develop our unique ways of hand piecing. Favorite methods from personal instruction, classes, and books? Just to add to your confusion, here is my method of hand piecing.

**Tip!** Always make sure that all the pieces on the outside edges of the block are cut on the straight of the grain. If at all possible cut triangles so that a straight grain meets a bias edge giving less chance of stretching the piece while stitching.

## Step 1

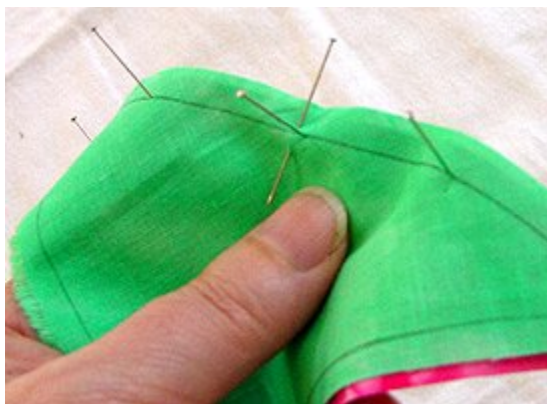


Lay out all the pieces of your block exactly in the position you want them stitched together. Pick out the first two triangles to stitch. Hold the right sides together with your fingers.

Start by pinning the two pieces - push the pin straight through at each point of the triangle where the pencil lines meet. Do the same on the other point.

Leave the pins at right angles to the fabric so it doesn't get distorted. I like using Iris Swiss pins or fine glass head pins as they are very skinny.

## Step 2



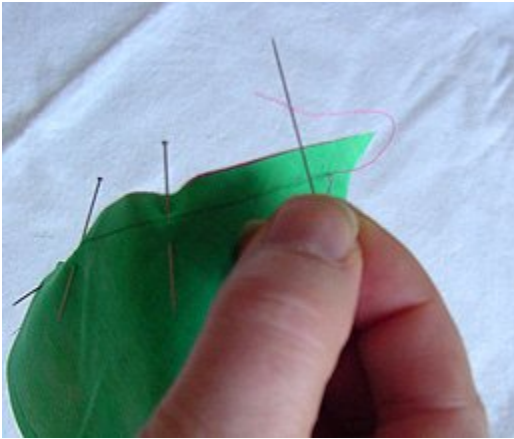
Pin in between the points, leaving approximately one to one and a half inch spaces.

All the pins should now be at right angles to the fabric.

Take another pin and line it up with the one already in the triangle tip. Angling the pin almost horizontally push it down and back up through the fabric. Because you have the first pin already steadying the fabric the second one will slide in without shifting the two pieces. Remove the pin at

right angles and use this to do the same thing to the next pin. Keep on doing this until you have all the pins properly lodged. This way you will find the pencil marks will stay exactly lined up while you stitch.

### Step 3

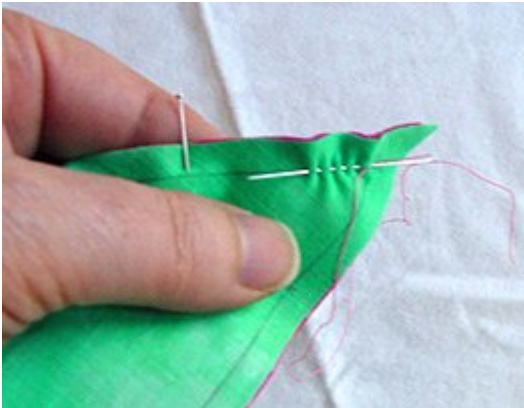


Everyone uses different needles for piecing. I use a straw/milliners needle, some people use a 'sharp' and Jean Lyle recommends using a size 10 appliqué needle.

Thread your needle of choice with either 100% cotton or cotton covered polyester (I like YLI Select hand piecing cotton thread). Use a colour that matches the darker fabric or a neutral shade such as medium gray. Do **NOT** make a knot at the end of the thread, this makes extra bulk and the less you have to quilt through later - the better!

Take one tiny stitch into the first pinhole. Split the tail with the needle, pull the thread through and tighten to lock in the first stitch.

### Step 4

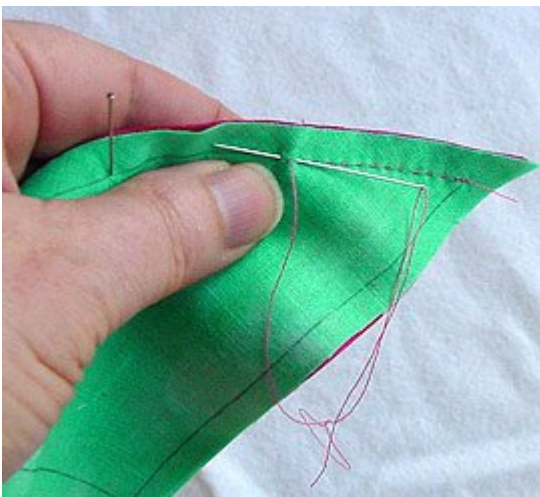


Back stitch a couple of times and then take about five or six running stitches onto the needle before pulling the thread through. As you take each stitch, keep an eye on the two sides to make sure you are stitching **ON** the penciled line.

I make my stitches about one sixteenth of an inch apart. Some fabrics are a little harder to stitch through, for example pima cotton has a high thread count so it is harder to push the needle through. Most normal quilter's cottons are printed on lighter weight fabric with lower thread count so are really

easy to stitch through.

### Step 5



Back stitch approximately every inch and a half. This gives strength to the seam and locks in the stitches. The idea behind this back stitching is if ever the seams come apart (heaven forbid) then the whole seam won't go. Just the part between the back stitches.

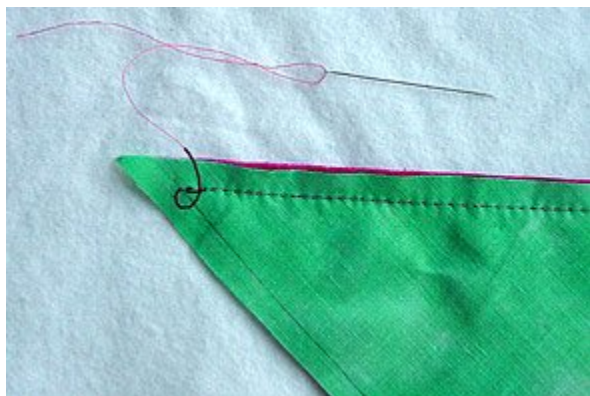
The pins are a good marker for when to back stitch. As you reach each second pin then take it out and back stitch.

Don't worry about whether you are making an exact quarter of an inch seam. You are stitching **ON** the pencil lines so you are following the exact

shape of the template.

If you want to trim the seams even later, you can. You will find when you iron the block flat it will be the size you were aiming for.

### Step 6



Near the end of the line make two or three back stitches. At the last stitch make a loop big enough to put the needle through easily.

To secure the thread, push the needle back through the loop and then through the loop you just made. Tug the whole mess gently to close it up and make a small knot.

Snip off the thread leaving about half an inch tail.

### Step 7



During the piecing of little bits of fabric you start running into seams. You may have noticed that ironing seams flat, open or otherwise has not been mentioned so far and there's a very good reason for this.

Using the Hole in the Barn Door quilt block as an example; pin and stitch a pair of rectangles to the centre square. Make running stitches as usual right up to the seam. Just before the seam take a backstitch, push the needle through the seam and make a backstitch on the other side.

Check to make sure that the two stitches join exactly on the other side to give a continuous seam and no little gaps. Now you see why the seams are not ironed. They need to be unfettered (!) so that you can negotiate which way they will be ironed when the block is finished.

### Step 8



Let's put a Hole in the Barn Door quilt block together and see what all this hard work can accomplish!

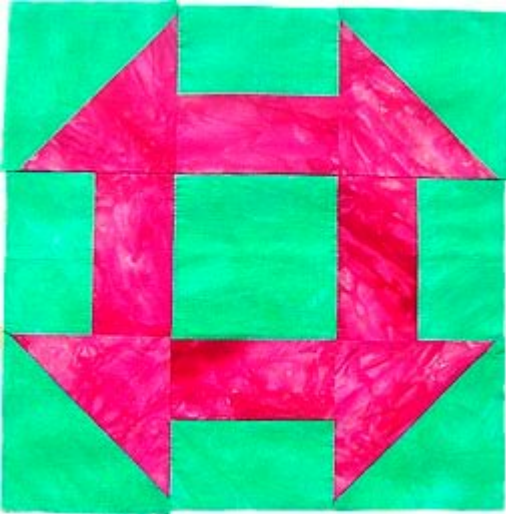
First stitch all the pairs of triangles together being careful not to stretch the seams. Then stitch all the rectangles together. These pairings will make eight squares plus you have the plain square for the middle of the block.

Piece the middle row together first. Pin and stitch a pair of rectangles to the centre square and then do the other side.

Next piece the top row together by pinning and stitching the two paired triangles to either side of the paired rectangles.

Now you should have three rows that look like the picture.

### Step 9



Stitch the three rows together and 'voila' - there's a beautiful Hole in the Barn Door quilt block. Do that a few times, stitch all the blocks together and make a whole quilt top.

As I stitch each piece together I finger press the seams over to the darker fabric. Once the block is complete I iron it properly and measure it making sure it is the size I want.

**Are we all nuts!**

Rose Rushbrooke  
**Artist**