



Whitney Ranch Designs

www.WhitneyRanchDesigns.com

Introduction

Cross stitching is a simple and relaxing craft endeavor. It is very easy to learn, requires minimal supplies, and a high proficiency level can be readily attained. Not only can it be both fun and rewarding for crafters of all ages, but you can also produce beautiful art pieces that can be proudly displayed in any home or office, or presented as a hand-crafted gift to someone you love.

Cross Stitch Definition

Counted cross stitch is the process of transferring a design pattern from a printed black and white or color graph containing floss symbols onto an even-weave fabric. Each symbol represents one "X" on the fabric, and each symbol on the chart represents a different embroidery floss color.

Fabric

Aida cloth, the most common fabric for cross stitching, is woven with holes in an even manner so that you know exactly where to place your stitches. It comes in a variety of colors. Common count sizes of the fabric are 14, 16, or 18. This means there are fourteen, sixteen, or eighteen cross stitches per inch, respectively. The higher the count, the more detailed the outcome. All of our patterns are specifically designed for 18 count, thus generating the best results. To keep your fabric from unraveling, either sew (baste) the four edges, or apply masking tape to both the front and back of it.

Start your project by finding the center of your graph. In most patterns, this is shown with arrows or a bold line. Then find the center of your fabric, either by folding it half vertically and horizontally, or by measuring and marking it diagonally with a straight edge. Be sure to also mark your fabric by identifying the top and bottom before you begin stitching. It is very easy to place stitches incorrectly before enough of the pattern has been established. This simple step will solve this potential dilemma.

Most stitchers like to begin their needlework close to the center of the design. However, you may stitch your project page by page, starting in the upper left hand corner of your fabric, and on page 1 of your chart. Be sure to leave at least a 2-3 inch margin around your fabric for later mounting and framing.

Tapestry Needles

Size 24, 26, or 28 tapestry needles are used in cross stitching. This type of needle has a blunt point and a larger eye than traditional needles. Generally, size 24 is used on 14 count fabric, and size 26 or 28 is used with a stitch count greater than 14. The difference between size 26 and 28 is relatively small. Therefore, the choice between them is purely a matter of the size of your hands and your personal comfort.

Most avid stitchers use multiple needles for a project, and many use one needle per floss color. Although the initial investment may be substantial, eliminating the need to thread a needle after every color change minimizes a very tedious and time-consuming element of cross stitching. Use of a needle threader to assist you in efficiently mounting your floss through the needle eye should be considered an essential component in your stitching arsenal. Whatever methodology you choose, purchase enough needles initially to at least cover the 6 -10 floss colors most predominant in your pattern.

Embroidery Floss

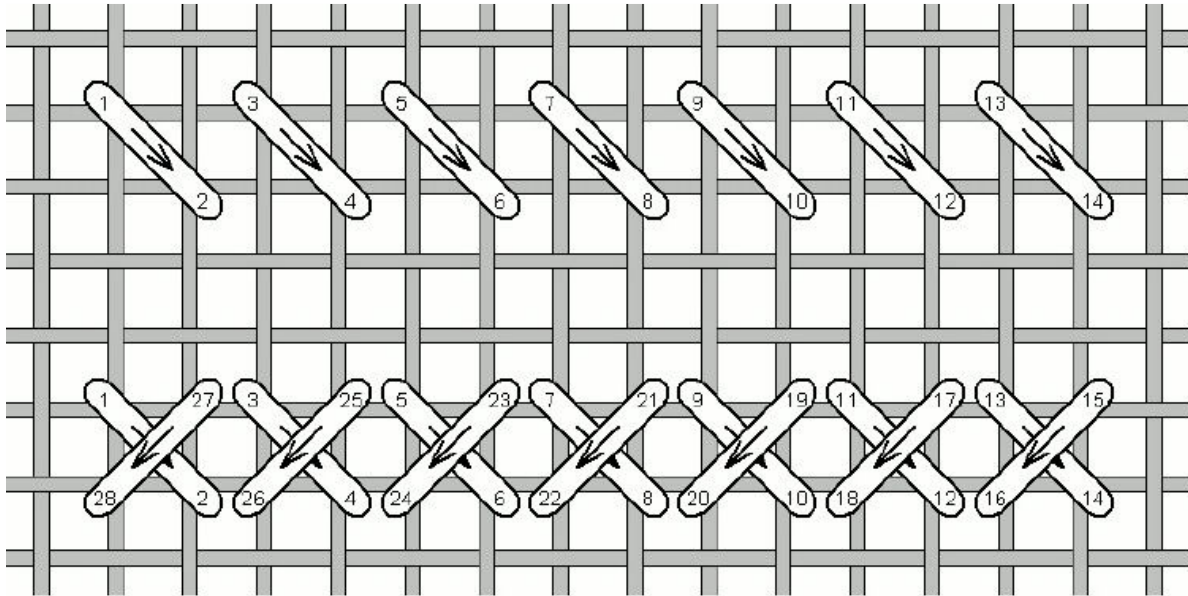
Color floss is a cotton thread used for stitching. (Other materials such as satin or metallic thread are often used for embellishment.) Most come in skeins measuring 8.7 yards in length. All flosses consist of six strands each. Cross stitching our designs in any count requires only two strands for full stitches, and one strand for any backstitching. Carefully cut and separate these strands into lengths of no more than 18 inches to avoid tangling. Park unused strands of floss by lightly wrapping them around their specific skein color wrapper for later use.

The Cross Stitch

A basic cross stitch can be created in one of two ways:

- Half stitching, as depicted in the top row of the diagram below. Do so by bringing your needle up at 1 and down at 2. Then up at 3 and down at 4, etc. through 14. Return by starting up at 15 and down at 16. Then up at 17 and down at 18 etc. as shown on the bottom row of the diagram.

- Full stitching by completing a complete "X" individually as shown on the bottom row of the diagram. This is done by bringing your needle up at 1 and down at 2. Then up at 27 and down at 28. Follow this with up at 3 and down at 4, then up at 25 and down at 26. Continue similarly across as necessary.



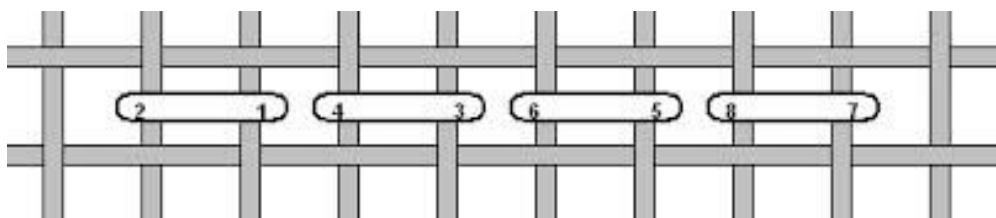
Either method - half or full stitch - is a matter of preference. The key to a beautiful outcome is to sew each stitch in the same direction, and as uniformly as possible. Take care that each stitch touches its neighbor by sharing the same hole in the fabric. Avoid pulling the floss too tight as you stitch in order to avoid any fabric distortion.

Do not knot your thread. To start a floss color, hold about one inch of thread under the fabric until it is secured with 3-4 completed stitches. (Use of a small piece of scotch tape to hold and align the floss in place is a handy method of accomplishing this.) To end a floss color, carefully run the thread under 3-4 completed neighboring stitches. In both cases, clip off any remaining thread closely, without leaving any tails. Use of premium quality embroidery scissors should also be considered a vital stitching tool in this endeavor.

Many times a specific color will have only a few sequential stitches, then jump to another color. In general, you can carry the thread to another adjacent area if the jump is relatively short, the floss color is light, and you are jumping over a previously stitched area. Otherwise, you should end off, and begin with a new floss color. Individual discretion will dictate your decision in these matters. Some stitchers are overly concerned with what the back of their design looks like. It is nice to have the back of your pattern look as tidy as possible. But, it is the front of the design that ultimately counts!

Backstitching

Backstitching is a running stitch (not an "X") that can go in any direction. It is applied to highlight or outline an area, and most often it is used to enhance lettering or accent an image. Always complete any backstitching as the final stitching step of your project. Use a single strand of floss for all backstitching, unless directed otherwise. These stitches can be applied over both a single square, or on multiple adjacent squares of the fabric. Again, discretion will determine the methodology you use.



Backstitch by bringing your thread up at odd numbers, and down at even numbers: Up at 1, down at 2, up at 3, down at 4, and so on.

Finishing

When your stitching is complete, wash it in cool water using a mild liquid detergent (if necessary). Almost all flosses produced by manufacturers today are quite colorfast, and will not bleed. However, a simple test with any leftover floss can be used to ensure that this is true.

After washing, rinse well, and roll in a clean towel to absorb excess water. Place face down on another dry towel, and press lightly with a warm iron. Allow your stitch to dry completely (at least 24 hours) before proceeding. Re-iron if necessary to remove any final creases. Mount, mat, and frame your finished piece as desired, ensuring you center and trim your design appropriately.

Miscellaneous Cross Stitch Items

There are numerous optional assisting cross stitch tools available to you in the marketplace. Among them include: Thread and floss organizers, hoops, frames, lap stands, chart holders, and a wide variety of needlecraft organizers. None of these items is necessary to successfully complete either a large or small project. Purchase of them is merely a matter of your personal preference and your crafting budget.

For example, although a hoop will help keep your fabric aligned, many traditional stitchers do not like to use one, because it has a propensity to distort and crush completed stitches due to the locking and unlocking of the hoop to the fabric. The wide variety of organizers and bobbin labels can be simply substituted by lightly wrapping unused floss and threaded needles around their specific skein color wrapper for later use, as described previously. They can then be placed in storage bags for easy transport.

Full Stitch & Half Stitch Kits

Many of the cross stitch kits offered both in retail outlets and on-line are packaged as half-stitch (/) versus full stitch (X) patterns, and are often labeled as "artistic effect" needlecraft designs. The reason for this is quite simple: It reduces floss requirements to complete in half, thereby reducing manufacturing and production costs proportionately. All of the designs on our site are prepared as full stitch offerings only.

Most stitching purists do not like the idea of completing a design using this method because it is not "true" or "traditional" cross stitching. More important, using half stitching for an entire design tends to generate a distortion (or skewing) of the fabric due to the stitches all slanting in the same direction. This ultimately makes it quite difficult to successfully align and mount your finished project on your frame.

You can choose to complete any design packaged this way by using full stitches. Just ensure you have twice the floss that is provided (or required) on hand, and recognize that it will take approximately double the time to complete successfully.

Black & White versus Color Charts

All of the patterns offered on our website can be purchased in either a black and white or color chart version. All are also prepared with extra large grids for easier viewing.

Black and white charts tend to be favored by more experienced stitchers, and can be easily highlighted as the pattern is being completed. Color charts provide the additional convenience of being a very detailed version of a stamped pattern, and generate better visualization for less experienced stitchers. Areas worked can also be marked on any color chart with a pencil or darker marker.

Your choice of either version is purely a matter of your personal preference and comfort.

Final Recommendations

Our patterns are very intricate and detailed, and will require many hours to complete. However, do not be intimidated by them. Cross stitching is relatively simple and straightforward. It is recommended that you mark your stitching progress on your chart with a highlighter. This will help ensure you are placing your stitches correctly, and will make it visually easier for you to keep track of your progress. Methodically place each cross stitch as uniformly as possible. Take your time, and relish your efforts. By doing so, you will achieve a beautiful masterpiece!

The World Wide Web is an excellent resource for any additional questions you may have as you work your project. A simple search for any concerns at hand will yield a multitude of sites and videos to help answer them.

Also, please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns you may have regarding your pattern. We welcome your query, and we would be pleased to assist you in successfully completing your project, whether you purchased it from us or elsewhere.

Happy Stitching!

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