



Cross stitches are X's using different colored symbols across a chart, like a paint by number. When finished, the floss shades combine to create a beautiful stitched painting.

Here are some basics you need to know.

#1. Work with the right kind of needle.

You need a cross stitch needle, which has a blunt end. I often use size #24. Sharp needles will not work well and will catch on your fabric.

#2. Work with the right strands of floss.

I work with one strand of floss (there are 6 strands in every length of floss). To separate floss, begin with cutting a length of regular floss to about 18". Then, pulling one strand away from the others, put the end of the floss in your mouth (this works as another hand), and pull gently. Of course, you should store your floss in a small floss bag to keep it clean. I double that strand of floss and use the loop knot method to begin. (see #3).

#3. Don't leave a tail in the beginning.

This will make your work very bumpy and your finish will not look very nice. I give credit to a model stitcher (Loris) for showing me how to do the loop knot to begin my work. Here's how it works.

Pull off one thread, approx. 18" long, and bring the 2 ends together. Thread the needle, leaving a loop at the end. Make your first half stitch, coming up through the lower left hole, and going down on the upper right hole. Then take the needle through the loop made on the back and pull carefully. Of course, when you get near the end of your stitching length of thread, you will weave this in on the back side for approx. 1/2" before cutting. Any less will cause the stitches to gradually become loose on your piece.

(Note: you should leave a tail before beginning backstitches or embroidery, to be woven in later).

#4. Check a fabric calculator such as the one we list at Linen Flowers/Timeless Handwork before cutting your fabric.

Since fabric is too valuable to waste accidentally, you will want to find the number of stitches wide and the number of stitches high on your chart, and enter them into the fabric calculator. Give yourself a generous margin to avoid difficulty in finishing later. See #5 on how to find the center of your fabric and where to place your first stitch.

#5. Find the center of the chart and your fabric before starting.

This is the most important step to know in Cross Stitch. It would be disastrous to spend your time and money stitching a project, only to find that there is not enough room to complete it.

To find the center of the chart, find the arrow at the top and at the side. Follow these together until you have one intersecting point.

Look at the top stitch of your design- it will have a certain symbol that corresponds to a color on the color chart- this will be your first color to start. (I look for the top left stitch in the design, though other stitchers differ on where to start).

Now, count up from the center to that top stitch. It might be something like, 24 up and 5 left. I usually jot this down so I remember.

Next, find the center of your fabric.

Fold the edges of your fabric together horizontally, then vertically, to find the center point. Finger-press the point lightly and place a pin there.

Count your stitches up and over to the left according to the number you have written down. This is where to begin the first stitch on the chart.

I use a separate quilting pin when I need to count, not my needle with the thread loaded. Always count a few times to make sure your count is right when starting a piece or new area.

Sometimes, when stitching, it is better to fill in a section at a time before working a long way down or up with one color, just in case a mistake is made.

#6. Work row by row (If possible).

This is usually done by working left to right, but not always. What you are trying to do is work all in one direction so that you don't have to end off and start again. I stop the thread or go back if I am going to skip over 3 threads. Skipping over too many threads will cause your stitching to pucker.

You may have a row of 000000000000's (symbols) you would slant like this /////////////// going across each one. (Don't cross each of these stitches- wait until your return to cross them).

When you reach the end, look on your next row to see if you have some isolated stitches on that right side just below the row you are on, and you can go ahead and /////// them. Then start working your way back to the beginning, crossing them to make XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX's.

(Note: If you are working with hand-dyed threads, then you may want to consider making a full X as you go for optimum effect).

Working top down is always preferred from bottom to top. It's much easier to keep your place.

#7. Work with a Lo-Ran magnetic board.

This is a magnetic board which holds a magnetic ruler that you place over your (letter-sized) chart which is placed on the board. This keeps your place and allows you to move row by row without losing your place. I use mine each time I stitch. Marking finished areas with a colored pencil helps to keep your place, also.

#8. Work with clean hands.

Wash your hands before stitching. Use only stitching lotions, as regular lotions have oils which can stain the fabric.

#9. Keep your piece clean.

Roll or fold up your fabric and place in a clean ziploc bag when finishing, away from pets and small children, or accidents that could happen.

#10. About scissors-

Small embroidery sharp scissors are perfect for trimming small threads against the fabric. A beaded scissor fob helps to keep them from getting lost.

#11. Working on hoops, frames, or in hand...

It seems that most beginners think a hoop is needed when learning to stitch. But a hoop can leave marks on the fabric. Qsnaps are a better choice for keeping the piece stretched.

For me, no matter how large or small the project, holding it in my hand works the best for me. I roll the left side as I work toward the right.

When the piece is done, you can place it face down into a thick terry cloth towel and iron very carefully on the lowest heat with a steam setting. Be very careful not to scorch the fabric.

Washing on regular floss may be accomplished with cold water and Dawn or a gentle liquid soap. Rinse very well with cold water.

(Note: washing is not recommended for many hand-dyed threads, unless the threads are rinsed and air dried before stitching).

#12. Mounting needlework

After ironing, you will want to mount your needlework on acid-free foam core board, if you are not finishing it another way. You can mount it by using small rust free pins on the back, turned into the board and securing the fabric.

I usually choose the frame and mat before cutting the foam core board with a razor knife.

Sticky boards look great for mounting, but unfortunately the glue over time adheres to the needlework.

#13. Railroading

Railroading means:

After you make your ////////////// stitches and are ready to return \\\\", take your needle down through the center of your two threads below the needle to make the stitch. This helps your stitches to lay flat and look fuller and nicer.