

Traditions Continue . . . What Is Candlewicking?

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*“Candlewicking”
is derived
from an old
embroidery
technique
that used
the soft-spun
thread that
was also used
for making
wicks for
candles.*

What Is Candlewicking?

Candlewicking is a type of embroidery done on 100-percent cotton unbleached muslin, which has not been preshrunk. The candlewicking fabric is washed after stitching; the shrinking of the muslin will not only hold the knots, but it also will give the puckered look of traditional candlewicking.

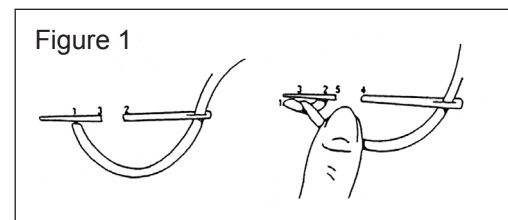
Styles of Stitching

Traditional embroidery stitches include French knots, stem/outline, satin, and padded satin. All candlewicking stitches are worked with two strands of candlewicking thread. When preparing the candlewicking thread, you want to cut the thread twice the stitching length desired (about 36 inches), thread it into the needle, bring the ends together, and make a simple knot. This will give you 18 inches of stitching length. By threading the needle this way, rather than using two individual pieces of thread, you will have an even tension and less bulk near the eye of the needle, making it easier to pull through the fabric.

To finish off a piece of thread, you will need to run the needle back through an inch or so of stitching to secure your work. You can begin in any area of the design. However, avoid long jumps from section to section; the tread will leave shadows on the back of the muslin that may be seen from the front. To keep the embroidery hoop from crushing the French and Colonial knots, stitch them last.

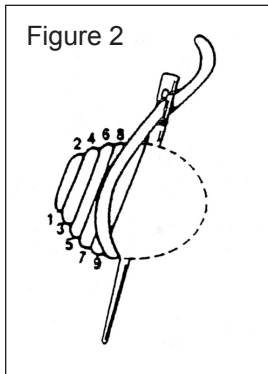
Stem/Outline Stitch – worked with 2 strands

In Figure 1, you can see that the needle comes up through fabric at 1, 3, and 5, and down through fabric at 2 and 4. When creating the stem stitch, always keep the thread below the needle.



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At point 5, bring needle up and from now on always bring needle up through a previously used hole. Continue in this manner.

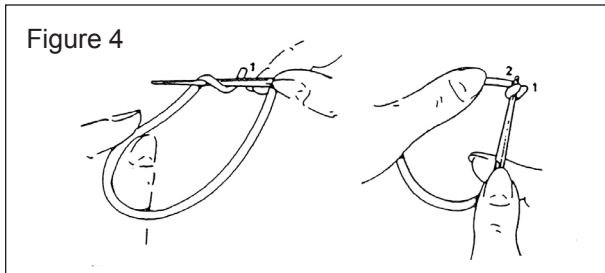
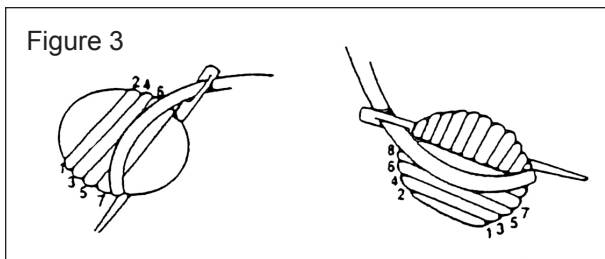


Satin Stitch – work with 2 strands

Figure 2 shows the needle coming up through fabric at 1 and all odd numbers, down through fabric at 2 and all even numbers. Keep tension even and the stands of thread smooth for this stitch.

Padded Satin Stitch – worked with 2 strands

This stitch uses the traditional satin stitch as its foundation, thus creating an added dimension to the embroidery stitch. In Figure 3, the needle comes up through fabric at 1 and all odd numbers, down through fabric at 2 and all even numbers. First work the padding, taking long stitches within the area outline, placed so they slant in the opposite direction in which the top stain stitches will go.



French Knots – worked with 2 strands

As shown in Figure 4, you will bring needle up at 1, hold thread close to fabric with left thumb and index finger about 1 inch from point 1. Slip

needle under thread, and turn needle clockwise. Still holding thread in left fingers, insert needle back down through fabric at 2 (above number 1), maintaining firm tension on thread until it is almost completely down through the fabric.

Washing

In traditional candlewicking, washing the completed embroidery in very hot water was the final step. This caused the fabric to shrink and the stitches to stand up. Today, the hot water bath will cause the fabric to shrink slightly, giving the work the soft, puckered look of antique candlewicking.

The first washing step is a cold water bath to remove all traces of the marking pen. Make sure there are no blue lines hiding in fabric. If the fabric is soiled, you may wish to use a mild soap. Second, wash the item in very hot water to cause the fabric to shrink. Roll fabric in a soft terry towel to eliminate moisture. Unroll and place stitched piece face-down on a dry terry towel on an ironing board and steam until dry. This will make the embroidery “stand up”; do not let the steam iron rest on the stitches – the steam will do the work.

Finished Project

You may use the finished candlewicking embroidery project any way you wish. You may want to create a pillow top, quilt top, or wall hanging. How you decide to use the embroidery work determines which extra supplies you’ll need to complete the project.

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