

Traditions Continue . . . What Is Chicken Scratch Embroidery?

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What Is Chicken Scratch Embroidery?

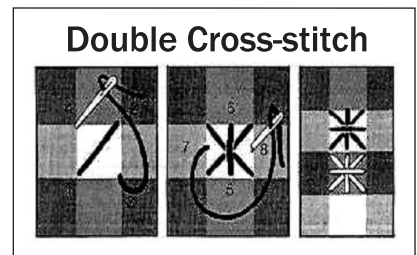
Chicken scratch is an easy type of embroidery done on gingham (checkered) fabric, which gives the impression of appliquéd lace. Gingham fabric usually comes in 4, 8, or 16 squares to the square inch. If possible, you want to use gingham fabric with a true square check. Fabric with 1/8-inch or 1/4-inch checks is most often used for chicken scratch. The 1/8-inch gingham is used mainly for small projects – pincushions, jar lids, bookmarks, and sachets. The 1/4-inch is used for larger projects – pillows, quilts, clothing, place mats, and tablecloths.

Styles of Stitching

Three simple stitches are used in chicken scratch embroidery – the double cross-stitch, the straight running stitch, and the woven circle stitch.

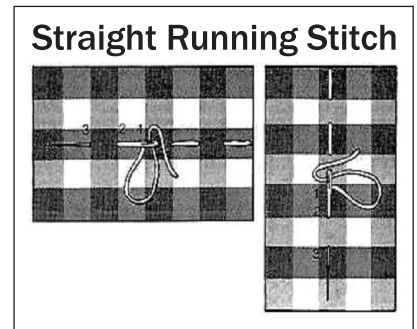
Double Cross-stitch

Work a cross-stitch as shown and then work an upright cross-stitch over it. It is important that the last upper stitch of double cross-stitch lies in the same direction.



Running Stitch

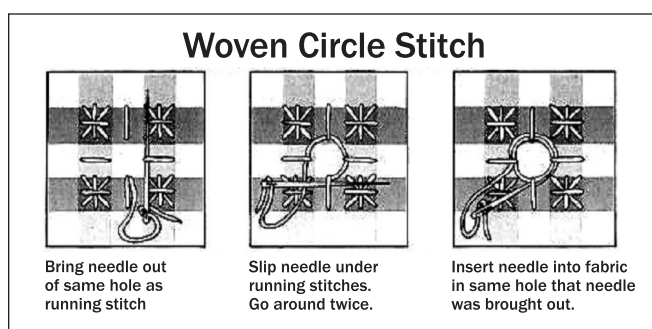
Pass the needle in and out of the fabric, making the surface stitches of equal length. The stitches on the underside should be of equal length, but only half the size (or less) than the upper stitches.



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Woven Circle Stitch

1. Bring needle out of the same hole as the running stitch.
2. Slip needle under running stitches. Go around twice.
3. Insert needle into fabric in the same hole that needle came out of in step 1.



These three stitches can create a variety of looks. You can use one, two, or many colors of floss. When only one color is used, it is common to use a light color on dark fabric and vice versa. When two colors of embroidery floss are used, one is usually white and the other a darker version of the fabric's darkest gingham check.

Keep the tension of the working thread/floss even, making smooth continual stitches. Be sure to cross all stitches in the same direction. Do the double cross-stitch in the same sequence each time. You want to complete stitches in a design order, starting with your double cross-stitches, continuing with the running stitches, and then finishing with woven circle stitches.

Reading the Pattern

Chicken scratch is completed by following a pattern and/or chart. The pattern includes the design layout and a key explaining the different symbols, color of embroidery thread, or stitch style to be used. Each square on the pattern represents a square or check on the gingham fabric. Certain patterns also have shaded squares to represent the darker squares of the gingham fabric. Symbols in the squares represent the stitch's style and/or color of embroidery thread to be used.

When reading a Chicken Scratch Key you will notice five common symbols:

X	Double Cross-stitch Using Darker Thread
*	Double Cross-stitch Using Lighter Thread
l	Straight Running Stitch (running top to bottom of pattern)
-	Straight Running Stitch (running left to right of pattern)
o	Woven Circle Stitch

Finished Project

You may use the finished chicken scratch embroidery project any way you wish. You can use your embroidery work to create a potholder, a pillow top, or a canning jar topper. How you decide to use the embroidery work depends upon extra supplies needed to complete the project.

Uses of Chicken Scratch Today

Decorating gingham aprons with cross-stitch was very popular in the 1940s and '50s. Sewing aprons was one of the basic projects a young girl learned in a home economics class.

Even though times have changed and home economics classes are not the same, aprons are still being made with a fresh approach to the age-old cross-stitch of chicken scratch embroidery. Many other items may be adorned with this type of embroidery.

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