

Making the Stack

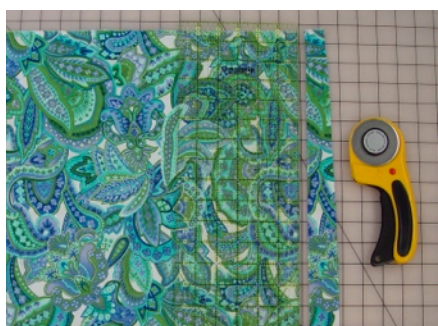
The Stack-n-Whack method is an easy way to create blocks with unique kaleidoscope designs. Identical layers of fabric are cut and stacked, with the fabric motifs aligned. Each set of identical pieces cut from the stack will create a different pattern. To view larger photos, see Bethany's book, **Stack-n-Whack®-ipedia** (AQS) or visit www.bethanyreynolds.com.



Measuring the Design Repeat

To determine the amount of yardage required for a Stack-n-Whack project, you will need to know the lengthwise design repeat of the main fabric. To find this measurement, examine the selvage of your fabric and find a point on a motif close to the edge. Scan along the selvage until you find the same motif, in the same orientation. Measure between these two points to find the design repeat of the print. The measurement will be the same regardless of which point you choose.

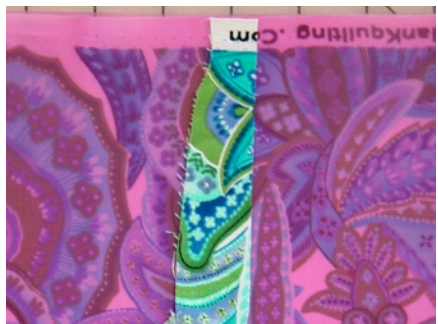
(Photo 1)



Using the "Amazing Repeat Finder" (ARF) to Cut the Layers

The layers for the stack are cut one at a time. In order to match the motifs, the fabric should be a single thickness, not folded double. For easier handling, most projects are cut from a stack that is half the width of the fabric, or about 21"-22" wide for standard quilt fabrics.

The directions for each project will give the recommended stack width. If the project directions call for a half-width stack, fold the fabric with selvages together to find the center, or measure off 21" from one selvage. Cut or tear up along the lengthwise grain for about a yard. Fold the remaining fabric out of the way.



Switch the bulk of the fabric to your right if you are right-handed (or to your left if you are left-handed). Smooth out the end of the fabric on your cutting mat. Square off the end of the fabric, trimming off at least an inch. (Photo 2)

Save the trimmed-off strip. This is your Amazing Repeat Finder (ARF)!



Skim the ARF along the fabric just until the print matches on both sides of the fabric strip. In the photo, the yardage under the ARF is shaded pink. The edge of the strip closest to the rest of the fabric (on the right in the photo) marks one repeat. (Photo 3)

If you have not already done so, measure the lengthwise design repeat of the fabric. Check this measurement against the directions for your pattern to see if you will need more than one repeat for each layer. If so, move the strip up to the second (or third) place where the repeat matches. In the photos that follow, the layers are cut two repeats long.

Lay a ruler over the ARF and cut along the edge that is closest to the remaining fabric. You have now cut the first layer of your stack. (Photo 4)

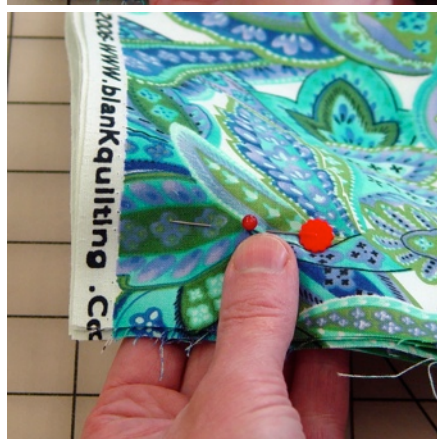


Set aside the ARF. Lay the first layer on the remaining fabric, matching the edge closest to the remaining fabric. You don't need to match the two cut edges on the other end exactly. Cut along the edge of the top layer to make the second layer. (Photo 5)

Set the second layer aside. Using the first layer as a guide, continue matching and cutting layers until you have the number of layers required for your project. (Photo 6)

Stay Sharp

Always use a sharp rotary cutter blade. Sharp blades cut more accurately with less effort. Nicked or dull blades may also drag the fabric layers out of alignment.



For best results, be sure to cut all the layers for each stack from the same half of the fabric. Printing and finishing processes can cause slight distortions even in high quality fabrics, and the differences may be noticeable in the finished blocks if you use crosswise, rather than lengthwise, repeats. You might also find that the crosswise repeats are staggered, so that they only match up for part of the width. This can result in a stack that is too narrow to cut enough block kits for the project.

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If your project calls for a second stack, use the other half-width of fabric, and start by cutting a new ARF. This stack should start and end at a different part of the repeat, so that the blocks will be different from the first set.

Stacking and Pinning the Layers

Press the layers one at a time to remove any wrinkles. Press along the lengthwise grain to avoid distortion. If you have pre-washed the fabric, it is a good idea to use a little sizing or spray starch to return some crispness to the fabric. This will make the pieces easier to handle and will help keep bias edges from stretching.

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Stack up the layers, smoothing out each piece so that the selvages line up. When you have all the layers stacked, use “stick-pinning” or tacking to line up the motifs accurately through the layers. Select a point on the fabric design about 1"-1½" from one crosswise edge. Look for something that's distinctive and easy to spot, such as the tip of a leaf. Place the point of the round-headed pin on this spot. (Photo 7)

Lift the top layer of fabric, sliding the pin through. Find the same point on the next layer and slide the pin through. (Photo 8)

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Continue lifting layers and pinning through this point until you have gone through all the layers. Slide the pin all the way through to the head and hold it in place with your thumb and forefinger. Hold the pin straight up and down and smooth out the surrounding fabric. Take a flower-head pin and pin across through all the layers, right beside the stick pin. Point this pin across the width of the stack, in the direction you will be cutting the strips. If it is placed perpendicular to the crosswise edge, the pin may be in the way when you trim the edge. (Photo 9)

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Remove the stick pin. Repeat this at three other points across the width. Also pin the selvage and torn edge, 8"—12" above the crosswise pinned edge. (Photo 10)

Trim the stack along the tacked crosswise edge to ensure a straight edge through all the layers. Cut a strip as directed for your project, and cut the block units. If you are cutting more than one strip from the stack, align and re-pin the edge before cutting each new strip. Pinning as you go, rather than pinning the center of the stack, will give you more accuracy and greater control of the pin placement so that pins won't interfere with the cutting.

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The MicroStitch® Tool may be used in place of pinning. There are several advantages to using fabric tacks. Unlike pins, they will not damage rotary cutting blades if accidentally cut. Tacked stacks tend to lay flatter, and can be handled and stored more easily than pinned stacks with less chance of layers slipping. To use the fabric tacks, align the layers as you would with a pin, sliding the needle of the tacking tool through the matching points. When all layers are aligned, pull the release trigger on the tool to attach the tack. Tacks may be removed easily by holding a few layers in each hand and tugging gently.

