



Adding Borders to Quilts

(1) Why add borders?

Not all quilts need borders. Some modern and contemporary quilts look great without them. But in many cases, borders give your quilt a finished look, and sometimes you'll add them just to grow the quilt to the size you need to fit the bed it's intended for. You can add one, two or more borders. Decorative borders are always an option. Piano key, flying geese, applique, and many other designs can add to the look of your quilt.

(2) How much border fabric you need? This is easy math.

- ✓ Determine the perimeter of the finished quilt top. Example: For a 70 x 80 quilt add $70 + 70 + 80 + 80 = 300$.
- ✓ You need 300 linear inches of fabric.
- ✓ Divide 300 by 40 (approximate WOF after selvedges are trimmed off) = 7.5.
- ✓ You need 8 strips of fabric.
- ✓ Multiply 8 by the unfinished width of your border. Example: $8 \times 4.5 = 36$.
- ✓ You need one yard of fabric for this border.

This formula works for both borders and binding. If you are calculating fabrics for multiple borders be sure to add the extra measurements to the size of your quilt top as it grows to determine how much fabric you need for each subsequent border. Example: 70 x 80 quilt. Add a 4-inch border all the way around. Quilt is now 78 x 88. Do the math based on this new size for subsequent borders and binding.

(3) Measure twice, cut once.

There are two schools of thought on measuring quilt tops prior to adding borders. Many quilters measure only the middle of the quilt and then cut the two corresponding borders to that length. The theory here is that if opposite sides of the quilt are not exactly the same length, making the border the length of the middle and then "easing in" either border fabric or the quilt top as needed will square things up.

If you go this route, you can spread your quilt top out on the floor, carefully place your border fabric on top of it through the middle, and trim two border fabric pieces to the correct length (basically using the border fabric as your tape measure). If you do this, pin at one end and be careful not to stretch the border fabric before you trim it to size.

Another option is to measure both longest sides of your quilt and measure the middle. Average the three measurements by adding them together and dividing by three. Cut your two borders this length.

What you do **NOT** want to do it simply cut a border strip longer than you need, sew it on, and then lop off whatever fabric is left hanging off the end. Unless your quilt top is 100% perfectly square or rectangular you'll likely end up with an unusually shaped finished quilt. Even if your quilt top is 100% perfect at the outset, because fabric can stretch as you sew, you might still end up with an uneven quilt.

(4) Piecing borders

If the borders needed are longer than the typical WOF (40-42") you have two choices. You can piece WOF strips at the desired width until you have enough length, or cut the borders pieces from the length of fabric (LOF).

If you are going to piece the borders and they are less than 4" wide, sew the pieces together on the diagonal. If borders are more than 4" wide, sew a straight seam. Either way, press seams open.

Cutting borders from the LOF usually means purchasing more fabric than you need unless you happen to be adding very wide borders to your quilt. The decision to cut from LOF rather than piece WOF strips together is personal preference. If you are making a fairly wide border out of a large print or solid fabric, cutting from LOF might result in a more polished look (i.e., without seams interrupting the pattern or being readily visible on the solid). Also, LOF is less stretchy than WOF, so factor that in.

(4) Ready to sew.

Pin – **at minimum** – each end and the middle of the border strips before sewing. For larger quilts, it's best to use 5, 9, or even more pins.

Stitch carefully using a 1/4" seam and be very careful not to stretch your fabric as you sew. Let the feed dogs on your machine do their work. Use a walking foot for added security.

Press seams toward the border fabric. Repeat with the top and bottom of your quilt. Most quilters sew on the longest two borders first, then the shorter two. However, there are no federal or state quilting laws on this, so do what you like.

If you are adding multiple borders to your quilt, you will want to add them in the same order. For example, if you add your first border on each side and then top and bottom, do the same with each subsequent border.