



BUILDING BLOCKS with Sharyn Craig

— A 12 MONTH PATTERN SERIES —

Welcome!

This year we will be making wonderful 9-Patch blocks that will all finish 9" square. We will release one block pattern a month for the next twelve months. All of the block pieces can be cut easily with a rotary cutter and ruler. Or you can choose to make them with templates or pattern pieces. If you elect to use templates, there are only eight different shapes for all twelve blocks. We are providing all the pattern pieces now for those of you who do choose to make the templates in advance. Note that each piece has a letter on it. This letter will be repeated in different blocks. Not all blocks require all the pieces, but if a block calls for Piece A, it will always be the same piece.

You'll also notice that the blocks on each pattern are not colored in. It will be totally up to you to decide how many fabrics you want to use in any one block... where you want to put any particular fabric... and what portion of the block you want to feature. We know this sounds scary, but we promise, it's fun, exciting, rewarding, and there are absolutely no wrong answers.


Background Fabric: We are deliberately NOT providing a background in the kits, although there is nothing to stop you from using one of the fabrics in your kit as the background. If you want all twelve blocks to have the same background fabric, you'll probably want to select 1 yard of a fabric that you designate as background. If you want to make sure you have more than enough of that background fabric, in case you want to use some of it in the setting, then we recommend getting 1 – 2 additional yards. (You can always use it for something, if not in this quilt.)

Every month you can come in on the first of the month and get your next kit. You'll probably want to purchase the same colorway each month, but this isn't a requirement.

Following Our Building Plans

On each pattern you will see both templates and rotary cutting instructions. You can do one or the other, but you do not need to do both.

If you choose to do the templates, just cut out the quantity indicated on the template page. You get to choose the fabrics! Pay attention to the arrows. They indicate the fabric grain direction and are especially important when using templates. Keeping the proper grain orientation will help keep a block square.

If you choose to use the rotary method, cut out the size indicated next to the rotary cutter symbol . For example, for Block One, you need one 3½" square cut so the grain runs parallel to a cut edge. You also need 8 -- 2" squares so the grain runs parallel to a cut edge. Use the blueprint diagram to determine which color you decide to use for those 8 squares. To get the C triangle, first cut a 4¼" square so the grain runs parallel to the cut edge. Then cut it twice to get four quarter triangles. Repeat to make 4 squares into 16 triangles. If you want more than 4 colors in your triangles, you will need to cut more starting squares. For the D triangle, you start with a 2¾" square so the grain runs along a cut edge. Then cut it once. Pay attention to that "cut once or cut twice" key. It is easy to skip over that, but it is important.

Before we get started, here's a great organizing tip: get a box and label it "Building Blocks." Use it as one convenient place to store the background fabric, each month's pattern, your finished blocks, any extra fabric, templates (if you're using them), and perhaps even the additional fabrics/colors that you personally choose to add to your blocks. This will keep everything together and you won't go crazy looking for these things!

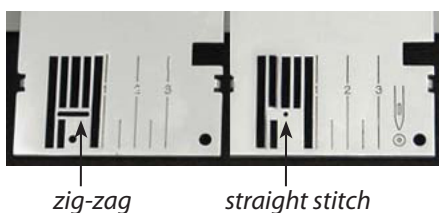
I've included a special bonus for you on the next page. These tips are things I've learned over the years through my personal experiences and teaching others. I recommend taking the time to read through it, even if you have been quilting for years... you never know when you can pick up and use something to make your piecing even better!

Sharyn's Tips for Better Piecing

SEAM ALLOWANCE: In reality you should be sewing with a scant quarter-inch seam allowance, not an exact quarter-inch. Why? Because as quilters we directionally press both our seam allowances to one side. When we do that, the bulk created by the fabric seams uses up a little extra space, making our pieces come out slightly smaller. So, how scant, you're wondering? Honestly it's no more than the width of one thread in the weave of the fabric... that's how scant you need to be. But, how do you measure that? The way I do this is to position a strip cutting ruler under the presser foot on the machine. By hand you want to gently turn the fly wheel lowering the needle until it touches the RIGHT hand edge of the quarter inch line (not dead center on the line, and definitely not on the left edge which would be too large a seam allowance). When you've found the scant position, then you can use a barrier guide (Molefoam, tape, quilting bar guide on the edge of the presser foot, even the quarter-inch foot, if yours is accurate) to mark that scant measurement.

We all think that when we put a quarter-inch foot on the machine that we're set. That isn't necessarily so. Many feet are true, perfect, quarter-inch, while others are scant. Then there's the matter of your needle position. Position your body directly in front of the needle when sewing. Look at that needle's position in relationship to the space between the toes of the foot... or even to the hole in the throat plate. Just because it is supposed to be in center needle position doesn't make it so. I've encountered many machines that have a misaligned center needle. If your needle is off-center, that can affect the accuracy of your quarter-inch foot. (Your sewing machine mechanic can adjust this if needed.)

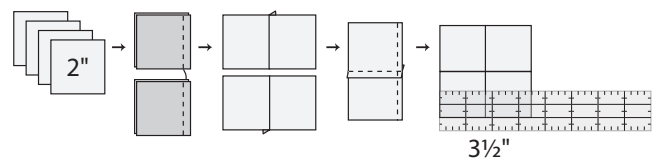
THROAT PLATE: The throat plate is the metal disk that sits on the bed of your machine, flanking the feed dogs. Standard for most machines is a zig-zag throat plate. This means that the hole is large enough to allow the needle to zig-zag without breaking needles. This is a good thing when we need to zig-zag. But that large hole is not so helpful to piecers. For most machines a straight stitch throat plate is an additional accessory you can get. Now the hole is only large enough to allow your needle to go up and down, not side to side.



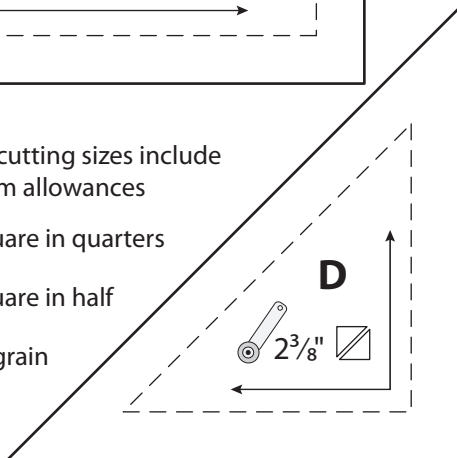
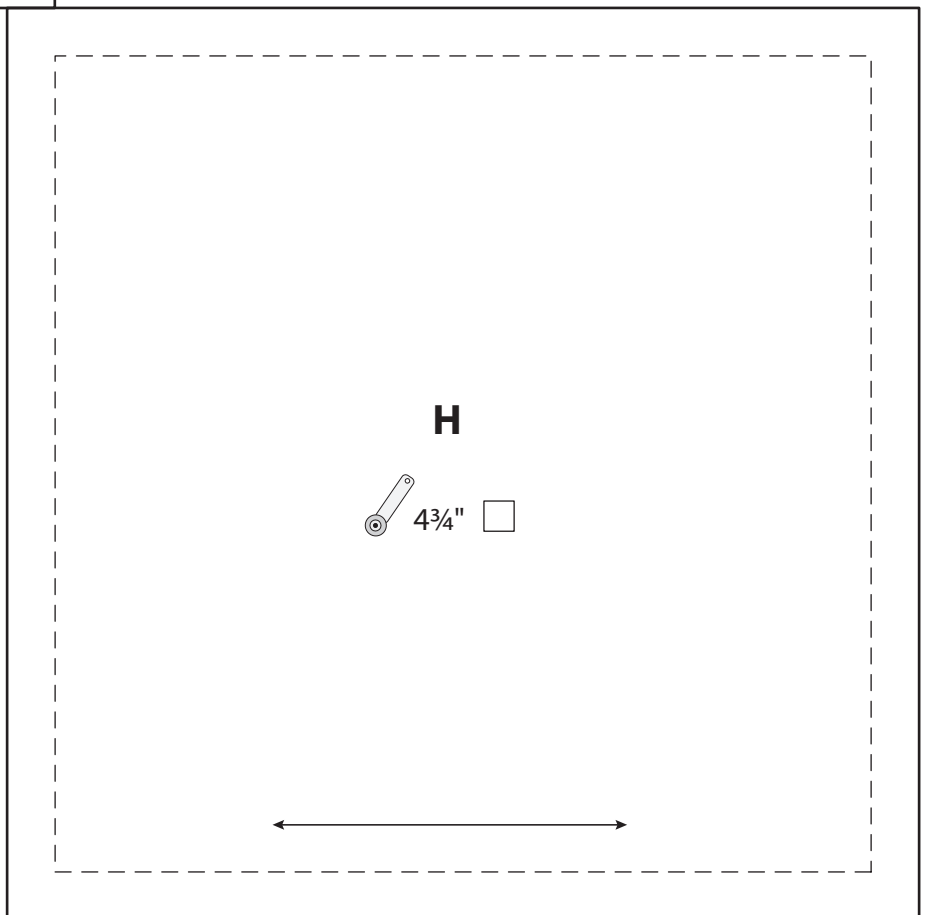
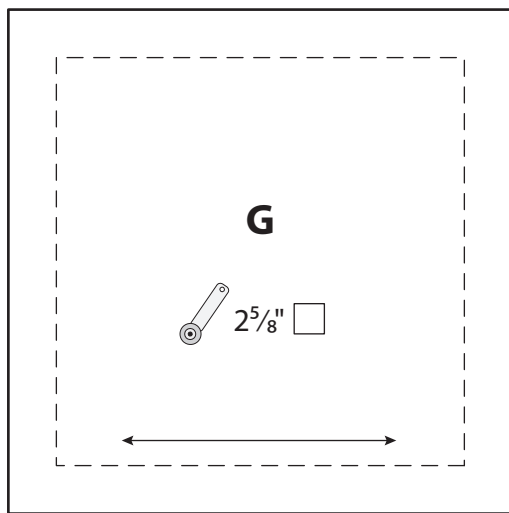
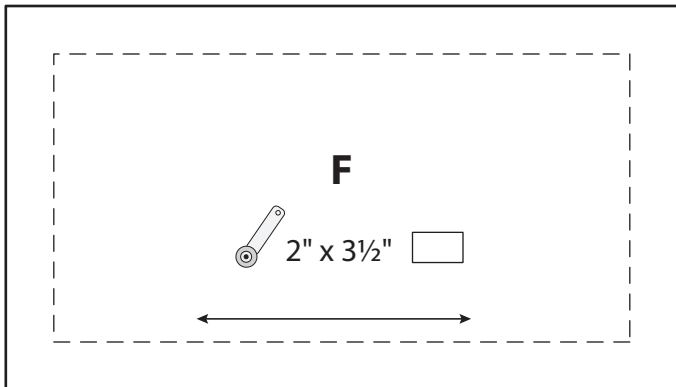
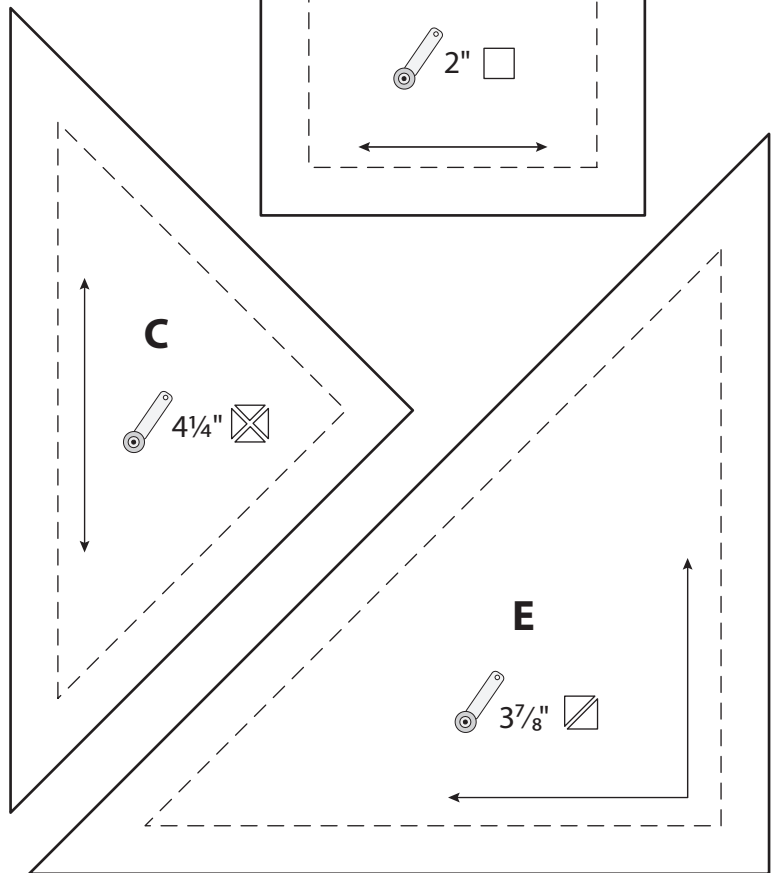
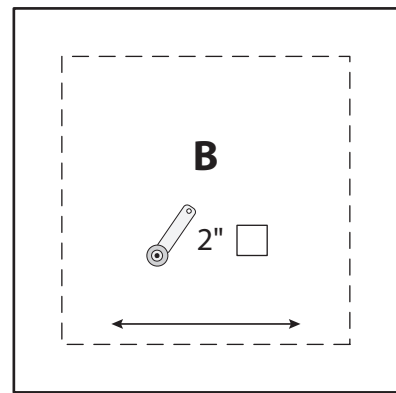
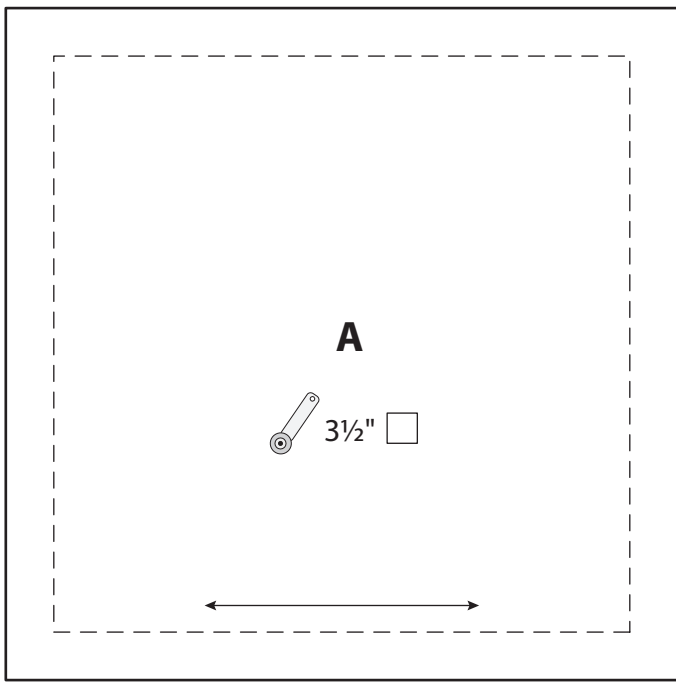
One of the benefits of the straight stitch throat plate is that you can evenly feed across bulky seams and you'll find that the stitch length doesn't get shorter when you're crossing seam allowances. (With a zig-zag throat plate, there is room for the fabric to be pushed downward into that hole, bogging down the stitching.) Another common occurrence with a zig-zag throat plate is that the fabric tends to veer off as you come to the end of a piece. You may not notice it when sewing a short seam, but watch the next time you're stitching two long strips together. It does happen on the shorter pieces as well, you just might not see it until you look for it. I'm not saying you have to have a straight stitch throat plate, but if you're having problems like I've just discussed, then you might think about this as a way to fix the problem.


THREAD: When piecing, I like to use a 50 weight, 100% cotton thread. I personally like a long staple, two-ply thread. Using good thread can make a huge difference. One of the benefits of the 50 weight two-ply is that it is thinner, so it doesn't take up as much room in the seam allowance... this is another thing that can affect the accuracy of your piecing. A thicker thread "eats up" a bit more space, thereby making your pieces come out smaller. So if you're cutting accurately and get the proper scant quarter-inch seam allowance, but are still having problems with your blocks not coming out the right size, then you might want to experiment with different brands of thread to see which one might give you the best result.

SIMPLE TEST: So, how do you know if you're doing it right? Here's a simple test you can try. Cut four, 2" squares. Sew them together into a 4-patch, pressing seam allowances to one side. Your pieced square should measure exactly 3½" from raw edge to raw edge. If your 4-patch isn't that size, then double check your seam allowance, the size of your cut squares, and finally your thread. Cut new pieces using a different spot on the ruler line. Check again to see how your sewn pieces measure up. Keep going until you are satisfied with the result. If you can't make four squares into the right sized 4-patch, then you'll definitely have trouble when you start making blocks with more pieces.



That's it. Are you ready? Put on your hard hat, take out Block One, "Hammer and Nails", and let's get started!



 rotary cutting sizes include 1/4" seam allowances

 cut square in quarters

 cut square in half

 fabric grain

