

Stabilizers Demystified

By Jeanine Twigg

With the myriad stabilizers available, you may wonder which ones are best to use for embroidery? The answer: It all depends on the project fabric and design combination. For perfect embroidery it's necessary to keep a buffet of stabilizers to embroider the limitless fabrics, designs and projects available.

Use quality products manufactured specifically for embroidery. Make sure the stabilizers used most are readily available or keep several rolls on-hand for uninterrupted embroidery. Each hooping requires a new layer of stabilizer, so a roll can go quickly.

Some stabilizers are available pre-cut in sizes perfect for standard size hoops. This is handy to help speed up the embroidery process. To save money, purchase rolls or bolts of your favorite stabilizers. This allows you to cut your own to fit standard size hoops or use stabilizer saving hooping techniques. Some manufacturers offer two size rolls – one for standard size hoops and a longer for oversized hoops. Be sure to check the roll yardage as some rolls have more yardage than others.

The standard color for stabilizers is white but some stabilizers are available in other colors such as black, cream and nude. When it matters, use a dark color stabilizer with dark fabrics and a light color stabilizer with light color fabrics.

Here's the breakdown and description of each stabilizer available. There is some


crossover, but to make the list complete, each type of stabilizer is listed within each category.

Tear-away

Use a tear-away stabilizer on fabrics that are stable and have some support to help hold the stitches during embroidery. This type of stabilizer is removable so that the fabric will need to be strong enough to hold the stitches during embroidery, wear and laundry. Depending on the design and fabric, use a stabilizer weight accordingly. The heavier the design and fabric the heavier the stabilizer needed. Gently tear away the stabilizer from the design after embroidery.

◆ **Lightweight** – Use with a lightweight woven fabric and an open, airy embroidery design. If more stability is required on a fragile fabric, use two layers for easy removal; remove one layer at a time.

◆ **Medium-weight** – Use with a medium-weight woven fabric and a light fill, satin stitch or appliqué designs.



Keep a variety of stabilizers on hand to choose the best for the fabric and design combination to be embroidered.

◆ **Heavyweight** – Use with a heavyweight woven fabric with a dense design.

◆ **Water-soluble** – Use as a topper on fabrics with a nap or on knits. Use as a stabilizer with a woven fabric to provide minimal support. This one is available in an assortment of weights from lightweight

to heavyweight. A heavyweight version can be used for freestanding lace or dimensional designs.

◆ **Adhesive** – A tear-away stabilizer with an adhesive paper topping. Remove the paper to expose the adhesive and secure fabric for embroidery before or after hooping.

◆ **Water-activated** – A tear-away stabilizer with an adhesive topping that's activated by dampening a sponge and lightly touching the stabilizer.

◆ **Fusible** – A tear-away stabilizer that can be ironed onto the wrong side of fabric and hooped together as one layer.

Cut-away

Use a cut-away stabilizer on fabrics that are unstable and stretch. This type of stabilizer is permanent and will remain with the design to help the fabric hold the stitches during embroidery, wear and laundry. Cut away the stabilizer from the fabric within a 1/4" to a 1/2" from the design.

- ◆ **Lightweight** – Use with a lightweight knit or stretch fabric and an open, airy embroidery design.
- ◆ **Medium-weight** – Use with a medium-weight knit or stretch fabric and light fill, satin stitch or appliqué designs.
- ◆ **Heavyweight** – Use with a heavyweight knit or stretch fabric, such as denim, with a dense design.
- ◆ **Water-soluble** – Use with woven fabrics where stability is required during embroidery, but not necessary after. Disappears completely with water. Perfect for freestanding lace or dimensional designs.
- ◆ **Adhesive** – A cut-away stabilizer with an adhesive paper topping. Remove the paper to expose the adhesive and secure fabric for embroidery before or after hooping. After embroidery, lift up and trim a 1/4" to 1/2" from the design.

◆ **Water-activated** – A cut-away stabilizer with an adhesive topping that's activated by dampening a sponge and lightly touching the stabilizer.

◆ **Fusible** – A cut-away stabilizer that can be ironed onto the wrong side of knit fabric and hooped together as one layer to prevent fabric stretching.

◆ **Mesh** – A lightweight, soft stabilizer with see-through properties and a grid-like appearance to help prevent show-through on white fabrics; soft next to the skin.

Water-soluble

Use a water-soluble stabilizer for specialty applications or for hooping with fabric. It can be removed directly after embroidery or during the first laundering. It will disappear when it comes in contact with water; therefore, the fabric or base stitches must support the design after the embroidery is complete. Tear or cut away the excess stabilizer from the fabric and remove the remaining stabilizer according to the manufacturer's directions.

◆ **Lightweight** – Use as a topping to prevent stitches from sinking into knit or textured woven fabrics. Sandwich fabric

between two layers for embroidery support. Hoop with lightweight fabric for embroidery of running stitch outline or Redwork type designs.

◆ **Medium-weight** – Use as a backing for woven fabric where a stabilizer is not required after embroidery, such as on sheer fabrics.

◆ **Heavyweight** – Use for freestanding lace or dimensional designs.

◆ **Adhesive** – A clear or mesh stabilizer with a paper topping. Remove the paper to expose the adhesive. Secure the fabric for embroidery before or after hooping.

◆ **Fusible** – A mesh cut-away stabilizer that's fused to fabric with a dry iron before the embroidery process. Completely disappears with water after embroidery.

◆ **Mesh** – Super stable for freestanding lace or for use with a woven fabric where a stabilizer is not required after embroidery.

◆ **Clear** – Use as a topping to prevent stitches from sinking into knit or textured woven fabrics. The see-through properties help in viewing the fabric and for design alignment.

	Tear-away	Cut-away	Water-soluble	Specialty
Lightweight	X	X	X	
Medium-weight	X	X	X	
Heavyweight	X	X	X	
Water-soluble	X	X		
Adhesive	X	X	X	
Water-activated	X	X		
Fusible	X	X		
Mesh		X	X	
Clear			X	
Liquid			X	
Spray			X	
Heat-removable				X
Water-soluble paper				X
Foam				X
Vinyl Topping				X

◆ **Liquid** – Soak or paint onto fabric before embroidery. Allow to dry. Embroider and rinse away after embroidery.

◆ **Spray** – Spray directly onto fabric before embroidery. Allow to dry. Embroider and rinse away after embroidery.

Specialty

◆ **Heat-removable** – A tear-away or fabric stabilizer that's hooped with the fabric and then removed with the heat of an iron after embroidery.

◆ **Fusible fleece** – A heavyweight batting that can be fused to fabric before or after embroidery to offer additional support to the project such as quilting or bowls.

◆ **Water-soluble paper** – A lightweight paper that can be used for foundation piecing or template-making.

◆ **Foam** – A thick topper that helps to raise designs dimensionally from the fabric. Designs must be digitized specifically for foam or use very little underlay to allow the foam to “puff” up during embroidery. Used mostly with satin stitch designs.

◆ **Vinyl topping** – A thin colored topping to help hide a dark or light base fabric while using dark or light color thread.

Accessories

◆ **Temporary spray adhesives** – A spray that can be used on a stabilizer to temporarily hold layers together during embroidery.

◆ **Fusible spray adhesive** – Used to make any stabilizer fusible. Spray directly onto a stabilizer; allow to dry; iron onto the fabric wrong side.

◆ **Template adhesive** – Print or draw templates directly onto paper, cut out and secure to the fabric for design placement.

◆ **Appliqué adhesive** – Used to make appliqué templates. Draw shape, cut out, secure to fabric; cut out appliqué fabric shapes.

◆ **Fusible interfacing** – Iron product onto the back of lightweight fabric to add support during embroidery. It's permanent and perfect for a backing to firm up appliqué fabric.

◆ **Shape interfacing** – Used between fabric layers to add stiffness to projects. May be available in a fusible form on one or both sides.

◆ **Press cloth** – Specialty cloth for use when pressing the fabric wrong side after embroidery.

◆ **Adhesive remover** – A spray that can be used to remove the adhesive build-up on hoops. ☞

Jeanine Twigg is the author of the Embroidery Machine Essentials series published by Krause Publications.

She is also the contributing editor for Creative Machine Embroidery magazine.

Sources

Find stabilizers from the following companies:

ABC Embroidery (www.abcemb.com)

Adorable Ideas (www.adorableideas.com)

Allstitch (www.allstitch.net)

Baby Lock (www.babylock.com)

Bernina (www.berninausa.com)

Embroidery.com

Hoop-It-All (www.hoopitall.com)

Husqvarna Viking (www.husqvarnaviking.com)

Janome (www.janome.com)

John Solomon (www.johnsolomon.com)

Madeira (www.sewphisticatedstitcher.com)

Nancy's Notions (www.nancynotions.com)

Oklahoma Embroidery Supply & Design
(www.embroideryonline.com)

Palmer & Pletsch (www.palmerpletsch.com)

Pfaff (www.pfaffusa.com)

RNK Distributing (www.rnkistributing.com)

Sulky of America (www.sulky.com)

Terradon Embroidery (www.terradonembroidery.com)