

Learning Miniature Punch Needle Embroidery

The instructions that follow give you the basics of miniature, needle punch embroidery. Needles vary from one company to another, but the instructions are easily adapted for your style needle (read the instructions that come with your needle for instructions specific to your needle.)

The following are basic supplies that you will need:

- ❖ Russian-style punch needle
- ❖ Needle threader for punch needle
- ❖ Threads (floss of other)
- ❖ Embroidery hoop with locking lip or Gripper frame for needle punch
- ❖ Small, sharp embroidery scissors or thread snips
- ❖ Permanent marking pen (fine tip)
- ❖ Pattern marked on foundation fabric

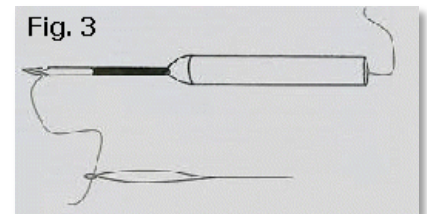
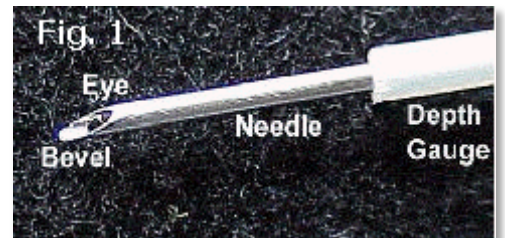


in comparison, usually measuring less than 6 inches and oftentimes as small as an inch or two. With a little practice, you will be creating miniature works of art in no time, so let's get started.

Punch needle embroidery is an old needle art that is worked through a fabric pattern stretched in an embroidery hoop, forming loops of threads on the side opposite the working surface to create a design. A special needle tool with a hollow core holds and feeds the thread as the needle is punched through the fabric, from back to front, to the same depth to create loops of even height. Depending on the needle selected, a single strand of thread, or as many as six strands, can pass through the needle at one time. Typically, miniature needle punch embroidery uses one or two strands of thread and the finished work is quite fine and small. The finished results can resemble miniature hooked rugs but the pieces created are generally quite small

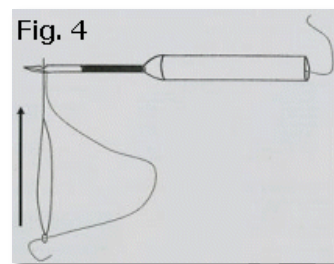
1 Threading the Needle

1. The needle is a hollow shaft with a sharp pointed end consisting of two different sides. One side of the needle is beveled and the eye of the needle lies within the bevel. Fig. 1.
2. See Fig. 2 and 3. Feed the looped end of the threader into the hollow shaft from the pointed end of the needle, pushing it all the way out the end of the handle. Insert the required number of threads through the loop of the threader, and then pull the threader down through the handle from the needle end, exposing the threads.
3. See Fig. 4 and continue to bring the threader with the thread out the hole in the pointed end of the needle. Now, pass the loop of the threader with the threads through the eye of the needle.



4. Remove the thread from the threader; ends of the threads are now on the back of the needle, with the bevel side of the needle open — this will be your front side or leading edge of the needle while punching.

Needle threading images courtesy of CTR, Needleworks



2 Preparing a Pattern

1. If you purchase a commercially available pattern, it will probably come to you already marked on the foundation fabric. If you wish to draw or transfer your own pattern, you can use an iron-on, fabric transfer pencil to trace a design and then transfer it to fabric, or draw a pattern directly on your foundation fabric with a water-proof, fine marking pen.
2. The pattern is transferred to the “back” side of your work, so any mistakes in transferring or drawing will not be seen in the finished work. Align the straight outside pattern lines with the grain of the fabric. You need to use a tightly woven fabric — the threads and weave of the fabric hold the loops in place. If the loops will not stay in your fabric, a poor choice of fabric could be the problem. If you wish to use a looser fabric, such as tightly woven wool, mark your pattern on woven, fusible interfacing, then iron that to the back of the fabric—the weave of the interfacing is tight enough to hold the loops (you will need to adjust the length of the thread loops to compensate for this extra layer of fabric.)

3 Preparing to Work

1. Sit comfortably with your hooped pattern in your lap and all your supplies nearby. Be sure you have adequate lighting, and if you need one, a magnifier can help. Take care not to drop the fine wire threader — they can be really hard to find! A magnet helps to keep it in its place. Separate your threads (if necessary) into single strands about one to two yards long, if using embroidery floss.
2. The depth gauge tubing (or setting, depending on the needle you use) changes the loop length on the front of the work. The more gauge material loaded onto the needle, the shorter the loops will be on the front of your work since the gauge stops the needle going through to the front. Always punch until the gauge touches the fabric to ensure consistent loops on the front.
3. Select the depth gauge required for your pattern. Generally, for a one-strand needle, use a depth gauge that leaves about 1/4-inch of needle exposed. The more threads you use, or the larger the needle size, the more needle will be need to be exposed, allowing a longer loop length to be punched on the front of the pattern. You need to adjust the length of gauge if the loops don't stay in the fabric; if they pull out as you punch, try a shorter gauge.
4. Thread your needle with the required number of threads in the color for the outermost outline of the pattern. Leave about 1/2 inch of thread pulled through the eye to ensure that the needle does not come unthreaded. Be sure that the length of thread is falling loose at the handle end (not trapped under your fingers or wound around the handle) so it feeds freely through the needle. It's a good habit to keep the thread lying freely over top of your index finger. Any impedance to the threads' movement through the needle will pull the loops out of your work, or not allow loops to form as you punch.

4 Loading the Pattern

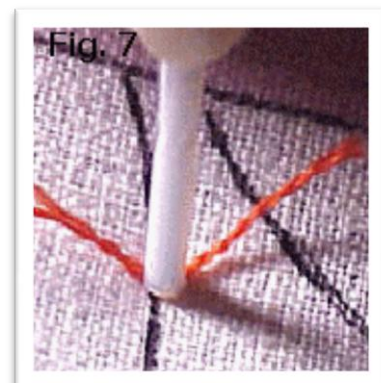
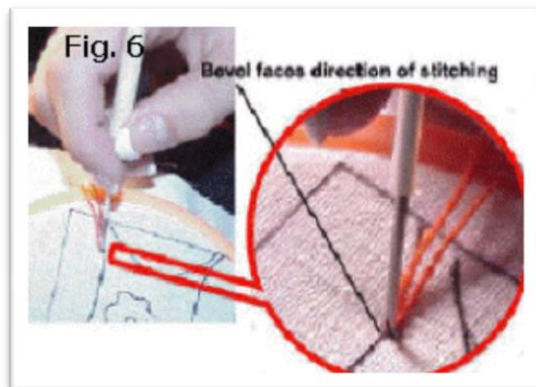
You can use a locking-lip embroidery hoop for now, and at some point you will want to try a gripper frame made for punch needle embroidery. Gripper frames hold the pattern very tight and do not loosen as hoops will. They are really worth the money!

1. Select an embroidery hoop in a size that will encompass the entire pattern — this should be as small as possible without cutting across the pattern lines at any point. For instance, if the largest outer measurement of your pattern is 3 inches, select a 5-inch hoop. Lay the fabric in the hoop with the pattern side up, over the inner ring of the hoop with the locking lip (lip should be facing up.). Center the pattern in the hoop opening, then slide the larger hoop over the top.
2. See Fig. 5: Stretch the pattern tightly in the hoop as you continue to tighten the top. Be sure to get the pattern stretched as tightly as you can for ease in punching and to ensure the most even loop height in your work. You will need to re-stretch and re-tighten it from time to time as you work. Take care to notice that the hoop does not pull out of shape as you tighten -- if it does, push on the sides and round it out again. Punching with the hoop out of round will cause your design to be distorted.
3. See Fig. 5: Hold the hoop with your thumb to the top side. Take care to keep your fingers away from the tip of the needle on the underside of the hoop as you punch! Punch needles are very sharp and cause puncture wounds very easily.



5 Working the Design

1. Hold the handle of the needle like a pencil with the needle perpendicular to the fabric. See Fig. 6. Don't rest your finger on the metal shaft of the needle. Face the bevel side of the needle in the direction you are moving the needle (I like to punch toward myself so I can see the bevel easily.) You can make a mark on the bevel side of the handle to make it easier to see. The CTR punch needles have a metal bevel indicator on the handle to make it very easy to locate the bevel side of the needle.
2. As you begin to work the design, first stitch the outline of an element following just barely inside the pattern line, then fill in with rows of appropriate colors. Work the main design elements first, starting in the center of the pattern and working outward. When the main design elements are completed, fill in the background.
3. Align the needle tip just barely inside the pattern line, then punch straight down through the fabric until the depth gauge hits the fabric; see Fig 7. Slowly retract the needle straight back up and out of the fabric, lift the tip of the needle off the face of the fabric. This part takes a little practice. Lifting the needle will pull the loops on the front shorter and create loops on the back, or it could pull out the loops from the front altogether—not good!
4. With the needle still resting on the fabric, slide the needle forward over a 'couple' of threads in the foundation fabric; align it to the pattern, then punch the next loop. With practice, you'll begin to feel the needle skip over the threads as you move to the next position.



5. Looking at the back (work) side, you should see the 'tail' of the thread showing and one stitch in the fabric now; the 2nd stitch is still obscured by the needle, which is in the 'down' position. Keep the stitches fairly close together as you punch from one loop to the next. Repeat steps 2 and 3 and continue punching.
6. When you come to the end of a row, leave your needle in the "down" position as show in Fig. 7, with the tip pushed through to the front of the pattern. Now turn the needle or turn your hoop so the bevel faces the direction you will move in next, and then begin again bringing the needle to the surface and punching the next row. You will begin the next row about a needle width away from the last row so you have a small amount of fabric showing between rows. Now just continue to follow the pattern line until the area you are working on is completed.

Note: if working with one strand of thread, you won't leave very much space between rows; the more threads in the needle, the more space you'll need between rows. Check the front side of the pattern and if you can see foundation between the rows there, you are leaving too much space.

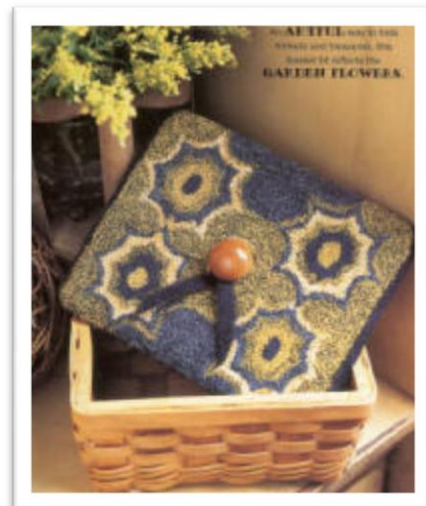
7. If you run out of thread, or when you need to change colors, place your finger tip on the last stitch to hold it in place, and gently pull the needle to the side a bit allowing about 1/2-inch of thread to feed through the tip of the needle. Now, clip the thread ends close to the foundation fabric. Go back and clip the ends where you began that length of thread now too, if you haven't already. I clip the beginning 'tail' after I get 2 or 3 stitches in so the tail does not get in my way or obstruct my view of where I am working.
8. Every so often, check your work on the front side of your work. Check for a uniform loop height and an overall even pile. If you notice any loose ends or errant loops on the front side, you can carefully clip them even with the "pile" of the design and they will blend right in and not fall out.
9. If you check the front side and don't like the results, don't take the threads out — practice a while and work several rows first. This makes a big difference in the look on the front. It takes a little practice and you will slowly get a feel for the punching — before you know it, you will be moving along and your work will begin to look more consistent. Give it a little time. If you decide to take out some threads, just pull up on the end from the back of the foundation and the stitches will pop out one at a time. Do not try to re-use the threads — they are too kinked to properly feed through the needle again. Don't re-punch the same area more than twice or you will risk creating a hole in the foundation -- that's irreparable and you'll have to start all over with a new pattern.
10. When the design elements are complete, punch a row of background color around each one, and then work the rest of the background. I like to work the background by visually dividing up the background into smaller "patches" then I outline the elements in each patch with the background color and fill in the remaining background area. Then I move to the next "patch". I also find that I like to work the background in opposite corners (first upper right, then lower left, etc.); that way, if I should run out of background thread and need to use a different dye lot, it won't be as noticeable if the color is slightly "off".
11. When you have all the design areas completed, but before you remove it from the hoop, check the back for any loose threads or long tails and trim them close to the foundation fabric. Check the front for any areas that need to be filled in, and punch a few stitches to fill in those areas. Check the front for long loops or loose ends and trim them even with the 'pile' of the piece -- they will blend in and you won't see the cut ends.

6 Finishing Your Work

1. Remove the complete piece from the hoop. Press the fabric just around the punched design just up to the edge of the loops.
2. If your piece does not lie flat, you probably punched it too tightly (stitches too close together or not enough space between rows). If this happens, you can lay a damp press cloth over the back side of the piece and with a hot, dry iron barely touching the back, steam it slightly so it lays flatter (do not press down on the iron and crush the loops!).

To create a pin:

Trim the foundation fabric to about 1/4 inch, turn it to the back, and then glue it down. Once dry, cut a piece of color coordinated matte board the same size as the finished piece and glue it to the back. Attach a pin back to the matte board. Sign and date the matte board!

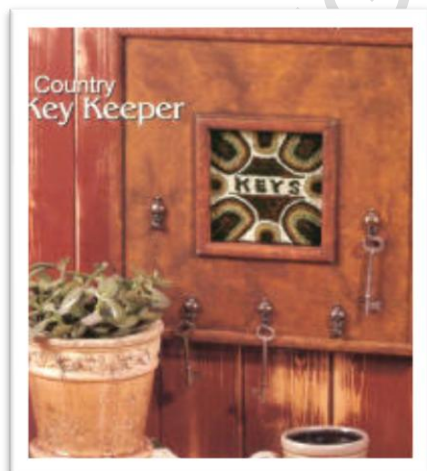


To frame your piece:

Trim the foundation fabric to size and mount it to a corresponding size foam core or matte board for your frame. Place a matte around the piece if you wish, then install the mounted piece in the frame. Sign and date the matte beneath your work!

To create a miniature rug:

Trim the foundation fabric to about 1/2 inch. Apply a fray prevention liquid to the edges of the foundation fabric right up to the last row of stitched loops, and allow it to dry. Clip the excess fabric close to the last row of loops, without cutting into the fabric holding the loops in place. Glue a small label to the back with your name and the date marked on it in permanent, water-proof pen.



You will discover certain ways you prefer to work a design as you gain more experience. Try different approaches to find what suits you best. That's it—you should have loops on the front side and small, close stitches on the back side. Your work will look sparse and very “loopy” on the front until you get a few rows punched next to one another—the loops in one row help the loops in the next stand up and create the pile of the design. The threads of the foundation fabric hold the loops in place so they will not fall out -- really!

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