FREE GUIDE

Basting and Batting Guide

How to turn a finished top into a quilt sandwich: which batting to choose, what size to buy, how to pin or spray baste, and how far apart to quilt.



The quilt sandwich

A quilt is three layers: the pieced top, a soft middle layer called batting, and a backing fabric. Basting holds the three together, smooth and flat, while you quilt them.



Backing: the quilt + 4 in on every side

Batting: the quilt + 3 to 4 in (here, 4) on every s

Top: the finished quilt top, pressed

The margins give the layers room to shift while you quilt. Trim them off when you square up for binding.

Sizes for seven quilts

Quilt	Top (in)	Batting, 4 in extra (in)	Backing, 4 in extra (in)
Crib	36 x 52	44 x 60	44 x 60
Throw	50 x 65	58 x 73	58 x 73
Twin	70 x 90	78 x 98	78 x 98
Full	84 x 103	92 x 111	92 x 111
Queen	90 x 108	98 x 116	98 x 116
King	108 x 108	116 x 116	116 x 116
Cal king	102 x 112	110 x 120	110 x 120

Sizes from the QuiltLab quilt size chart. A long-arm quilter may ask for more: check before you buy.

You will need

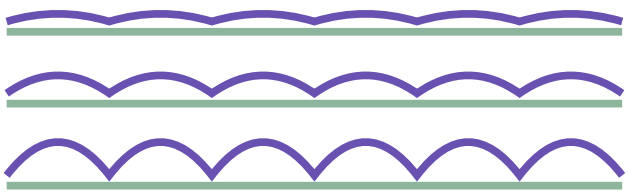
Pressed top and backing; batting, out of its bag a day early so the folds relax; painter's tape or binder clips; curved safety pins (about 1 in long) or basting spray; a long ruler; a clean floor or table.

Choose your batting

Fiber	Loft	Shrinks	Quilting lines up to	Warmth	Good for
Cotton	low	3-5%	4 in, or 8-10 with a scrim	●●●○○	Bed and baby quilts, a flat crinkled look
Polyester	high	0%	8-12 in (varies by brand)	●●●○○	Tied and puffy quilts, no shrinking
Cotton-Poly Blend, 80/20	medium	1-3%	6-8 in	●●●○○	An all-purpose default
Wool	medium	1-3%	4-6 in	●●●●●	Hand quilting, warm bed quilts
Bamboo	low	2-3%	6-8 in	●●○○○	Summer quilts, drape
Silk	low	0-1%	4 in	●●○○○	Art quilts, wall hangings, garments
Recycled / Eco-Friendly	medium	1-3%	6-8 in (varies by brand)	●●●○○	Everyday and charity quilts

Typical values. **Your batting's package sets the real limit on quilting distance**, and a batting with a scrim (a thin stabilizing web) can usually be quilted further apart. Shrinkage happens in the first wash and gives the crinkled look; prewash the batting only if its package says to and you want a flat finish.

Loft: how puffy



Low loft: flat, shows piecing and dense quilting

Medium loft: soft, some puff between lines

High loft: puffy, best tied or lightly quilted

Labels like "low loft" vary between brands, so compare actual products. To choose, quilt two small samples the same way and wash them. More in Choosing a batting loft.

Light or dark?

Use white or bleached batting under light fabrics, so the natural color doesn't show through. Under mostly dark fabrics, a black or charcoal batting keeps white fibers from working out through the top (bearding).

Not sure?

A cotton or 80/20 cotton-poly blend with a scrim is a forgiving first choice for a bed or throw quilt. Answer a few questions in the batting selector for a match.

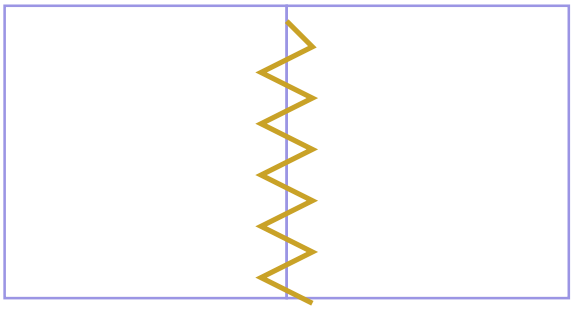
Batting from a roll, and joining pieces

Buying from a roll

Quilt	Batting (in)	From a 90 in roll	From a 120 in roll
Crib	44 x 60	1 1/4 yd	1 1/4 yd
Throw	58 x 73	1 5/8 yd	1 5/8 yd
Twin	78 x 98	2 3/4 yd	2 1/4 yd
Full	92 x 111	5 1/8 yd (2 pieces)	2 5/8 yd
Queen	98 x 116	5 1/2 yd (2 pieces)	2 3/4 yd
King	116 x 116	6 1/2 yd (2 pieces)	3 1/4 yd
Cal king	110 x 120	6 1/8 yd (2 pieces)	3 1/8 yd

Batting on a roll is sold by the yard at a fixed width. Where one width won't cover, the yardage is for pieces butted together, laid whichever way uses less. Packaged batting comes in named sizes (crib, twin, queen, king); pick the first one at least as big as the batting column. When the batting is just over a roll's width, as the full is on a 90 in roll, 3 in of overhang may let one width cover it.

Joining batting pieces



1. Cut both edges straight, ideally together so they match.
2. Butt them together. Don't overlap them: an overlap makes a ridge.
3. Join with a wide, long zigzag that catches both pieces, or with fusible batting tape.
4. Keep the join flat and unstretched.

Joining is how you use leftover batting, or cover a quilt wider than your roll. Join natural fibers (cotton, wool) with a zigzag or tape; follow the tape's package directions for heat and fiber content. Sew a small sample join first and check that it lies flat. More in Joining batting scraps.

> Plan joins to run down the middle of the quilt, not near the edge, where binding and handling stress them most.

Any size or roll width: batting size calculator.

Pin, spray or thread basting

Method	What holds the layers	Holds	Good for	Watch for
Pins	Curved safety pins every 3 to 4 in	Until you take them out	Any size; first quilts	Stopping to remove pins as you quilt
Spray	Temporary fabric adhesive between the layers	As long as the can's label says	Small quilts quilted soon after	Ventilation; the label's surface and time limits
Thread	Long hand stitches in a grid, 4 to 6 in apart	Until you pull them out	Hand quilting; quilts that travel in a hoop	Time to sew and remove

Pin basting, step by step

1. Tape the backing to the floor or table, wrong side up, smooth and taut but not stretched. Work from the middle of each side out to the corners.
2. Lay the batting on top and smooth it from the center out with your hands. Don't pull it.
3. Center the top on the batting, right side up, and smooth it the same way. Check that the backing and batting show past the top on every side.
4. Pin from the center out, one pin in every 3 to 4 in square, through all three layers. Leave the pins open if you'll close them all at once.
5. Close the pins, take up the tape, and check the back for folds before you quilt.

How many pins

Quilt	Size (in)	At 4 in	At 3 in
Crib	36 x 52	117	216
Throw	50 x 65	221	374
Twin	70 x 90	414	720
Full	84 x 103	546	980
Queen	90 x 108	621	1080
King	108 x 108	729	1296
Cal king	102 x 112	728	1292

One pin per square of the grid. Every pin also comes out as you quilt.

Spray basting

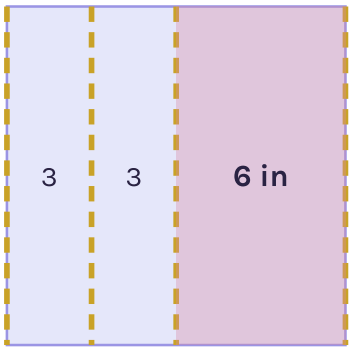
Read the can first: it sets the distance to spray from, how long the hold lasts, and how much ventilation you need. Fold back half the top, mist the batting lightly, smooth the top back down, and repeat for each half on both sides of the batting. More in Pin vs spray basting.

Table smaller than the quilt?

Baste the middle first, then slide the quilt to bring each side and corner onto the table in turn. Clamp or tape the layers before each move and smooth any slack outward. More in Basting on a small table.

QUILTING

Quilting distance and your plan



The batting's package says how far apart quilting lines can be. Check the widest gap, not the average:
1. Mark only the lines you will quilt, including seams you stitch in the ditch.
2. Measure the gap between each pair of neighboring lines, and find the widest (shaded: 6 in).
3. If it is wider than the limit, add a line through it and measure again.

Too few lines and the batting shifts and bunches in the wash. Closer quilting than the limit is always fine, and it wears better, but makes the quilt stiffer. More in Checking quilting distance.

Before you quilt: a checklist

- The backing and batting show past the top on every side.
- No folds or puckers on the back: run a hand over it.
- Pins are every 3 to 4 in, or the spray is inside its hold time.
- The quilting plan's widest gap is inside the batting's limit.
- Start quilting in the middle and work out, so slack moves to the edges.

Your quilt sandwich

Quilt top	_____ x _____ in	Batting	_____ x _____ in
Batting fiber	_____	Quilting limit	_____ in
Backing	_____ x _____ in	Backing fabric	_____ yd
Basting	pins / spray / thread	Pins needed	_____

How we made this guide. QuiltLab wrote and drew it with AI tools from published basting methods and the batting details on QuiltLab's batting pages, summarized in the articles linked above, which cite their sources. Sizes come from the QuiltLab batting and backing calculators. The pictures are diagrams, not photos, and no one has basted a quilt from this guide yet. Spot a mistake? Tell us at quiltlab.co/help.