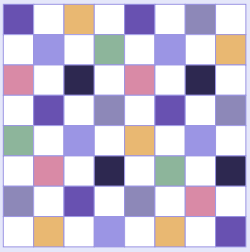
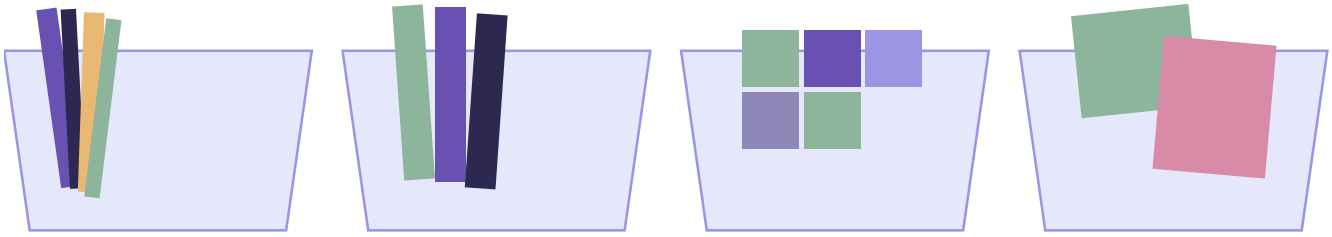
FREE GUIDE

Scrap-Buster Quilt Guide

Turn the scrap bin into quilts: sort scraps by size and value, keep a few standard cuts, pick from eight scrap-buster ideas, and make a scrappy quilt look planned.



Sort by size



Strings
under 2 1/2 in wide

Strips
2 1/2 in wide and up

Squares
cut to a standard size

Chunks
bigger than 5 in both ways

Trim each scrap to the **clean rectangle** inside it, leaving out selvage, holes and frayed edges, and sort by its **narrow side**. That side decides what it can become: a 2 x 12 in piece can't give a 2 1/2 in square, however long it is.

Sort by value, too

Split each bin into **light, medium and dark**, judged against the fabrics next to it, not by color name. Value, more than color, is what makes a scrap quilt's pattern show. A phone photo in black and white is a quick check.

More in Sorting scraps by value.

What to throw away

- Pieces smaller than your smallest standard cut.
- Fabric that's thin, stretchy, or worn through.
- Prints you'd never put in a quilt. Scraps take space.

Standard cuts worth keeping

Cut	Used in
1 1/2 in strips and squares	Log cabin logs, tiny postage stamps, narrow sashing
2 in squares	Postage stamps, small four patches, corner stones
2 1/2 in strips and squares	Nine patch, four patch, rail fence, binding; the same width as a jelly roll
3 1/2 in squares	Nine patch (9 in block), large four patch, HST starters for 2 1/2 in HSTs
5 in squares	Charm-size blocks, HSTs for 4 in finished, snowball blocks

Cut the sizes your favorite blocks use, not every size. Keep odd useful pieces whole rather than cutting them down. More in A scrap cutting system.

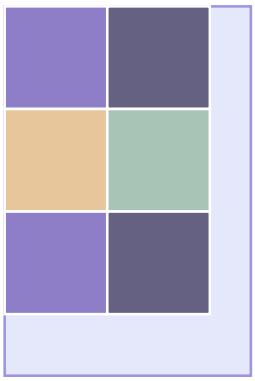
COUNTING

What a scrap makes

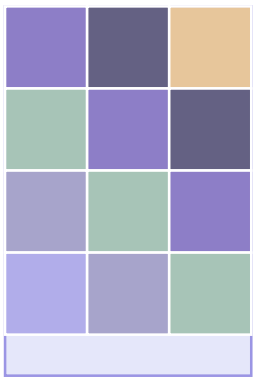
Whole pieces from common scrap sizes

Clean scrap	1 1/2 in sq	2 in sq	2 1/2 in sq	3 1/2 in sq	5 in sq	2 1/2 x 4 1/2
5 x 5 in	9	4	4	1	1	2
6 x 9 in	24	12	6	2	1	4
10 x 10 in	36	25	16	4	4	8
3 x 21 in	28	10	8	-	-	4
9 x 21 in	84	40	24	12	4	16
18 x 21 in	168	90	56	30	12	32

Cut sizes, with seam allowances included. A 9 x 21 in scrap is a fat eighth; 18 x 21 in is a fat quarter. Counts assume straight cuts and no miscuts.



2 1/2 in: 6 squares



2 in: 12 squares

The same 6 x 9 in scrap gives 6 squares at 2 1/2 in with a strip left over, or 12 at 2 in with almost nothing left. Before you cut a pile, decide the project first, then count:

1. Measure each clean rectangle.
2. Count the whole pieces it gives at your size.
3. Add up, and count each fabric only once.
4. Short? Add a fabric, or change the block size.

More in Sorting scraps by size.

Squares a whole top takes

Quilt top	2 in cut	2 1/2 in cut	3 1/2 in cut	5 in cut
Baby 36 x 52 in	840	468	216	96
Throw 50 x 65 in	1,496	825	374	180
Twin 70 x 90 in	2,820	1,575	720	320
Queen 90 x 108 in	4,320	2,430	1,080	480

One square per cell, rounded up to whole rows, so the top can come out a little bigger. Divide by the pieces per scrap above to see how many scraps you need.

> Leftover strips 2 1/4 to 2 1/2 in wide make a scrappy binding. Join them with diagonal seams and keep each piece at least 10 in long. More in Scrappy binding.

IDEAS

Eight scrap-buster quilts

Throw counts are for the quilt top only, at 48 x 60 in with no borders. Every idea works smaller, as a baby quilt or table runner.

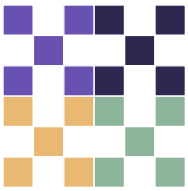


1. Postage stamp

Cut: 2 in squares (1 1/2 in finished)

48 x 60 in throw: 1280 squares

Sew squares into rows, rows into a top. Use every color, or alternate scraps with one light.

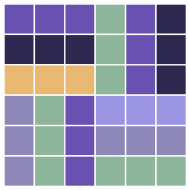


2. Nine patch

Cut: 2 1/2 in squares (6 in blocks)

48 x 60 in throw: 80 blocks, 720 squares

Five scraps and four lights per block, or the reverse, alternating. Nine Patch pattern.

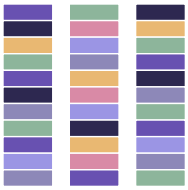


3. Rail fence

Cut: 2 1/2 x 6 1/2 in strips (6 in blocks)

48 x 60 in throw: 80 blocks, 240 strips

Three strips per block; turn every other block a quarter turn. Rail Fence pattern.

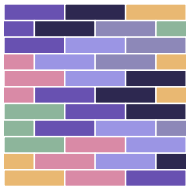


4. Chinese coins

Cut: Strips any length, cut to one width

48 x 60 in throw: Columns of any height

Stack strips into long columns ("coins"), then set the columns apart with sashing. Chinese Coins pattern.



5. Brick wall

Cut: 2 1/2 x 4 1/2 in bricks

48 x 60 in throw: 360 bricks

Sew bricks into rows; offset every other row by half a brick and trim the ends. Brick Wall pattern.

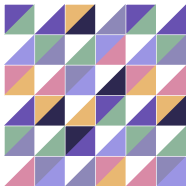


6. String blocks

Cut: Strings 1 1/4 to 2 1/2 in wide

48 x 60 in throw: 48 blocks of 9 in: 54 x 72 in

Sew strings onto a foundation, trim, and turn the blocks into diamonds. Page 4. String block size.

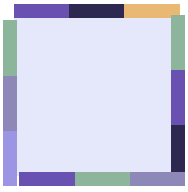


7. Bonus triangles

Cut: Corners trimmed from stitch-and-flip units

48 x 60 in throw: A border, a pillow, or a mini quilt

Sew a second line 1/2 in from the first before trimming; trim all the bonus HSTs to one size. Bonus HSTs.



8. Scrappy binding

Cut: 2 1/4 to 2 1/2 in strips, 10 in and longer

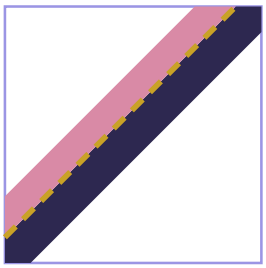
48 x 60 in throw: About 226 in of binding

Join strips end to end with diagonal seams; plan the order so no two neighbors match. Scrappy binding.

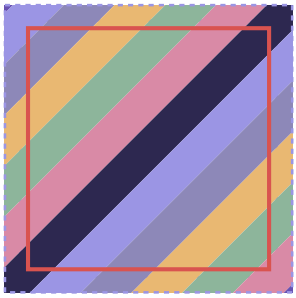
String blocks



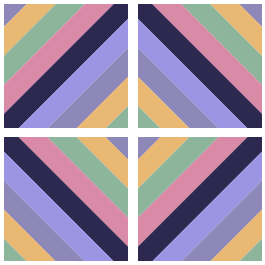
1. Center string corner to corner on the foundation.



2. Next string right sides together; sew, flip, press.



3. Cover it, then trim from the back (red).



4. Turn the blocks: the centers make diamonds.

1. Cut foundations of thin muslin or paper, 1 in bigger than the finished block (chart below).
2. Lay a 2 in center string right side up from corner to corner, and pin it.
3. Lay the next string on it right sides together, edges matched. Sew 1/4 in from the edge through the foundation, flip it open and press.
4. Keep adding strings out to both corners, mixing widths from 1 1/4 to 2 1/2 in. Each string must reach past the foundation at both ends.
5. Turn the block over and trim it to size through the foundation. Tear away paper foundations; muslin stays in.

Foundation sizes

Finished	Trim to	Foundation	Longest string
6 in	6 1/2 in	7 in	11 in
8 in	8 1/2 in	9 in	13 3/4 in
9 in	9 1/2 in	10 in	15 1/4 in
12 in	12 1/2 in	13 in	19 1/2 in

The longest string runs corner to corner, plus 1/2 in past each end. Short strings fit nearer the corners.

A 54 x 72 in string quilt

48 blocks, 9 in finished, set 6 across and 8 down. Cut 48 foundations 10 in square and 48 center strings 2 in wide in one color: the repeated center is what turns a pile of strings into one quilt. More in String block size.

> Strings too short to cross the block? Sew two end to end with a straight seam and press it open. In a busy string block, nobody will find the join.

DESIGN

Make scrappy look planned

Pick two rules, then vary everything else

A scrap quilt holds together when a couple of things stay the same everywhere. Choose two before you pull a single fabric, and let the prints change freely inside them.

Keep the same	Example
A color family	Every scrap is blue or green; prints, values and scales vary.
A role for value	Every block has light corners and darker centers.
One repeated fabric	The same background, center string or sashing throughout.
One shape	Only squares, or only strips, in one size.

More in Scrappy quilt tips.

Choosing a background

The background usually covers the most area, so test it first: lay it beside your **lightest** scraps (for a light background) and check that the edge between them still shows. Then compare undertones, warm or cool, and how busy a print it can be. More in Choosing a background.

Spread it out

- Lay out the whole top before you sew rows together.
- Step back, or take a photo: clumps of one color jump out.
- Spread the loudest prints across the quilt, not in one corner.
- Try a layout in QuiltLab first, with your fabrics: quiltlab.co.

Your scrap quilt

Idea	_____	Finished size	_____ x _____ in
Rule 1	_____	Rule 2	_____
Cut size	_____ in	Pieces needed	_____
Pieces counted	_____	Background	_____ yd

How we made this guide. QuiltLab wrote and drew it with AI tools from published scrap quilting methods, summarized in the articles linked above, which cite their sources. Piece counts are worked out from the cut sizes shown, whole pieces only. The pictures are diagrams, not photos, and no one has sewn these quilts from this guide yet. Spot a mistake? Tell us at quiltlab.co/help.