

BEGINNERS GUIDE TO SMOCKING

English smocking is a form of embroidery that is worked on fabric that has been pleated. Using a pleating machine (i.e. pleater) is the quickest & most popular method of gathering the fabric into these pleats. If no pleater is available, iron-on-dots can be used as a guide for sewing the gathering threads by hand, but these dots are sometimes hard to find. As demonstrated in the sample projects included on this web site, fabrics with a woven pattern (such as gingham check) can be the guide for sewing the gathering threads.

With knowledge of only a few basic stitches, a beginner can create a large variety of geometric designs. (Even the more advanced technique of picture smocking is simply stacking rows of the most basic stitch--the cable--one on top of the other, creating large areas of color that are shaped into figures.)

Materials

- Fabric - 100% cotton broadcloth (or cotton-polyester blend) is best for beginning projects.
- Embroidery floss
- Needle - #7 darning or #8 crewel recommended.
- Pleater (optional) - Refer to first paragraph above.

Terms

- valley - area between the pleats.
- row - line created by gathering threads.
- space - distance between gathering threads.
- stripping floss - separating strands & putting back together before threading the needle.

The goal is to keep the strands from twisting together so they will lie flat on the fabric. A quicker way to achieve this is as follows: Thread the needle, knot the thread, pull the needle down to the knot & pull it back again, causing the strands to separate slightly. (This method can be repeated as you work across a row if strands twist together again. Simply pull the needle down the floss to the fabric & pull it back again.)

General "Rules" for Working Stitches

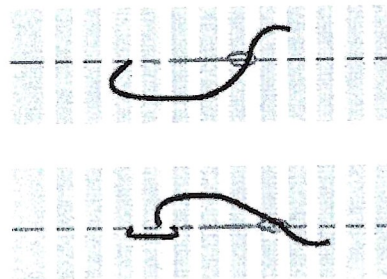
1. Most stitches are worked from left to right, sewing through or "picking up" approximately the top 1/3 of each pleat.*
2. Unless design directions indicate otherwise, stitches are typically worked with 3 strands embroidery floss.
3. Gathering threads are used as guides for keeping rows of stitching straight.
4. Needle is inserted into fabric parallel to the gathering thread.
5. The terms "thread up" and "thread down" in these directions are referring to the embroidery floss in relation to the needle. (Diagrams will help demonstrate this.)

*A left handed person will be working from right to left--just opposite directions. Holding printed pages upside down to study diagrams can be helpful.

BASIC STITCHES

THE CABLE STITCH

1. When grasping pleated fabric, thumb should be just below and parallel to the gathering thread. Although the gathering threads will be the main guides for keeping rows straight, the thumb can also be helpful if it is positioned as described. The forefinger may be outstretched above the gathering thread, or behind the fabric--whichever position is most comfortable.
2. Bring needle up from under side of pleated fabric. Bring needle through fabric on **left side** of first pleat to be stitched--approximately 1/3 the way down from the top of the pleat.
3. With thread down below needle, "pick up" top 1/3 of the **next pleat** (it's important that needle is inserted in the **next pleat**). Now, pull the 2 pleats firmly together. This stitch is referred to as a *down cable* or *down stitch*.
4. With thread up above needle, "pick up" top 1/3 of **next pleat** and pull pleats firmly together. This stitch is referred to as an *up cable* or *up stitch*.



Tips for creating a pretty *cable stitch*

- Pull the needle to the left as you pull the pleats together on each stitch. (Just remember to pull the needle in the direction it's pointed.) Pull *up cables* as though you're aiming over your left shoulder. Pull *down cables* away from your left shoulder.
- As you pull 2 pleats together, be sure the stitch is straight and in place before giving the final tug drawing the pleats firmly together.
- As you practice, work toward a consistent tension. Pull stitches together firmly, but not so firmly that threads twist tightly together. Just think, "Firm, but not too tight."

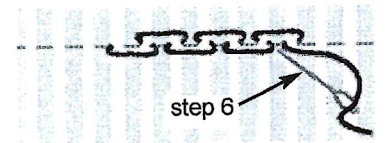
5. Continue across row, alternating thread position (up or down) on each stitch. Remember, **thread up** to work an *up cable* and **thread down** to work a *down cable*.



Tips for creating a straight, even looking row

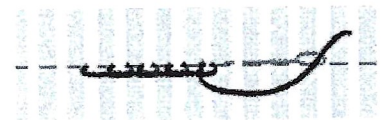
- It is important to keep the needle level and parallel to the gathering thread on each stitch. Try to enter the fabric in the same position in relation to the gathering thread. Don't try to move the needle "up a little" on *up stitches* and "down a little" on *down stitches*.
- Straighten the stitch over the pleats, if necessary, to make it lay horizontally. As you pull the pleats together, your thumbnail can be used to push the *down stitch* in place. When each stitch is completed it may need a "little pat" with the needle. Pat *up stitches* down and pat *down stitches* up to help keep the row straight.

6. To tie off thread at the end of a cable row (or any row of smocking), take needle down in valley **just before** last stitched pleat. Tie off on backside of fabric.



THE OUTLINE STITCH

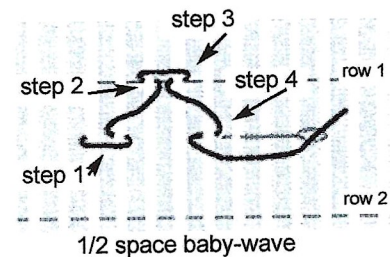
This stitch is worked much the same as the *cable stitch*, except all stitches in a row are worked holding the thread in the same (up or down) position. The outline stitch shown on right is worked keeping **thread down** as each new pleat is "picked up."



THE BABY-WAVE STITCH

(Rows numbers are simply to help explain this stitch.)

1. Work 1 cable (**thread down**) half way between rows 1 and 2. (This is referred to as row 1 1/2.)
 2. With **thread down**, "pick up" **next pleat** on row 1. (Remember to keep needle level and parallel to gathering thread.)
 3. With **thread up**, work 1 cable.
 4. With **thread up**, "pick up" **next pleat** on row 1 1/2.
 5. With **thread down**, work one cable, completing one *baby-wave* (and beginning another).
- (A wave row can be created by repeating steps 2--5.)



The stitch described in steps 1--5 above is referred to as a *1/2 space baby-wave* because it covers 1/2 space. A *whole space baby-wave* is worked the same except thread is carried one whole space between cable stitches. Refer to diagram on right.

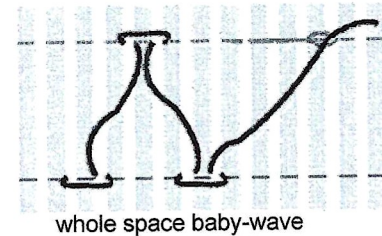
General "rules" for working *baby-wave*

- **Thread up** for top cable, **thread down** for bottom cable.
- **Thread down** when working upward, and **thread up** when working downward.

THE TRELLIS STITCH (also referred to as step-stitch)

This stitch is much like the baby-wave except you take several "steps" between the top & bottom cables. There are many combinations of this stitch & also many ways of describing it in design directions. The 1/4 space step-stitch (meaning each stitch is worked 1/4 space apart) is described first. (Rows numbers are simply to help explain this stitch.)

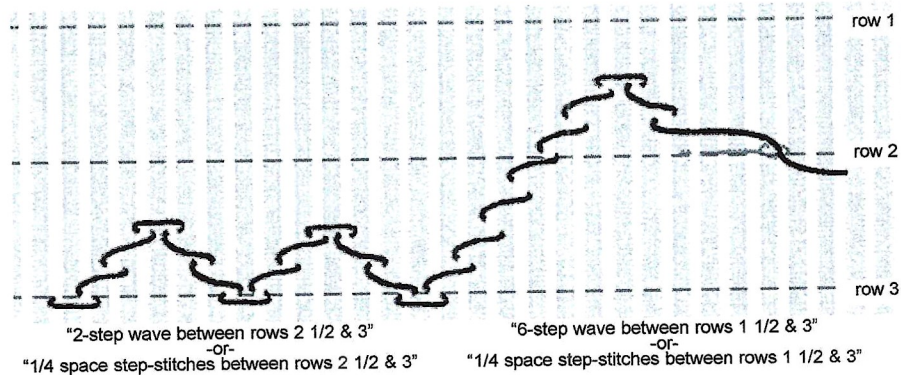
1. Work one cable (thread down) on row 2.
2. Keeping **thread down**, "pick up" next pleat 1/4 space above gathering row, "pick up" **next pleat** 1/2 space above gathering row, then 3/4, then level with row 1. (Remember to keep needle level and parallel to gathering thread on each stitch.)
3. With **thread up**, work one cable on row 1.
4. Keeping **thread up**, "pick up" **next pleat** 1/4 space below gathering row, then 1/2, then 3/4, then level with row 2.



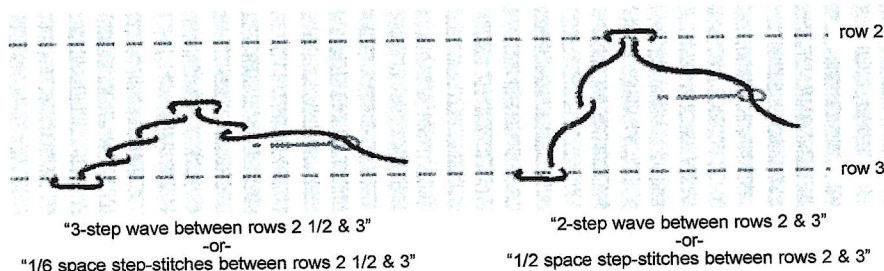
(A wave row can be created by repeating this sequence (steps 1--4).



As shown below, the *trellis stitch* may be worked between less or more than a whole space. Also, this stitch is sometimes described by the # of “steps” worked in a particular space. (Examples of common descriptions for this stitch are below diagrams.)



The *trellis stitches* described so far have been worked 1/4 space apart. Occasionally you will be directed to space these stitches closer together or further apart as shown below. (Examples of common descriptions for this stitch are below diagrams.)



General “rules” for working *trellis stitch* (are same as *baby-wave*)

- **Thread up** for top cable, **thread down** for bottom cable.
- **Thread down** when working upward, and **thread up** when working downward.

These are the most common stitches used in smocking. With the exception of some popular accent stitches (french knot, lazy daisy, etc.) all of Creative Keepsakes’ smocking designs were all created from various combinations of these 4 stitches.

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