

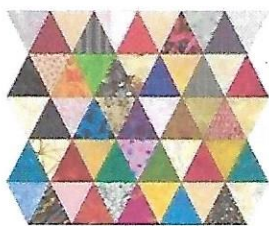


Pattern of the Month - January 2015

By Evelyn George

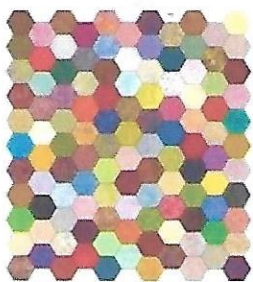
Charm Quilts

By definition, a charm quilt has many patches, each cut from a different fabric. Traditionally, quilters have traded "charms" of fabric with their friends, in order to have enough different ones -- a thousand or more might be needed to make a big quilt. Today we have a tremendous selection of fabric, so it's easy to collect a variety, and even buy sets of pre-cut squares or other shapes, if we wish. And it's still fun to swap! It's those unexpected colors and patterns that make a charm quilt so interesting.



Choosing a pattern - Almost any quilt pattern could be used to make a charm quilt, as long as each separate piece of fabric is different from the rest. But simple patterns work better than others. One-patch designs are especially suitable; these include Square, Rectangle, Triangle, Diamond, Hexagon, House and other tessellating shapes.

A charm shape is typically repeated in just one size, but some, such as squares, can be repeated in several different sizes that fit together in sets or blocks.

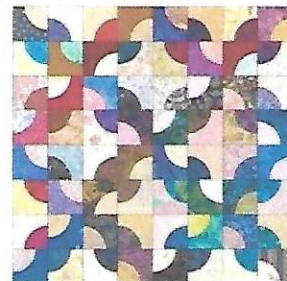


Hexagons have been used by quilters for over two hundred years - in the 1800's they were popular for charm and scrap quilts; the design was called "Honeycomb" or "Mosaic." They were stitched by hand, and we still enjoy hand-piecing them today.

Curved piecing, usually done by hand, makes it easy to create such patterns as Drunkard's Path or Apple Core. But many simple charms can be pieced by machine, such as Tumbler, Diamond, Square and Triangle.



Some applique patterns could be converted into charm quilts, if no fabric is repeated (for example, each petal and leaf is different). In any pattern, the secret to using charms is to sort them by value, using lights, mediums, and darks in appropriate places to make the design show up. This could be quite a challenge, and results unpredictable, but certainly not boring!



Templates - Durable acrylic templates are available for purchase in a variety of shapes suitable for charm quilts. Just as in any pieced quilt, seam allowances must be added to the charm shapes in order for them to fit together properly. If the template already includes seam allowances, possibly it can be rotary cut. If the template does not include seam allowances, you need to draw around it onto the wrong side of the fabric, and add $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowances when you cut it out.

If you are lucky enough to have access to a cutting machine, see what charm shapes are available. Remember, for a charm quilt, you only need to cut one from each fabric. If you make your own template, it's a good idea to test it out by cutting a few sample pieces with it, and sewing them together, to be sure they fit together well. *When you're sure your template works OK, make an extra one, in case the first one wears out or gets misplaced.*



Collecting Charms - Set aside some time to begin going through your stash, especially the scraps. Decide if you want to use only certain styles or colors, or if anything goes. Cut one charm from each fabric (more, if you're swapping with a charm quilt buddy). Work through one section of your stash at a time, whenever you're in the mood to cut some charms (and don't forget to keep your eyes open for charm bundles whenever you're shopping.). This can be an ongoing project, as it will take some time to have enough to make a quilt.



You might want to sort them roughly into lights and darks, or into color families. You don't actually need to have this planned out ahead, but when you start stitching, you can either arrange them as you like or just embrace a random effect. Look at pictures of old charm quilts and you will see a lot of random beauty. Even the occasional "ugly" fabric has a place in a charm quilt! (However, it's best to omit any fabric that is not good quality.) Keep the template and the cut charms stacked together in a closed container until you have enough to start the quilt. You can start any time, just keep adding more charms as you go along.

Making a Charm Quilt - Simple 3 or 4 sided charm shapes are easily assembled into rows, then rows joined together. Those can be pieced by hand or machine, with careful attention to consistent seam allowances, especially at intersections. More elaborate tessellating shapes may require "y" seams or curved piecing. Those are probably more easily pieced by hand. Use small stitches and backstitch at beginning and end of seams, to keep charms from coming apart. Either way, make rows (or blocks, or sections) and join together to make the quilt as big as you want (or until you've used all your charms!).

Finishing - You might want to leave the quilt edges as they end up, reflecting the unique charm shape. In this case, a bias binding can be used. Or, if you decide to trim off uneven outside edges of quilt, stay stitch it first, then trim, leaving a seam allowance; take care not to cut off knots in the hand piecing. Then, after layering and quilting, add your preferred binding. Another option is to turn under edges of original shapes all around the quilt, then applique edge of quilt to a border strip slipped underneath, creating a straight edge as well as a beautiful effect (see quilt at top of first page). Enjoy making and using your charm quilt - On the label, note the number of different fabrics used, and date finished, so future quilters and historians can appreciate the amazing diversity of fabrics available in our quilting era!