

This week we will discuss cost effective alternatives to linen fabric that can be used successfully for needle painting embroidery.

Here are some of the characteristics to look for when choosing fabrics other than linen:

1. **Weight:** The fabric should be of a medium weight to support the embroidery. Furnishing fabrics are normally more suitable but ensure that they have a dense enough weave. If using a lighter weight cotton such as calico or quilting cotton you will need to use a backing fabric such as batiste cotton to support the main fabric.
2. **Quality:** Look for a good quality fabric that has a fairly smooth texture. Crush it in your hand and see if it creases badly then it will probably not suffer the process of lengthy stitching well. Buy a small sample and wash it to see if it can withstand washing & ironing.
3. **Density:** As discussed with linen the density of a fabric is defined by the number of threads woven together in a square inch – referred to as the thread count. For example 100 threads across and 100 threads woven down will result in a 200 thread count. Your chosen fabric should have a high thread count as possible to ensure that it is a close weave. This is necessary as because Needle Painting is so fine, you need to have plenty of placement for the needle for precise stitching– if you use a loose weave you will be forced to re-enter the same hole which will leave openings in the fabric.
4. **Stretch:** the fabric should have little or no stretch in it, otherwise it will stretch out of shape in the hoop and the stitching will be puckered when you remove it. Test the stretch across the straight grain not on the bias – most fabric will stretch on the bias.

Here are some recommended fabrics:

### **Cotton Satin**

This is a medium weight furnishing fabric that I import from Whaleys Bradford in the UK. They are manufacturers of a vast number of different fabrics and were kind enough to send me numerous samples to try out. Cotton satin was the chosen fabric and has remained my favourite choice for needle painting. It has all the requirements listed above and is a joy to work on, the needle glides through with ease. It can be washed and ironed but be careful of using a hot iron as this could scorch the satin content. It has a smooth front side and rougher back, the smooth side is used to stitch on. It is available in a milky white shade only. I have used this fabric for many of the projects in my books, workshops and kits.

### **Cotton Sateen**

This is similar to cotton satin but has more of a shiny surface. It is available in different weights, the light weight is often used to make sheets so be careful again that you choose the furnishing weight - don't go out and buy a cotton sateen sheet thinking it will do the job!

### **Southern Belle 100% cotton muslin fabric**

Tanja Berlin of Berlin Embroidery in Canada recommends this fabric for needle painting embroidery. It has a 220 thread count with a smooth weave which is ideal for needle painting. I have tried it and it is lovely to stitch on – you may wish to use a backing fabric with it. – see more information here:

<http://www.berlinembroidery.com/fabrics.htm>

### **Quilting cotton**

A 200 count good quality quilting cotton is lovely to work on for smaller projects but can be a bit on the light side for larger projects. If you do use it make sure that you use a backing fabric to support the weight of the embroidery.

### **Duchess satin**

This is the highest quality satin available. It is quite stiff and of a medium weight. I prefer to stitch on the non-shiny side. It can tend to pucker a bit but I have used it in the past very successfully.

### **Silk**

Silks such as silk dupion can be used as long as they fulfil all the requirements above. Personally I am not a fan of silk dupion due to the many slubs in the fabric and prefer a non-shiny texture to contrast with the sheen of the threads but it is up to you!

### **Online Fabric Sales**

I am unable to recommend any websites that sell the above fabrics except as already suggested. I recommend you search furnishing fabric stores and quilting stores. Mary Corbet of Needle N Thread has many useful hints and suppliers for fabric on her site: [www.needlenthread.com](http://www.needlenthread.com)

You can purchase Irish linen and cotton satin fabric on my website here

<http://trishburr.co.za/content/product>

