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Hot Water Stabilizers 101 by Sue Bleiweiss

Looking for an easy way to add texture to a piece of cloth? Try stitching it to some hot water stabilizer. You can get some interesting textural effects with hot water stabilizer by varying the degree of hot water that you use to dissolve it with.

For all of these samples I stitched the hot water soluble stabilizer to a piece of unwashed cotton. I laid the fabric onto the stabilizer and used free motion stitching to attach the two together. After I finished stitching, I brought all my samples to the kitchen and prepared some hot water at different temperatures using a standard kitchen meat thermometer to measure the temperature of the water. Working with one sample at a time I put it in a heatproof container (a disposable roasting pan works great) and poured the hot water over the surface. I pulled the samples right out of the water as soon as I finished pouring the water over it. Leaving them to sit in the water may produce different results.



The water temperatures that I used in the samples above (reading clockwise from the upper left):

120° F - No change in the stabilizer

140° F - Small amount of crinkling, didn't dissolve at all

160° F - More crinkling with a little dissolution

170° F - A little less crinkling than at 160°, but it began to dissolve and get a bit sticky.

180° F - A bit more dissolution than at 170° and the stabilizer is very sticky at this stage.

200° F - Total dissolution

Here's a view of the backside of all of the fabric shown previously, so that you can see how much of the stabilizer is left on the fabric.



It's absolutely imperative to monitor the temperature of the water when you use hot water soluble stabilizer if you do not want it to dissolve completely and I recommend that you prepare several samples to test what temperature is best to achieve the results you desire for your project. You can see from the photos above that the temperature of the water has an affect on not only how much crinkling that you get on the surface of the cloth but also how much the stabilizer itself will dissolve, which in turn will affect the final hand of the cloth. The key to success with this technique is to sample and experiment!