

Legend: DMC Stranded Cotton

B	310 black	O	975 golden brown - dk
+	977 golden brown - lt	8	3046 yellow beige - md

Backstitches: DMC Stranded Cotton

—	310 black
----------	-----------

Learn to Cross Stitch

By Christina Snaples

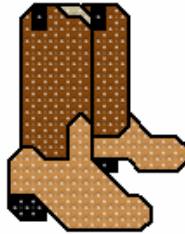
Copyright 2007

So you want to learn to cross stitch? Congratulations! Cross stitching is relatively cheap, it's easy learn, and it makes a great gift for anybody - including yourself! Ok, it may not be quickest craft project you've ever done, but it's very easy to do - especially while watching television, riding in the car, watching sporting events, etc.

Pick Your Project

Probably the hardest thing you have to do is to decide what project you want to work on! There are thousands of cross stitch patterns to choose from for just about anything you're interested in: animals of all sorts, houses, boats, cars, sports, holidays, weddings, religious scenes, etc. Projects come in many sizes ranging from very small (and quick to finish) to very large (and may take months to finish). Exactly how long it takes to complete a project depends on how big the project is and how often you can work on it. For your first few projects, I recommend something small - so you can finish it quickly, be proud of it, and be inspired to complete another project.

If you have a cross stitch project picked out already, great! You'll have to adapt some of these instructions to your project. If you haven't pick a project, that's fine too; we'll use mine - a pair of cowboy boots.



Buy Floss and Fabric

The next thing to do is make sure you have all the supplies you'll need. If you buy a cross stitch "kit" most of the supplies are included: fabric, thread, needle, and any embellishments. Although there are exceptions, most kits do not include: scissors, embroidery hoops, mats, or framing supplies. If you are working with a kit, you can skip down to the next section.

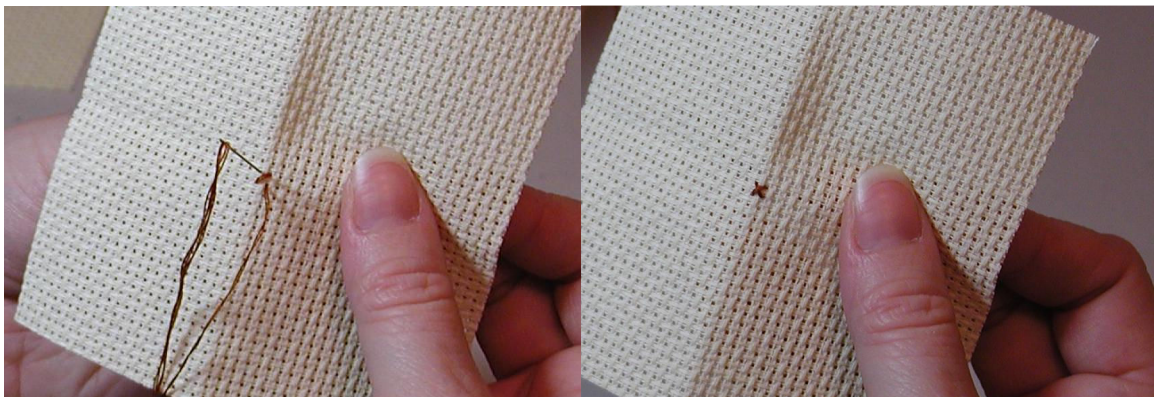
If you bought a "pattern," usually all you get is the pattern, the floss color codes, and maybe some basic cross stitch instructions that assume you know what you are doing already. You have to supply all the rest of the materials. If you are only going to do a few cross stitch projects, buying a kit is probably cheaper. But if you find you like cross stitching, leftover fabric and floss can be used on the next project, and the next project, and the next project. After a few projects, you may find that you already have most of the floss colors and you don't have to buy very many supplies to make even an elaborate project.

If you are working with a pattern, you need to figure out exactly what you have to buy. Usually there is a chart with the floss color codes. You will need one skein of each floss number listed. Occasionally large projects may need more than one skein; the directions will usually indicate that. Many instructions call for a particular brand of floss -

DMC floss. Conveniently, most stores sell DMC floss. Occasionally, you might run into something different; Anchor and Coats brand floss each have their own numbering system. In that case you may have to find a specialty store or try to guess which color would substitute best. For my cowboy boot project you need one skein of DMC floss #310 (black), #975 (dark golden brown), #977 (light golden brown), and #3046 (yellow beige - medium). One thing to watch out for - at the store sometimes skeins get tossed in the wrong bin; always double check the floss number on your instructions with the floss number on the skein!



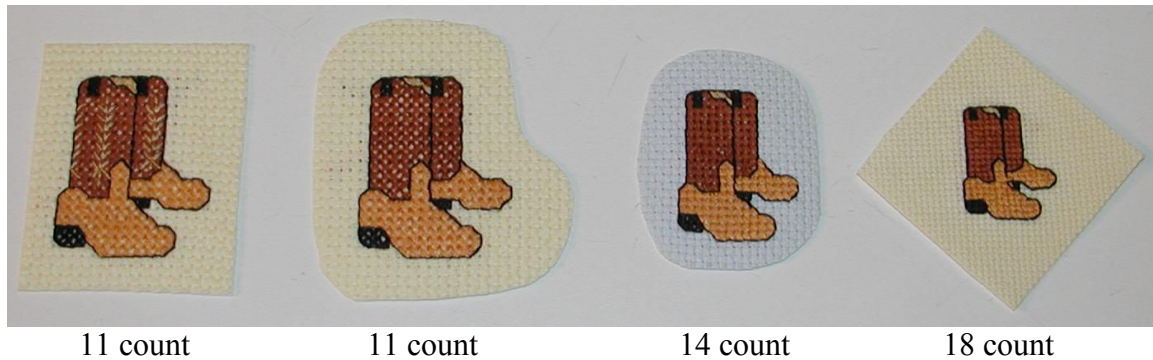
If you are working from a pattern, you'll also need to buy some special cross stitch fabric. Cross stitch fabric has lots of regularly spaced holes in it. Sometimes directions will call it "even-weave fabric." Or the directions may call for "Aida" fabric; Aida is a popular brand, rather like Kleenex is a popular brand of facial tissue. Whatever they call the cross stitch fabric, using a needle, you run the floss up one through one hole, down through the next diagonal hole, and repeat to make an X pattern. (The diagonal strands of floss will cross over each other - crossed stitch.)



The holes in the fabric have measured amounts of space between them. If your fabric has wider spaces, you'll end up with bigger X's and a bigger picture. If your fabric has very close spaces, you'll end up with smaller x's and a smaller overall picture size.

Cross stitch fabric is sold according to how many X's, or stitches, you can get in one inch. If your fabric has wide spaces and bigger X's, you won't have as many stitches in one inch. 11 count fabric will make 11 relatively big X's per one inch. If your fabric has a

smaller weave with small spaces and smaller x's, you can get a lot of x's in one inch. 18 count fabric will make 18 x's in one inch of fabric.



So what count fabric do you want? 11 count fabric will make bigger stitches, but bigger stitches doesn't always mean better. If the X's are too big, there will be a lot of fabric showing behind the threads and the project might not look as good. See all the white spots on the 11 count pictures? Projects on 18 count fabric aren't any faster just because they have smaller x's; there are still just as many stitches to make. Also some older people may have trouble seeing the small holes on 18 count fabric. Some young children may lack the coordination to put the needle through the correct small hole. If either case applies, you may want to use the bigger 11 count fabric. But many people will use something in the middle - 14 count fabric is probably the most commonly used size.

Next you'll have to decide what color fabric to use. Most stores carry at least some variety of colors - white, off white, and light blue. But many specialty stores will carry a full range colors and shades - pink, green, dark blue, black, and others. The color of the fabric is up to you. Take a look at your project, try to imagine it on different color backgrounds, and pick one. If you can't decide, most projects will look just fine on white or off white fabric.

But how much fabric should you buy? Buy enough to stitch your entire project!. How much is that? It depends on the project. Most of the instructions will have a chart that tells you how big the project will end up on various count fabrics. In that case, just look and see how big your project will be, add a few inches to both sides, and buy fabric that is at least that big. My cowboy boot pattern says the design area is only 1.64 inches wide and 1.79 inches high, so you don't need very much fabric.

But what if your instructions don't say how big the picture will be? Look at the pattern, count the number of squares down one size, divide that by the "count" of the fabric, and that is the height your pattern will be. For example, if you were making my cowboy boot pattern on 14 count fabric, the pattern is 25 squares down. $25 / 14 = 1.79$ inches high. Do the same for the width across. 23 squares across / 14 = 1.64 inches wide. You'll want to add at least 3 inches to those measurements and buy fabric that is at least 4.79 inches high and 4.64 inches wide. Most stores will sell prepackaged fabric that is much larger than you need.

Other Supplies You Might Need

You will definitely need a pair of scissors, but you probably have a pair at home. Just about any pair of scissors will cut off excess floss, although I find that a small pair of scissors is easier to work with than a big pair of scissors. I always worry about accidentally cutting through the fabric instead of just cutting excess floss.

Some people like to have an embroidery hoop to hold the fabric tight. If you want an embroidery hoop, I recommend a 4-7 inch hoop. Other people just hold the fabric in their bare hands. My cowboy boot project is small enough that it is probably easier to use your bare hands, rather than an embroidery hoop. If you use your bare hands, make sure they are clean when you start cross stitching! You may also have to use a bigger piece of fabric; 4.79 inches of fabric is hard to keep in a 4 inch embroidery hoop.

You will need a needle. You may have sewing needles at home, but you probably want to buy a “cross stitch” needle. Many regular sewing needles have a very small eye that is difficult to thread. Also most sewing needles have sharp points. A cross stitch needle has a relatively large eye and has a relatively dull point - which is good in case you accidentally stab your finger! Hmm, maybe you ought to buy a thimble if you don’t already have one.

You might also want some way to organize your floss. At some point the little piece of paper with the floss number will come off the skein of floss and you won’t know what number the floss is. There are plastic or cardboard “bobbins” that you can wind the floss onto. There are floss organizers in various shapes where you can hang a particular color from one hole. There are pieces of plastic that you can slip the floss skein onto without unwinding it - the Stitch Bow system. Or you can always write the floss number on sealable sandwich bag to organize your floss. Or an index card with hole punched in it works fine too.



Some people like to use Fray Check to keep the edges of the fabric from fraying. You might also pick up a small piece (4 inches by 4 inches) of iron on interfacing and a roll of magnetic tape to finish your project.

Basic shopping list for my cowboy boot pattern:

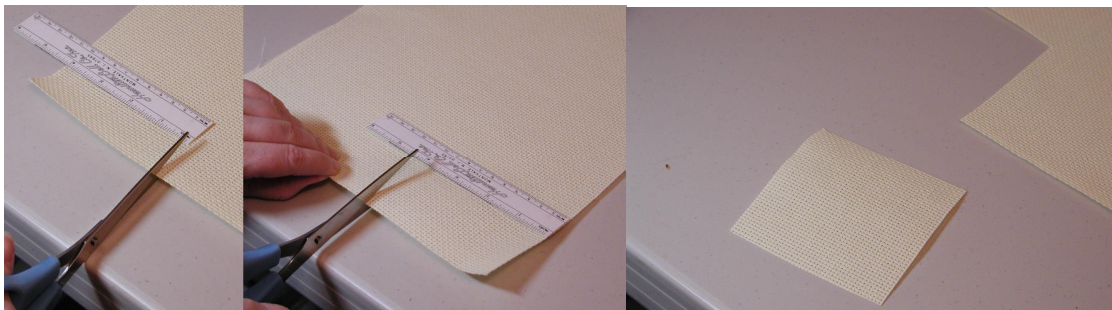
- 14 count cross stitch fabric (at least 4.79 inches by 4.64 inches)
- Floss #310
- Floss #975
- Floss #977
- Floss #3046
- Cross stitch needle
- Scissors
- Embroidery hoop
- Floss organization system
- Fray check
- Iron on interfacing
- Magnetic tape

You may have some of these supplies at home or you may choose not to use some items. That's fine, just cross those off the list!

Cutting the Fabric

If you bought a kit, it probably came with a piece of fabric that is just the right size; you can skip this section. If you are working from a pattern, you probably bought fabric that was way too big. You can just start working on one corner of the big piece of fabric and cut the fabric to size later. But most people find it easier to cut the fabric down to size first. Do not cut the fabric to the exact dimensions of your project! Cross stitch fabric frays easily and it gets smaller as you work with it. My first project was ruined; I left 3 "spare" rows at the bottom, but 5 strands had frayed away. Always add at least 1½-2 inches to each side, or 3-4 inches to the height and 3-4 inches to the width of your project.

My cowboy boots project itself measures 1.79 inches high and 1.64 inches wide. $1.79 \text{ inches} + 3 \text{ inches} = 4.79 \text{ inches}$ high. $1.64 \text{ inches} + 3 \text{ inches} = 4.64 \text{ inches}$ wide. So for my horse project you would cut a piece of 14 count fabric 4.79 inches high and 4.64 inches wide. If you end up with a weird number, like 4.79 inches, you can always round up to the next highest quarter inch, or even inch. It's much easier to cut a piece of fabric 5 inches by 5 inches for my boot picture. It's always better to have a little extra fabric around the edges than to come up short and have the entire project ruined!



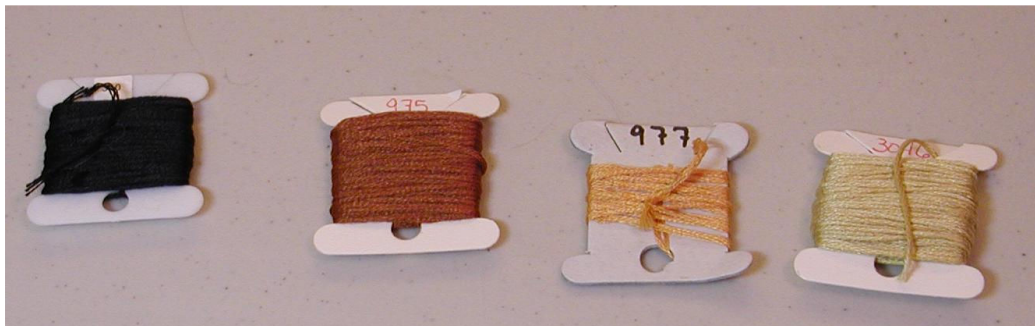
Preparing the Fabric

Many people bind the edges of the fabric to prevent it from fraying. Some people fold a piece of masking tape over the edges. If you do this, be sure to add at least an extra inch to each side (2 inches total) before cutting your fabric; you'll have to cut the masking taped fabric off later; so 7 inches by 7 inches for my cowboy boots. Some people use "fray check." This is clear fabric glue that prevents frayed edges. If you use fray check, you'll want to let the fabric dry before you start stitching. Some people turn the edge under and hand or machine stitch it in place. Other people cut their fabric with pinking shears, so it's less likely to fray. Still other people don't worry about it at all; they are just very careful with their project and don't pick at the loose threads.



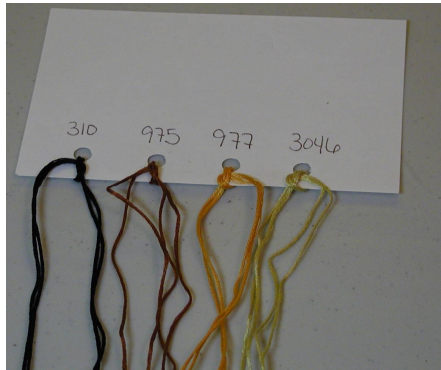
Preparing the Floss

I know you bought all your floss already, but most people like to organize their floss. The floss skein is really 8.7 yards of 6 strands of floss. You can just pull out the length you need from the skein, but almost nine yards of floss turns into knots very easily! Many people wind their thread around cardboard or plastic bobbins, which can then have the floss number written on the bobbin. The Stitch Bow system is designed so that you pull the little paper band with the floss numbers off and slide the floss over the plastic piece; no winding or unwinding! Small sealable bags, with the floss number written on the outside, work just fine too.



Some kits will organize the floss so that it's easy to tell which floss is what color. If your floss is threaded through premarked holes on a thick piece of paper, you don't have any work to do; skip down to the next paragraph! However, most kits just have a bunch of floss

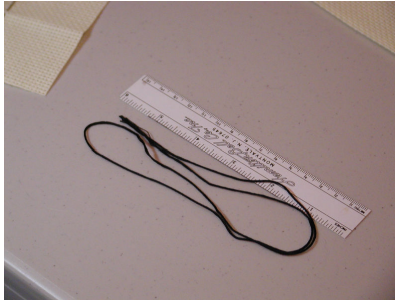
tied in a knot, and you have to figure out which strand of floss is what color. In that case, start with the easy colors - find the black or white floss and separate it out. If there is only one length of floss of a color family (if there is only one red color), that's relatively easy. If there are 3 brown colors, it's going to be harder to determine exactly which one is the "light brown," which is the "taupe," and which is the "light coffee." Sometimes you can get some hints; often the instructions will tell you how many lengths of floss there are for each color. If there are 3 light brown lengths, 2 taupe lengths, and 1 coffee length, it's easier to figure out than if there is one length of each color. Many kits include a cardboard "organizer" that you can write the floss color (or number) on and thread the floss through one of the holes as you figure out which is which. An index card and hole-punch will work too!



Most cross stitching projects call for 2 strands of floss, although there are exceptions - if you are working with an 11 count fabric, you might want to use 3 strands of floss instead. Also some of the complicated patterns may want you to combine 2 colors: blend one strand of this color with one strand of that color. Unless the instructions say differently, assume you are supposed to use 2 strands of the same color floss.

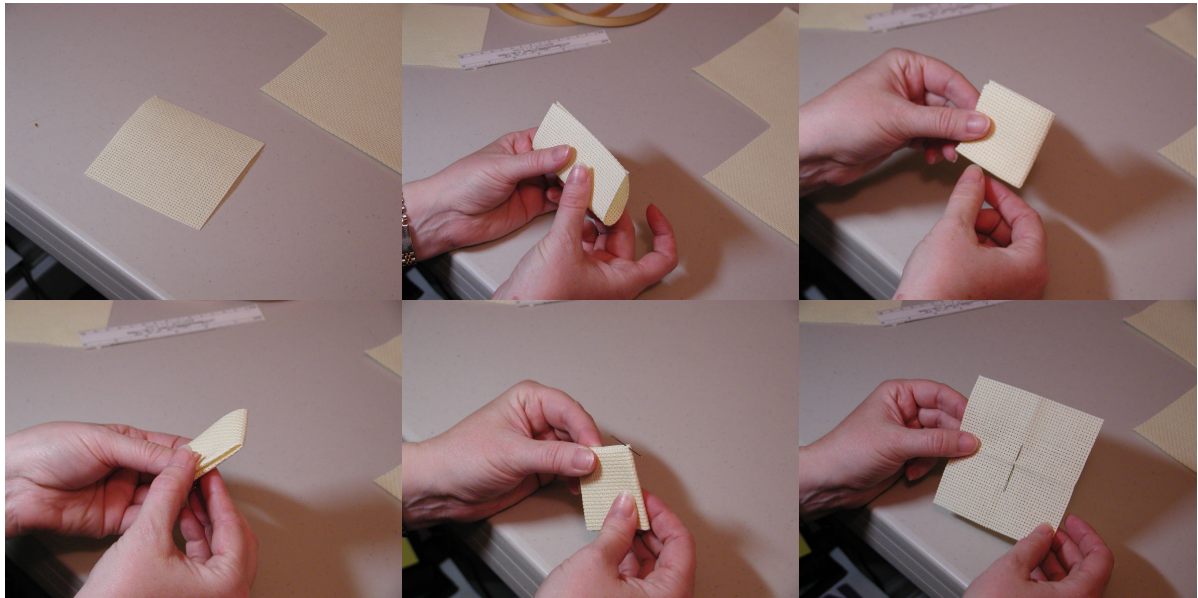
The next problem is getting 2 strands of floss. Your original skein of floss was 6 strands of floss twisted together. You can try to separate 2 strands from the entire 8.7 yards of floss, but that almost guarantees that you will end up with knots everywhere. A better way is to cut off the length of floss that you need, then later separate 2 strands from a smaller piece.

So how long of piece of floss should you cut? If you bought a kit, the floss is probably already cut into usable lengths. If you are working from a pattern and 8.7 yards of floss, you'll want to cut off a piece of floss before trying to separate out the 2 strands of floss. Different people prefer different lengths. Many instructions say to cut the floss into 18 inch lengths. Shorter lengths don't get tangled as often. However, if you have a short piece of thread, you will use it up sooner and have to change your thread more often. Try cutting an 18 inch piece of thread and working with it. If you don't have any trouble, try a 24 inch strand next time. One instruction booklet says to cut the floss into 28.5 inch lengths. Well, working the math, it does give you 11 pieces of floss that are all the same length.

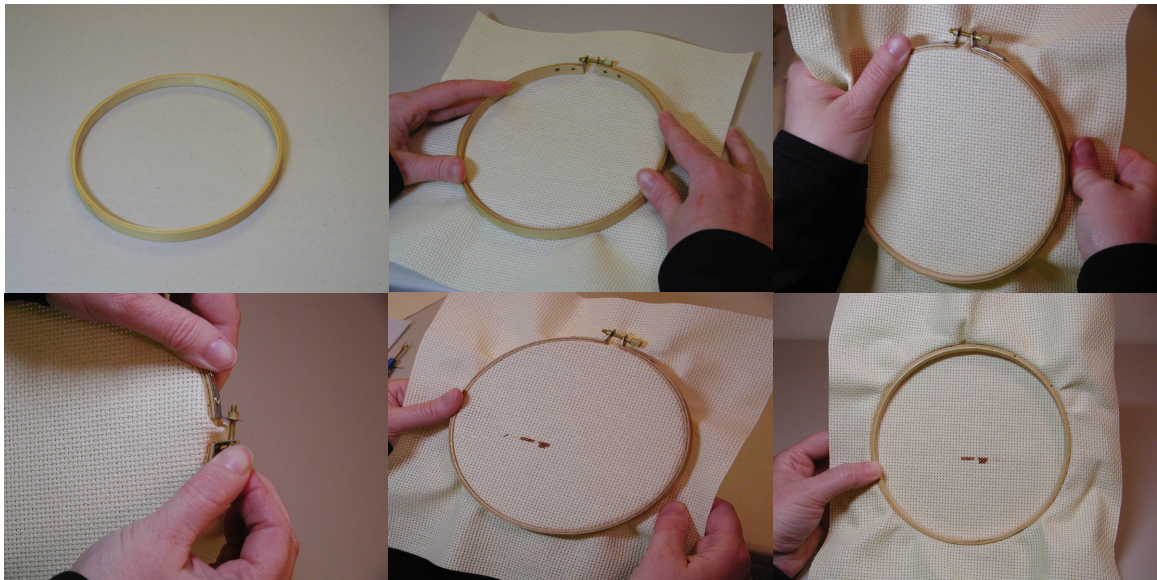


Getting Started

Most cross stitchers start in the very middle of the pattern and work their way outward. This means that you have to find the corresponding very middle of your piece of fabric. You can count the number of squares all the way across, divide by 2, and count across that many holes. Then you would do the same down the side. That would put you right in the exact middle of your fabric. The easier way is to fold your piece of fabric in half and fold it again so the fabric is now in quarters. Where the folds meet is approximately the center. I usually put a spare needle through the fabric right where all the folds meet. Or you could run a small piece of thread through 2 close holes to mark the center.



If you are using an embroidery hoop, you will want to put the fabric in the hoop. Some people like to work with the fabric on “top” of the hoop. Others like to work with the fabric “under” the hoop. Both ways work just fine. You will have to put one section of the hoop on the table, put the fabric down (trying to get the center of the fabric in about the middle of the hoop), and then put the second part of the hoop on top. Gently tighten your fabric in the hoop. Turn the thumb screw on the hoop. Keep pulling the fabric tight and turning the thumb screw. Be careful because the fabric wants to come out of the hoop! Some people give up on the hoop at this stage and just work with their bare hands; that’s fine too.

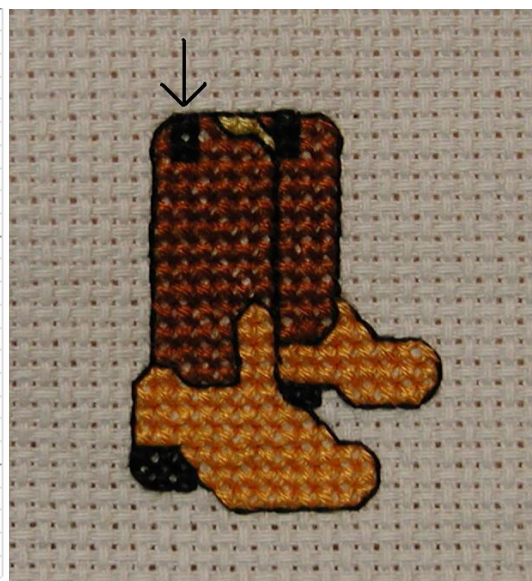
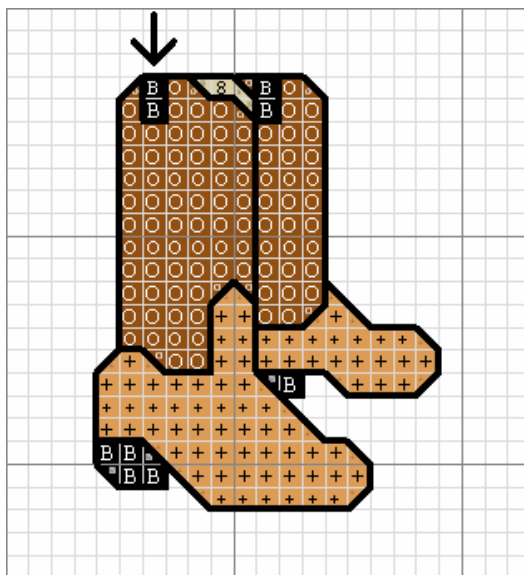


Fabric on top

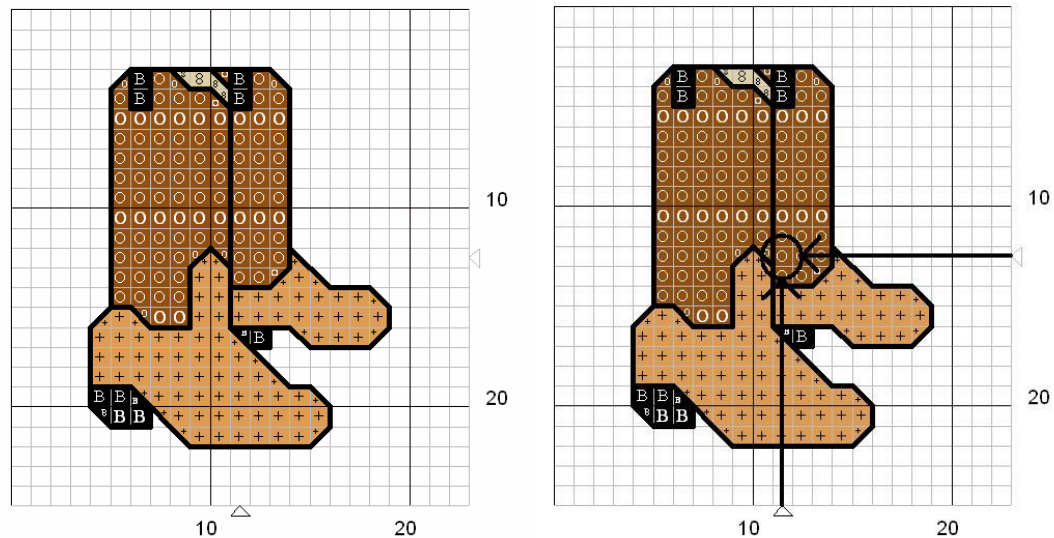
Fabric on bottom

Find the Center

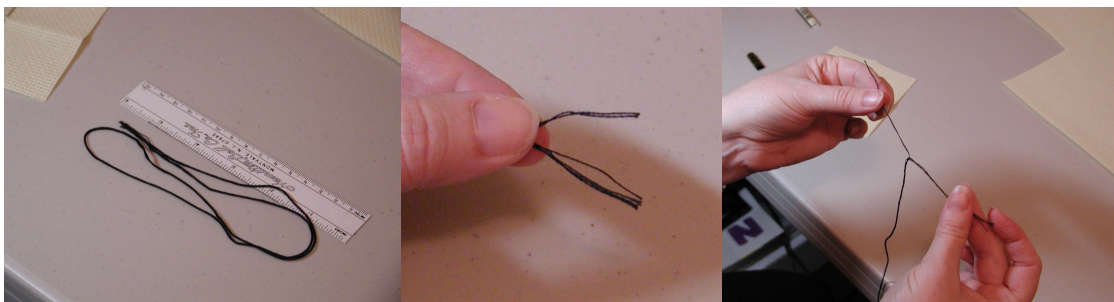
Now you are ready to start cross stitching. But how do you figure out what color to use and where? Look at my pattern. It is made up of symbols on graph paper. Each symbol needs to be a cross stitch (x) on the fabric. Look at the upper left hand side of the pattern - it has several B's. Now look at the picture of the finished project - the boot's pull on tab is made of x's using black thread. Everywhere you see a "B" on the pattern, you should make a cross stitched "x" using black thread. On the bottom "shoe" part of the boot, the pattern has many +'s; you would use a light golden brown thread to make cross stitches everywhere there is a + on the pattern. For the "leg" part of the boot you would use the dark golden brown floss to make stitches everywhere there is an O symbol. For the inside of the boot, you use yellow beige to make stitches everywhere there is an 8 symbol.



Ok, so where do I start? Most patterns or kits want you to start in the very middle of the pattern. The middle of the pattern is usually marked with arrows. On my pattern, there is an arrow (or really a triangle) on the right side about half way down. There is a matching arrow about half way across the bottom row. If you draw a line from each arrow, the lines will connect in the very center of the pattern. On my pattern, the lines intersect at an “O” symbol for dark golden brown. Sometimes the lines don’t intersect on an actual symbol. Pick one of the nearest symbols and start there. If you have a large, complicated pattern, you may have several different colors to choose from - pick one!



You will need to cut a piece of dark golden brown (DMC #975) about 18 inches long. (The length doesn’t have to be exactly, precisely 18.00 inches; a little more or a little less floss is fine.) The piece of floss has 6 strands twisted together. Carefully separate out 2 strands of floss. You can pull out one strand at a time or just grab the 2 strands at the same time. This may take some coordination to hold the 2 strands in one hand, the remaining 4 strands in your other hand, and still be able to deal with any knots and tangles that you get.

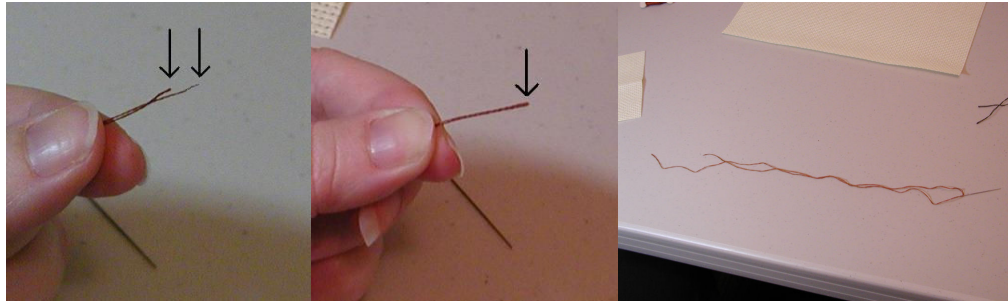


Start Stitching

Carefully thread both strands of floss into the eye of your cross stitch needle. This can be challenging! You may have to thread the needle one strand at a time. You might find a needle threading device helpful. Or you might try a “self threading” needle, but their points

are sharper than a cross stitch needle, so be careful! Young children may need a parent's help to thread the needle.

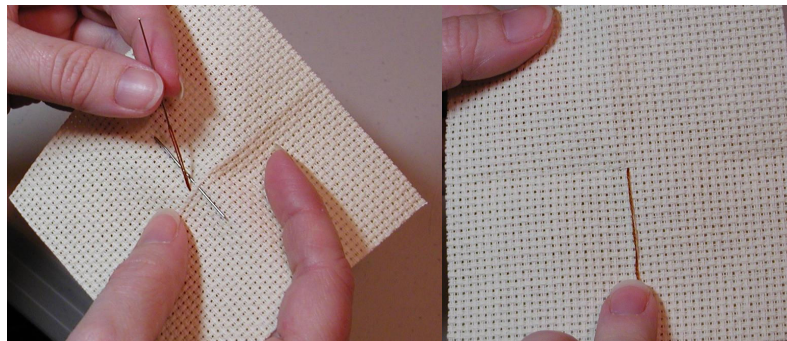
Line up the ends of the 2 strands so they are about even; you wouldn't want one strand to be 3 inches longer than the other strand! Pull the 2 strands so the needle is a little more than halfway down the floss. One side of the floss should be 2-3 inches longer than the other side.



threads not even

threads are even

Find the center of your pattern, check the symbol again, and check to make sure you have the correct color of floss loaded on the needle. Find the center of your fabric (marked with a spare needle or piece of thread). Starting from the back of your fabric, thread the needle through a hole in the center of your fabric. Hold onto the 2-3 inch "tail" of floss! If you don't hold onto the tail, it will go right through the fabric and you won't be cross stitching. Pull all but about 1 inch of the tail through the fabric. You will have to secure that 1 inch tail before you can start stitching.



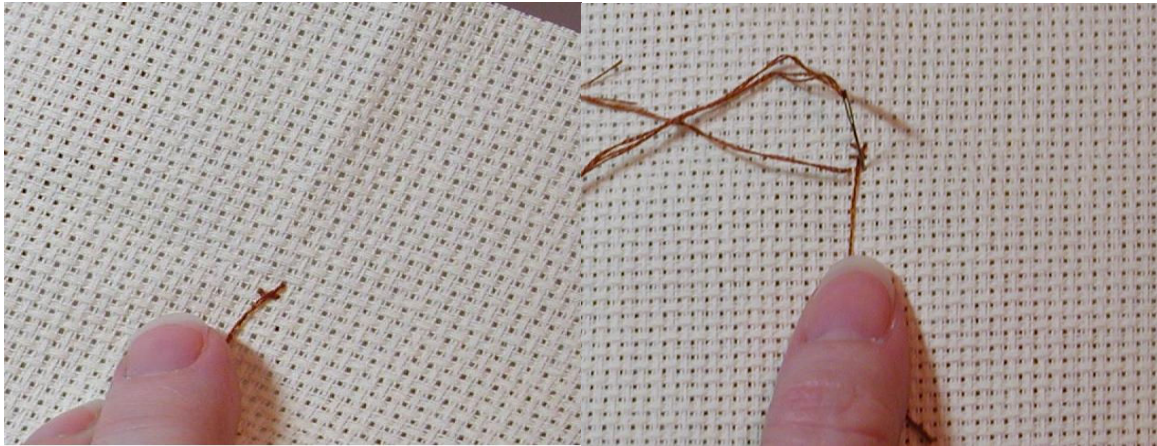
Thread the needle through.

Hold onto the "tail."

Secure the First Thread

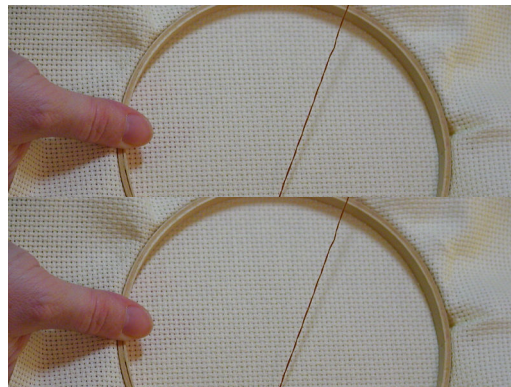
Most instructions say "Do not tie a knot in the thread!" It is difficult to tie a knot so big that it won't pull through the hole in the cross stitch fabric. Knots that big will certainly make your finished project look lumpy later. Some instructions recommend tying a "waste knot" about an inch from the center of the fabric. Before you make your first stitch in the middle of the fabric, run the needle up through a hole about an inch from the center of the fabric. Run the needle down through a nearby hole. Tie the thread in a square knot. The start cross stitching in the middle of the fabric; being careful not to pull too hard or you'll pull the waste knot out. Later after you have a few stitches going across the 1 inch tail, you can cut the knot and the tail will stay secure under other threads.

Most instructions recommend that you cross stitch over your one inch tail to secure it. This is easier said than done! Hold onto your one inch tail as you stitch and make sure that the floss on the back side of your project goes over the tail as you thread the needle through the correct hole. Sometimes it's just too much to keep track of.



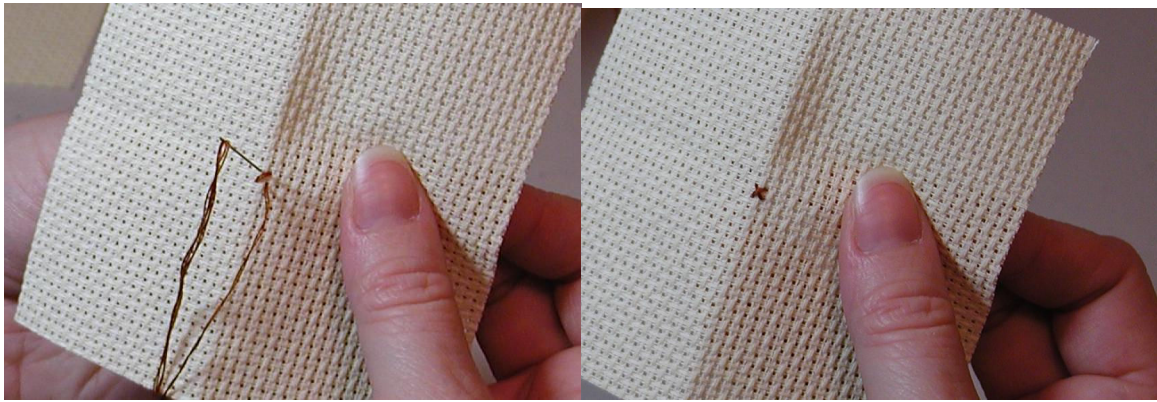
On the back of your pattern, make your stitches go over the “tail.”

An easier way to secure your 1 inch tail of thread is to make your first stitch. We already brought the needle up through the center of the fabric. Bring your needle down through a hole up and to the right of the first hole. This should make diagonal line like this - “/.” We came up through the bottom left hole and went down through the top right hole. You have a one inch tail that you still hanging onto and a 17 inch long working strand with a needle in it, both should be on the back side of your fabric. Tie the 1 inch tail and 17 inch long working strand in a square knot together. That should keep the tail secure, but not have too big of a knot later. Don't cut the 1 inch tail of the knot! Now that your thread is secure, try to make the next few stitches over that tail to hold it in place better.



Make a small square to knot to secure the thread.

On the front side, we now have a diagonal line (/) as our stitch. But we need a full X for the cross stitch. Your needle is on the back side of your fabric. Bring it up through bottom right hole - just to the right of your first upward hole and just under your second downward hole. Now thread the needle down through the upper left hole. You should have an X. Congratulations! You have started cross stitching!



Keeping Track of Your Place

Sometimes people will mark off each symbol as they make that stitch. Other people will wait and mark off the entire row as they finish the row. Still other people just mentally keep track of which stitches they have made. If you chose to write on your pattern, you might make a back up copy of your pattern first or at least write in pencil.

Cross Stitching

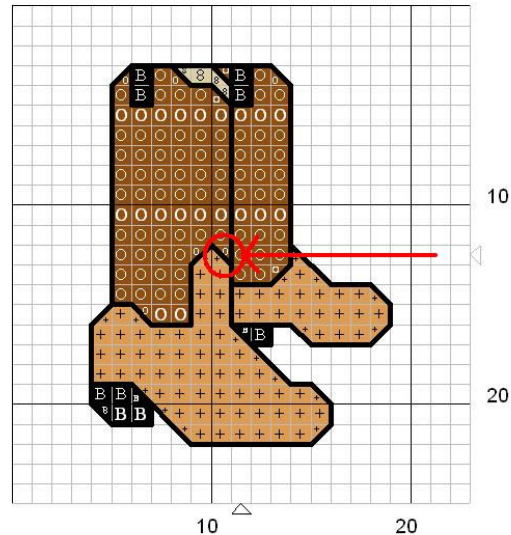
You will ultimately want to make X's for each symbol on the chart. Try to keep your first threads all going the same way - up from the bottom left hole, down through the top right hole, makes the “/”, up from the top left hole, down through the bottom right hole makes the “\”. On my cowboy boot project, you need 2 cross stitched Xs to the right of the first X.



Sometimes you may have to vary your stitching a little. Instead of coming up from the bottom left hole to make the first “/” part of the X, you might have to come up from the top right hole and go down through the bottom left hole. This still makes a “/” part of the X. Do the same thing with the second \ part. You might have to come up through bottom right hole and down through the top left hole. But you do want to make sure to do the / part of the stitch first and the \ part stitch second; this way all your X's come out in the same direction.

Making $\frac{1}{4}$ Stitches

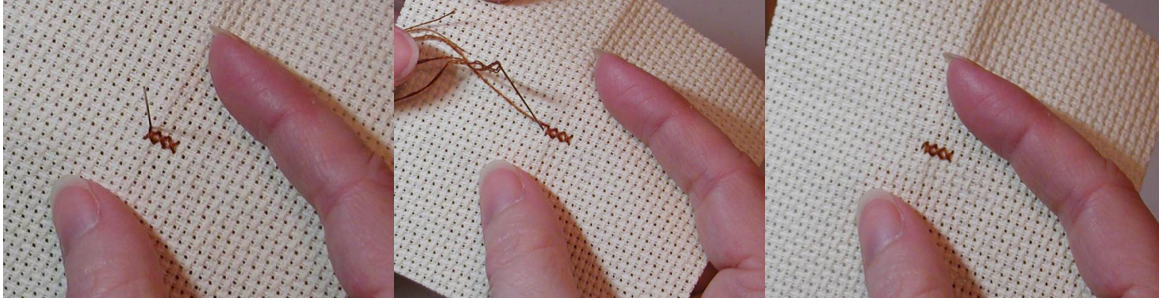
Notice that the stitch just to the left of the center O is a small “o” rather than a big O. The small o takes up about half of the entire square and there is a small “+” in the other half of the square. Although the symbols take up half of the square, the instructions will refer to these stitches as $\frac{1}{4}$ stitches or $\frac{3}{4}$ stitches. You will need to make a $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch for one symbol and a $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch for the other symbol.



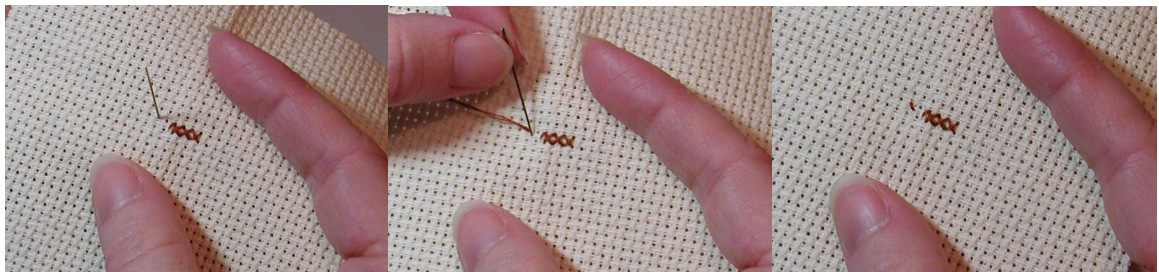
For a $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch, look at how the symbols come together in the square. Note which way the diagonal line will be going (“/” or “\”) and notice which side of the diagonal your stitch is. Is the small “o” on the top left of the diagonal line, the top right, the bottom left, or the bottom right? The small symbol could be in any of the four corners of the square. In this case, the small “o” symbol in question (just left of our first stitch in the very center) is in the top right side above a \ line. You need to make a $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch going from the top right corner to the center of the square.

Starting with your needle on the back side of your fabric, bring the needle up through the top right corner. If this causes you to “undo” the previous \ part of a stitch, it’s easy to fix! Thread your needle down the previous bottom right hole, bring it up through the top left corner and back down through the bottom right hole. This remakes the previous \ part of the stitch from top to bottom instead of from bottom to top. Be sure to bring the needle up through the top right corner, so we can continue our $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch.

The needle is on the front side of the fabric coming from a top right corner of the $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch’s square. Instead of aiming for the bottom left corner to make a full diagonal line, aim for the center of the crossed threads in the fabric. It can be difficult to make the needle go exactly where you want it. Many times it will slip off to one side or another. And when the needle does finally go through the fabric, you may get your finger poked by the needle! A sharp needle point does go through the fabric easier, but it hurts more when it pokes into your finger.

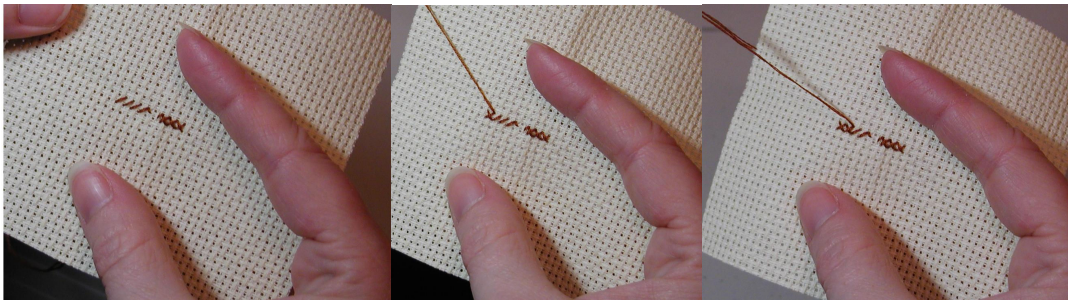


Make another $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch for the “o” in the next square just to the left of our first $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch. Notice that the second $\frac{1}{4}$ is going to have to go from the upper left corner to the middle.

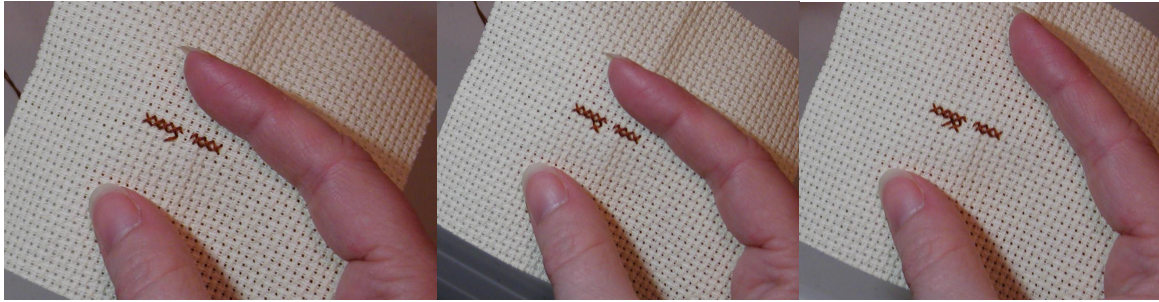


You get to make the rest of the “O” and “o” stitches on your own. Just make a full X on the fabric everywhere there is an O on the pattern. And make a $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch in the correct direction for each o on the pattern.

If you have a long row of stitches, some people like to do an entire row of up from the top right and down through the bottom left to make //. Then they come back with the entire row of up from the bottom right and down through the top left to make XX//. Either way works fine; just be sure to count and see how many stitches to make.



Or if you prefer, you can make each individual X on the row. Either way works fine.

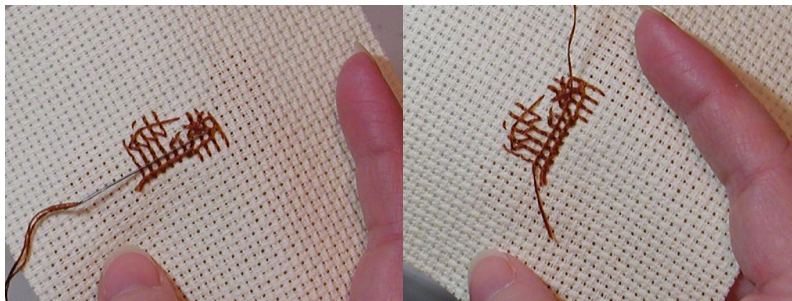


Ending Floss and Starting a New Piece of Floss.

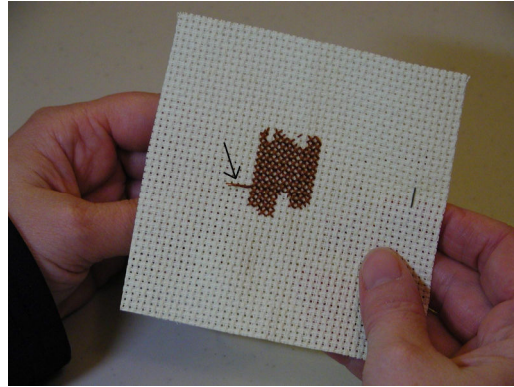
At some point, you will run out of floss on your needle. You can't just have floss dangling on the back of your picture; you will have to secure it somewhere. Again, most instruction books will tell you not to tie a knot. The best method is to turn your project over, run the needle under 5-10 stitches, pull the needle out, and cut off the excess floss.



To start back up again, thread 2 strands of the correct color floss through the eye of the needle, make sure the ends of the 2 strands are even, fold the floss in the half around the eye of the needle, and leave 2-3 inches extra floss on one end for a tail. On the back side of your project, run the needle under 5-10 stitches and gently pull the needle underneath the stitches. It is best to leave a short, half inch tail of floss to hang onto while you make the next stitch. If you don't hang onto your tail during your next stitch, the floss will come loose. Just run the needle back under the stitches and hang on tighter to that half inch tail!



When you have stitches about 5 more stitches and the tail will stay on its own, you can carefully take a pair of scissors and trim the tail off. Or you can leave it there. But be aware that you might catch the tail up in another stitch and have it suddenly appear on the front side of your project! If that happens, you just have to poke it back through to the back side.

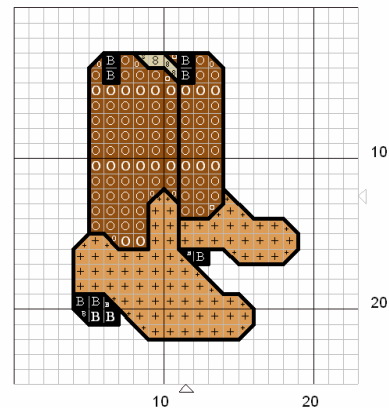


How to Fix Mistakes

Nobody likes to admit to making mistakes, but sooner or later you will make a mistake. Everybody does! Some mistakes are big and have to be fixed - if you accidentally stitched a black X in the middle of the brown stitches that would be very noticeable!

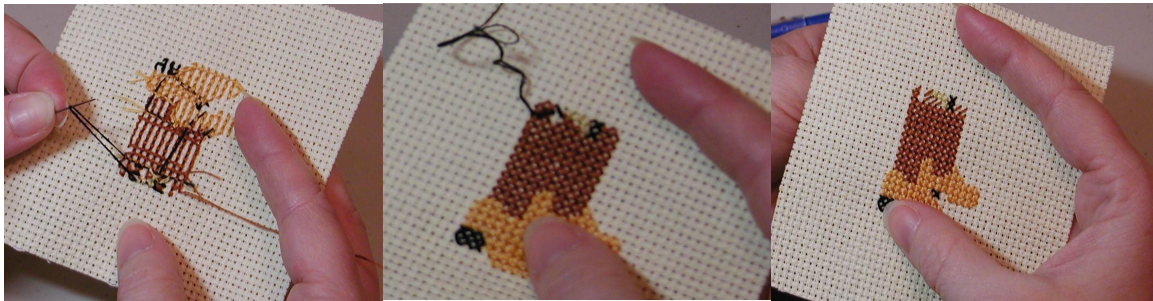


Some mistakes are small and nobody notices anything. Most of my projects do have a mistake in them somewhere. Just don't point it out and nobody will even know it's there. After a few weeks I can't even tell you where my mistake was! Can you spot the mistake in this picture?



Look closely at the top of the boot. The left black strap to pull on the boot is one square too far to the right. Yet it doesn't really make any difference. Nobody would know if you didn't point it out. But if you are really bothered by the mistake, you can always go back and fix it. If the mistake is only a few stitches back, it's just as easy to pull the needle off your floss and use the needle to pull out a few stitches.

If your mistake is quite a few stitches back, you can use a seam ripper to cut the offending floss. Then use a needle to pull out the surrounding stitches so that you have enough floss to run underneath 5-10 stitches (on the back side of your project) to secure the floss. Next secure the correct floss under 5-10 stitches, fix your mistake, fix the surrounding stitches, and secure the floss under 5-10 stitches.



Knotted Floss

Sooner or later you will get a knot in your floss. If you use a long length of floss, you are almost guaranteed to have at least one knot. If you are using shorter lengths of floss, knots don't happen as often. If you see a knot forming on the front side of your project, stop stitching and deal with the knot before it gets any tighter. You can generally see the knots on the front side soon enough to easily deal with them.

However, the back side of your project isn't as easy to see. You can look every couple of stitches to make sure you don't have any knots. Or you may be able to feel the knots with your fingers. I often run the floss through my fingers so I can feel the knots forming as I stitch. But nothing is foolproof.

If the knot is loose, it's easy to see which strand you should gently pull on to untie the knot. If you can't tell which strand to pull on, don't just start yanking on floss and hoping for the best! Many times the best way to deal with a knot is to put your needle through the loop made from the knot, hold onto your floss between the knot and the fabric, and gently pull the needle away from the fabric. Nine times out of ten the loop starts shrinking, you can remove your needle, and continue pulling until the knot pops free.

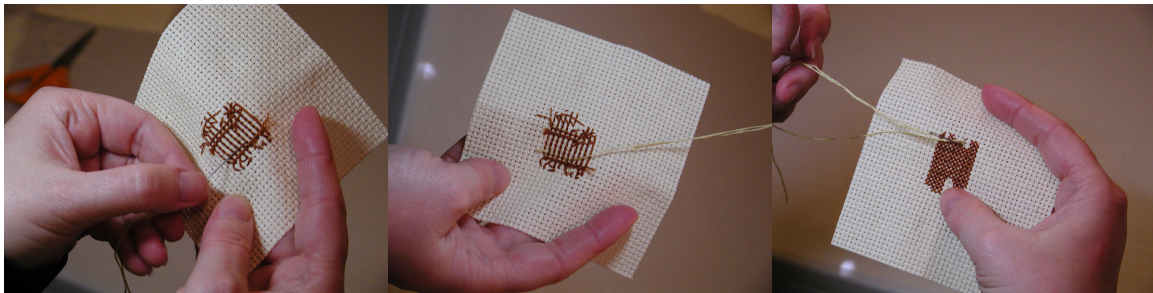


If that suggestion only made your knot tighter, with the needle in the loop pull on the free end of the floss. Sometimes that will free the floss. Most of the time, this just makes the knot tighter. If that's the case, you'll have to decide if you can live with a knot on the back of your fabric or if you need to cut the knot off and secure the end. If the knot is very close to my fabric, I usually decide to live with it. If the knot is a few inches from my fabric, I may cut the knot off, secure my floss, and start with a fresh piece of floss.

Sometimes you find a knot a few stitches later. If you can get the knot loose, now you have a little bit of extra floss on the back of your project. If the knot was just a few stitches back, you can work the extra floss through the stitches you've already made. But if the knot is more than 5-10 stitches back, I usually just leave it alone and figure nobody will ever see the back of my project.

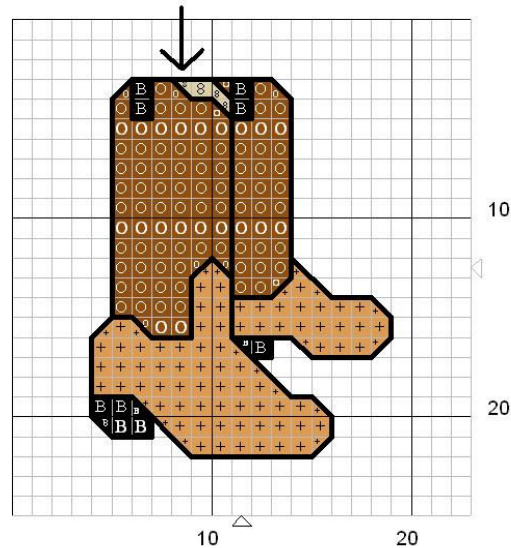
I'm Finished with the First Color

When you have made all the cross stitches for the O symbol and made all the $\frac{1}{4}$ stitches for the o symbol, you are ready to change colors. It works just like ending and starting any floss, except that you obviously have to change the color of the floss. Secure the end of the old floss under 5-10 stitches on the back, cut off any excess floss, thread the next new color on the needle, run the new floss under 5-10 stitches, hold onto the tail, and keep stitching. For my project, you might make the "8" stitches in 3046 medium yellow beige next.



Making $\frac{3}{4}$ Stitches

Notice there are three small "8" symbols. For the small "o" symbol, we made $\frac{1}{4}$ stitches. If we just made $\frac{1}{4}$ stitches for the "8" symbol, the stitched square wouldn't look like a full X cross; there would only be a /. For the small "8" symbol, we're going to make $\frac{3}{4}$ stitches. A $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch has one full diagonal stitch and one half diagonal that ends in the center of the fabric.



Look at the top of the boot, and small “8” on the left side. You always want to make the / side of the stitch first. In this case, this is the half diagonal that ends in the middle of the fabric. Bring the needle up in the upper right hand corner and down in the center of the fabric; if you can, go down with the “8” floss right where the “o” floss went down. Then bring the needle up through the lower right hole and down through the upper left hole. Your stitch should cover about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the fabric square. The “o” stitch already covered the other $\frac{1}{4}$ of the fabric square.

You will need to make a full X cross stitch, 2 more $\frac{3}{4}$ stitches, and secure your floss under 5-10 stitches.



Deciding Whether It Should Be $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ Stitches

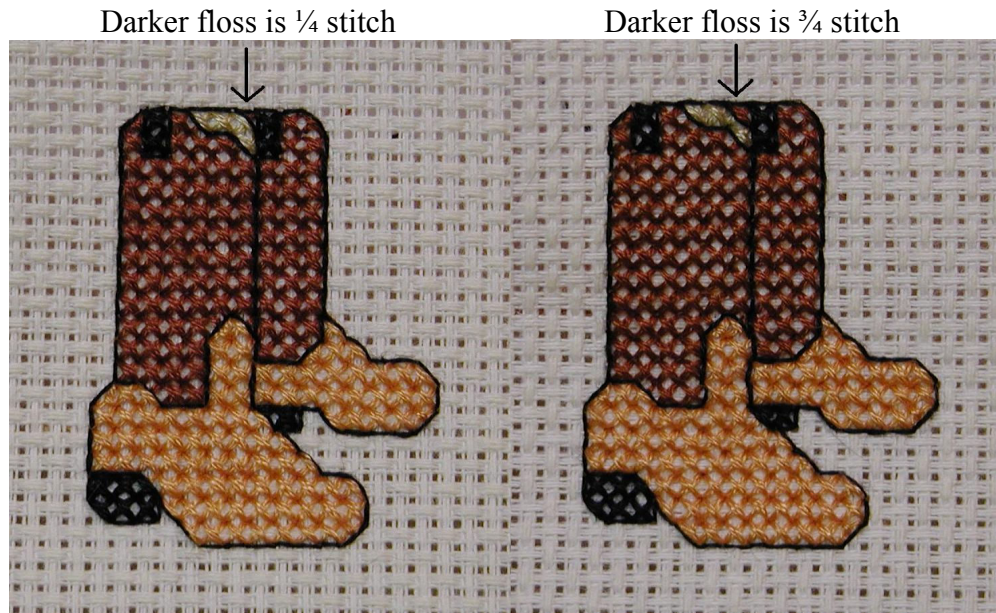
If your pattern has a small symbol in one half of the square and nothing on the other half, then the small symbol should be a $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch. But what if the pattern shows 2 symbols taking up about half of a square? How do you decide which color should be the $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch and which color should be the $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch? There are several ways.

One way is to look at the pattern and try to figure out which color should be in front of the other. The color in front would get the $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch. The color in the background should get the $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch. This can get difficult! If you were trying doing which color should go in front on my pattern, the top left most “o” is by itself; that makes it definitely a $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch. The next “o” would be the outside of the boot (in front of the inside of the boot), so it would also

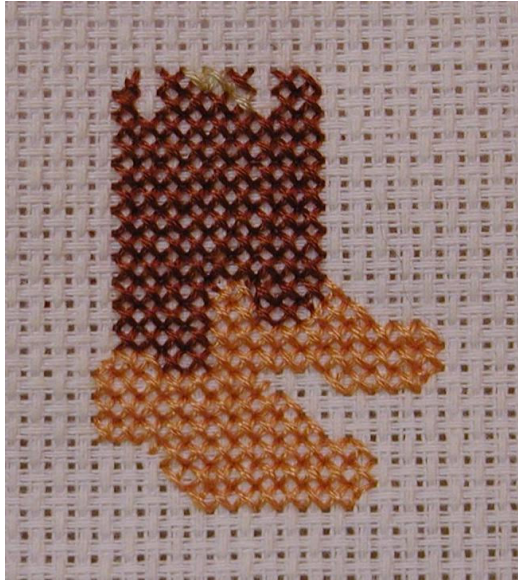
be a $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch. The first “8” is the inside of the boot, under the “o”, so it would be a $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch. But the next “8” is in front of the second boot, so it would be a $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch and the next “o” would be a $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch. The remaining “o” is the only symbol in the square so it is a $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch. This method probably gives the most realistic color shadings.

A second way to decide $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch is to always make the $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch out of the lighter colored floss. Generally darker colors will dominate, especially if they are the bigger $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch. That’s why my directions have you do the “o” in $\frac{1}{4}$ stitches; because it is the darker color. This method works fairly well and allows to you to still see light colors in small places.

The third way to just make the first color be the $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch and the second color will be the $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch. Warning - if you make the first color the $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch, you might not notice that you haven’t made the $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch and miss a stitch. If your first color is always the $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch, it’s more obvious that you haven’t made the $\frac{3}{4}$ stitch, so you are less likely to make mistakes. This method gives inconsistent color results, but it’s the easiest to do.



Now you need to make all the “+” and “+” $\frac{3}{4}$ stitches on the boots as well using floss #977. It should looks something like this:



Going Across a Large Section of the Pattern

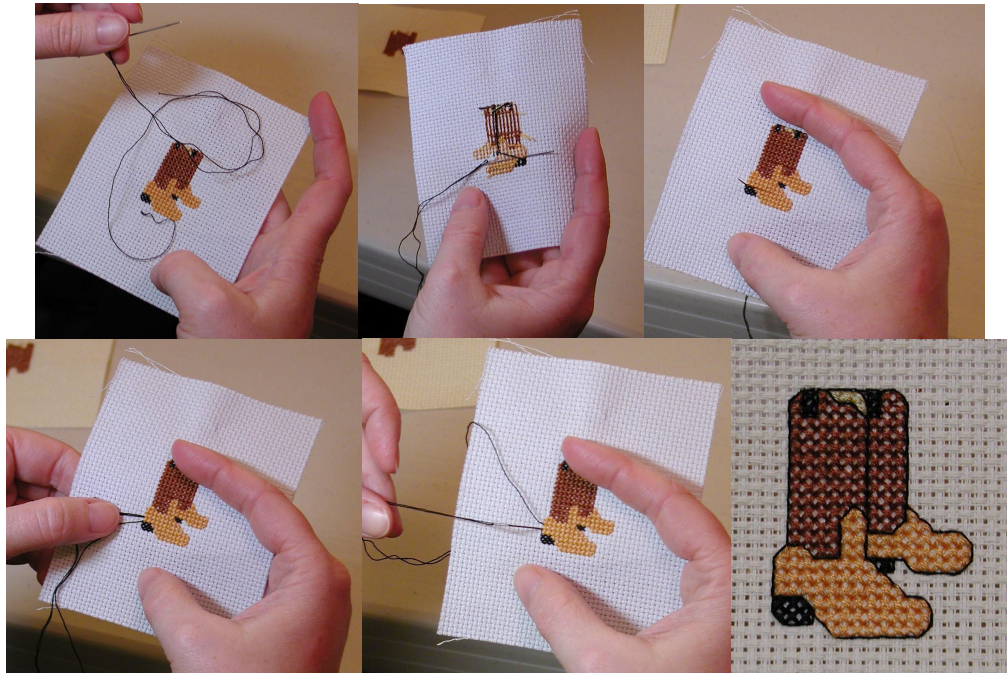
Most instructions will tell you not to run your thread across a large section of the pattern. If you have to run your thread more than a few inches without taking a stitch, you would do better to go ahead and secure your floss under 5-10 stitches, cut the floss, and move to the new section. For example, “B” is the symbol for black floss; it appears at the top of the pattern and at the bottom of the pattern. You should probably make the stitches at the top, secure your thread, cut, secure your thread again, and then make the stitches at the bottom of the pattern. But on this small of a pattern, I wouldn’t worry about it. For bigger projects, if you have to move more than 1-2 inches, it’s better to secure and restart than to drag your thread across your fabric.



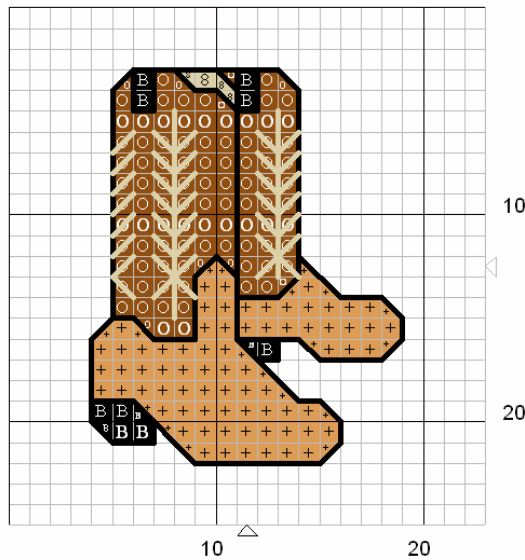
Backstitching

That should be all of the X stitches on the chart. But there are some dark lines on the pattern too; those are backstitches or outline stitches. Unless the instructions say differently, backstitching is done using 1 strand of the appropriate color floss. You still have to secure your floss, but because 1 strand is smaller than 2 strands, it is better to run it under 10-15 stitches on the back of the project.

For the backstitching, you still come up through one hole and go down through another hole, but the holes aren't always diagonal. On my pattern you go up through one hole and go down through the next hole in line. But for other patterns you may go up through one hole and down through a hole that isn't just 1 square over, but 2-3 squares up or over; look at where the lines go and follow that.



Sometimes projects have you backstitch in different colors. You can do the fancy stitching on the leg portion of the boot in floss #3046.



Finishing Your Project

Once you get the cross stitching and backstitching done, you'll want to finish your project somehow. The easiest way to finish any project is to take it to your local frame shop. They will mount it on a special backing, cut an acid fast mat, and fit it in a custom frame. Unfortunately, this is also the most expensive method; probably much more expensive than you want to spend on a simple 2 inch project. Some small kits may include finishing materials. In that case use those materials and follow their instructions.

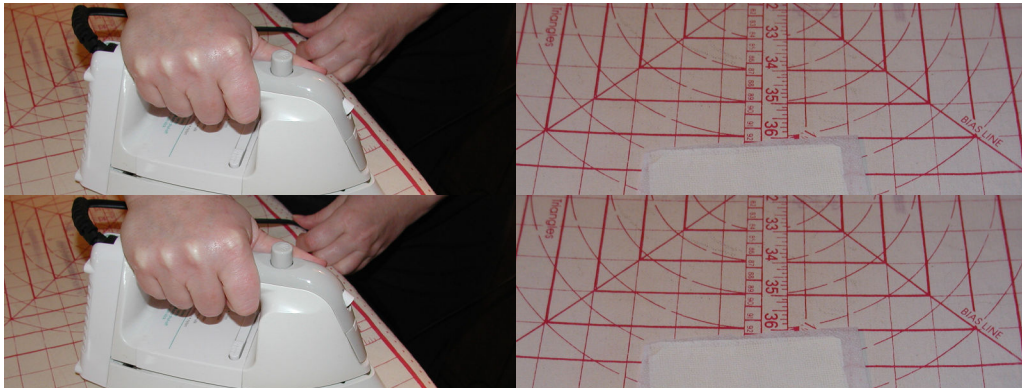
What I often do with a small project is make it into a magnet. You will want to wash your project in warm water with a small amount of soap. Swish it around for a few seconds. If there is a visibly dirty spot, you may have to scrub a little. But be careful the fabric will fray pretty easily. Rinse 2 or 3 times in cool water. Don't wring your project! But you can give it a good squeeze to get the excess water out. You can also roll it in a clean towel for a few minutes.



The easiest way to dry your project is to iron it dry. If you used fray check before stitching, you should carefully cut it off now; otherwise it may stick to your hot iron. Most instructions say to put your project cross stitching face down on the ironing board and cover with another clean, dry towel. But I usually just iron directly on the fabric. Be careful not to

iron too long in one spot - you don't want to scorch your cross stitching after all that hard work!

I usually iron a piece of fusible interfacing on the back of my project; it hides all the stitches. Be sure to buy the fusible type and follow the manufacturer's directions. Usually you put the shiny or bumpy side of the interfacing down on the back of the cross stitch project. Set the iron on the cotton setting, but no steam, and press for 5-10 seconds. Don't slide the iron around, just put pressure on it for 5-10 seconds. If your interfacing is bigger than your cross stitching, like mine is, you may have just fused it to your ironing board too!



At this point I cut the project to its final size. Don't cut too close to the cross stitching; leave at least 5 strands of cross stitch fabric. I usually put a small bit of fabric glue or Fray check around the edges, but standard Elmer's glue will work too.

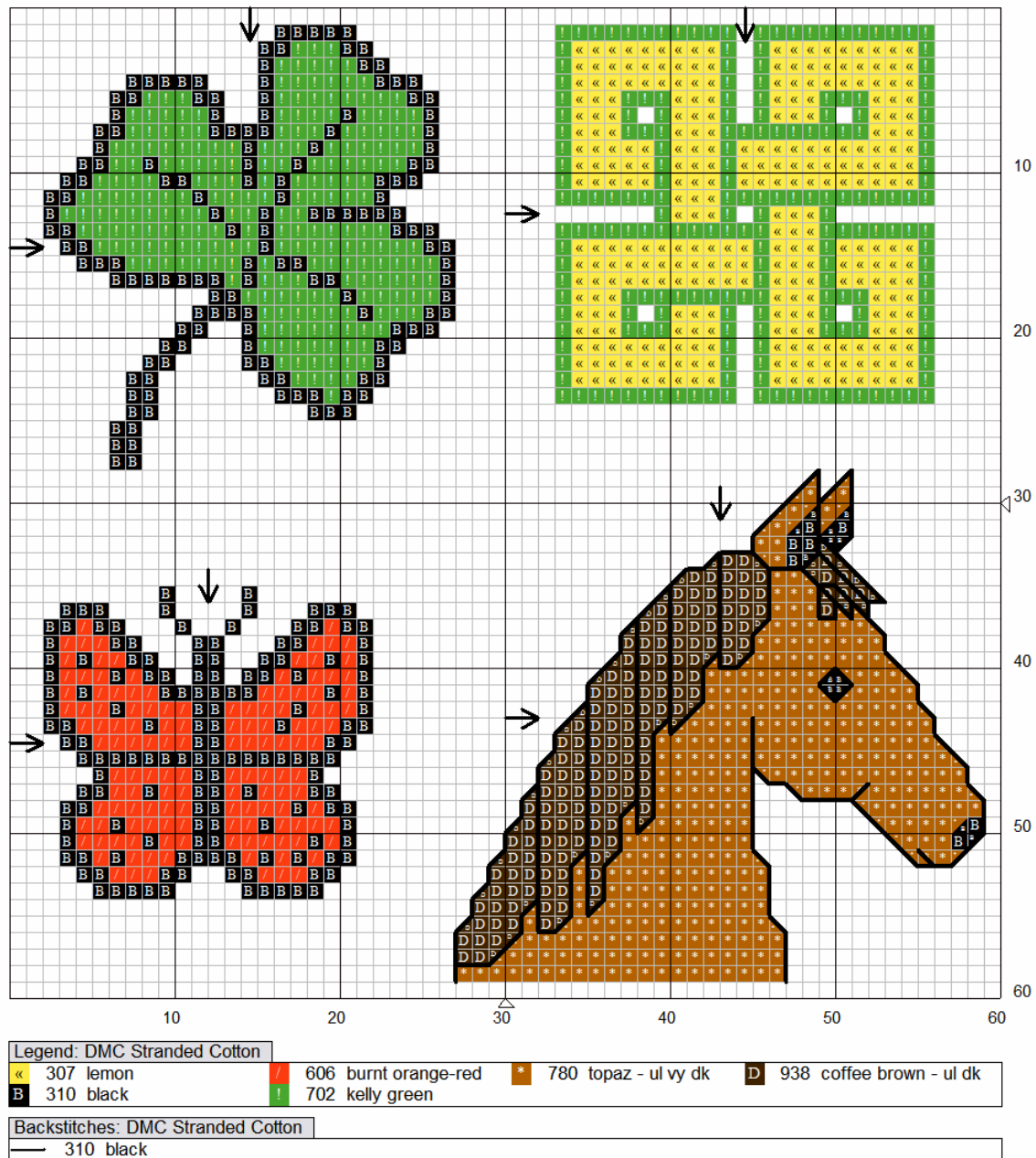


Then I cut a small magnet strip to the right size. Most of the magnetic strips have a mild adhesive on one side of the magnet, but I attach my magnets with some glue so it sticks better.



For a medium or large size project, I still wash and iron the project but I usually frame the project. Many craft stores sell “self sticking mounting board” in various sizes. I cut the mounting board to the correct size, center my project, and stick it on the board. You can often find a photo frame about the right size. If you can’t find a standard photo frame about the right size, some craft stores sell “sectional frames” that you can assemble using a screwdriver. Many hobby stores or frame shops will custom cut the mat board for a reasonable price. Although, if you REALLY get into cross stitching, the best thing I ever bought was my own mat cutter...

Here are 4 more easy projects:



The center of each individual project is marked. I wouldn't really put them all together on one big project either!

For other projects, try your local hobby store or online. I suggest my web site: www.cowtown-cross-stitch.com; use voucher code 112560001 for 10% your entire order.

Basic Cross Stitch Instructions

1. Pick your project.
2. Buy supplies.
3. Cut your fabric 4 inches wider and longer than your pattern will be.
4. Find the middle of your fabric by folding it in half twice and marking the center.
5. Find the middle of your pattern by looking for small arrows on the sides.
6. Find the symbol in the middle of the pattern.
7. Thread 2 strands of the appropriate colored floss on a needle.
8. Start stitching by making a diagonal line across the center of the fabric.
9. Secure the thread by tying a square knot on the back side of the fabric.
10. Make the other diagonal stitch across the center of the fabric.
11. Make the rest of the stitches for each color.
12. Make any $\frac{1}{4}$ stitches by starting in the correct corner and ending in the middle of the fabric.
13. Make any $\frac{3}{4}$ stitches by making a diagonal stitch and the appropriate $\frac{1}{4}$ stitch ending in the middle.
14. End threads by running the excess thread under 5-10 stitches on the back of the fabric.
15. Change colors by ending the last color under 5-10 stitches and beginning the new color by running thread under 5-10 stitches.
16. Backstitch using 1 strand of thread to outline the design.
17. Wash and iron the finished project.
18. Attach iron-on interfacing to the back side.
19. Glue on a small piece of magnetic strip.
20. Admire your finished project!