

YQG 2019 Mystery Quilt – Clue 3

You should now have 120 or 180 2.5" colored squares and the same number of 2.5" background squares, depending on whether you are doing the smaller (120) or the larger (180) size. If you are confident that you can produce beautiful four-patches, then do whatever you do to make the 2½" colored squares and the 2½" background squares into 4½" four-patch squares with the colored patches on diagonally opposite corners and the background squares on the other diagonally opposite corners. Meet us at Clue 4.



Making a four-patch seems like one of the simplest chores we do as quilters, but if you aren't very precise with your ¼" seams, they may come out a bit wonky. In addition, you want the center point to be well defined and the seams to swirl around that center point. If you aren't so confident about your four-patches, here are some hints.

First of all, make sure you're sewing your seams as close to ¼" as you can. Many ¼" feet are not exactly ¼". Moreover, it also depends on how you align the edge of your fabric along the edge of the foot. A good way to see how to set your machine to do this with your personal way of aligning the edges is to take a piece of quarter-inch graph paper and sew without thread with the edge of your ¼" foot along one line. If the needle punches are perfectly on the neighboring line, you have the needle position set just right. If, however, those needle holes are slightly off, most ¼" feet will allow you to move the needle one setting to the right or left without destroying the foot.

If you don't have a ¼" foot but your needle can be moved right or left, use the graph paper to see where to set your needle when you sew with whatever foot you prefer along one of the lines on the graph paper. Make a note of where to set the needle once you've determined the setting. If your needle cannot be moved to the side, you can still get a good ¼" seam by putting some tape of some sort on a line going up to your presser foot that will allow you to align the fabric to get a good ¼" seam.

The first chore is to sew each colored square to a light square with a perfect ¼" seam. (This is where the "leader-ender" concept--see below--relieves the tedium.) *Do not fasten off at the ends of the seam;* instead use a small enough stitch that your seam is secure until crossed by another seam.

Then in sewing two of these strips together, you will need to align the two center seams to meet precisely so that you can swirl the seam allowances around the center point. To facilitate that, press all the seams toward the colored square. Take two of these strips (with colored squares of different fabrics) and turn one of them around so that the colored squares are on opposite ends. When you hold the two strips together with right sides together, you will find that the seams can be matched well by pushing the two strips together until the folds of the seam allowances nest into each other. (Because you've consistently pressed the seam allowance to the colored square, they now lie in opposite directions.)

Check by pushing a pin straight through right into the seam on top. It should also go right through the seam on the bottom. Pin on both sides of the seams. As you sew the two strips together, keep the first pin in until the last moment, remove it and sew across the seam to the other pin. You should then be

able to remove the second pin. This will help to keep the seams from shifting away from each other or into each other.

The two seams should now match up. Turn the patch over and look at the seam allowances. The two that you've already pressed define a direction of swirl around the center point. Open the end portions of the seams inside the seam allowances and swirl the seams around the center point. Everything should now be lying quite flat.

Do this with all of the 2.5" blocks until you have either 60 (small size) or 90 (larger size) four-patch blocks.

A note about "leader-ender" projects: This part of the work would make a good "leader-ender" project. A "leader-ender" project is one that gets done in the course of sewing another project if you are one of those quilters that uses a piece of fabric (a "leader") to lead your seam under the presser foot.

If you have something as simple as the four-patches we're working on here, you can use the piecing of those as leaders for another project. If you choose your fabrics so that which of the two projects you're sewing is clear, you can alternate the piecing of one with the piecing of the other so that each seam being sewn serves as the leader for the next piece.

So for example, let's say I am sewing these 2.5" squares together and I want to work on another project at the same time. I would arrange a place beside my chair or at the side of my sewing table where I can put a pile of colored squares and a pile of colored squares. I would pair two of these up. I would use a piece of fabric to lead my first pair of squares (one colored, one background) under the presser foot and leave the needle down partway through the seam while I prepare the seam from The Other Project to be led under the needle by the squares that are waiting to do this.

Once the seam from The Other Project is close to being finished, I would stop the machine (with needle down) and prepare another pair of squares to be led under the needle by The Other Project. Once The Other Project has exited the needle area, the next pair of squares will be under the needle. I cut off the first pair of squares, which is now completely free of the machine, and lay them aside near the piles of unsewn squares. I prepare another seam from The Other Project and let the squares under the needle lead that seam under the needle. I then cut off the first piece of The Other Project, as it is now completely free, and lay it somewhere else. I keep doing this until I've sewn all the pairs of squares and a whole lot of The Other Project. At each switch, what acted as the ender for the previous seam is also acting as the leader for the next one. If you're careful about alternating, you don't get the two projects as confused as you might think because normally there is enough difference to distinguish.

There are those who claim that this gets the squares sewn together without any extra time being spent. That is not totally true, but it does relieve the tedium of sewing 120 to 180 pairs of squares, even if it does prolong The Other Project somewhat. It is especially valuable for those who do use leader fabric. (Not all of us do.) You could continue with the piecing of the four-patches themselves, although that takes a bit more attention.