

What size are the T-shirt blocks?

Many T-shirt quilt companies use one size of block for the entire quilt. This, unfortunately, can result in the design on a T-shirt being cut off or a small design floating toward the top of a block. The most custom T-shirt quilts will have block sizes that are determined by the design on the T-shirt - not a preset block size. This guarantees a design will not be cut off nor float in space on a block. A variety of block sizes also allows for more of the quilt space to consist of unique memories rather than blank material.

A Goofy T-shirt



Goofy cut to a standard 15" block



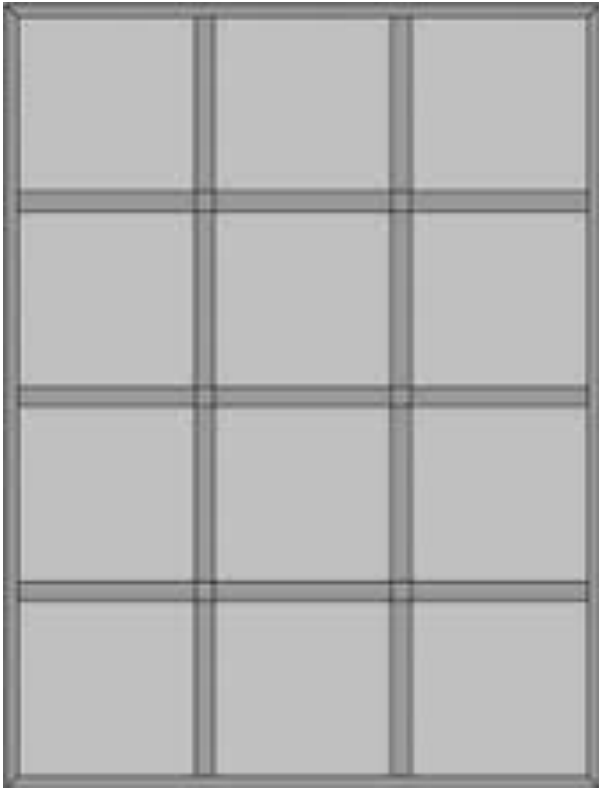
A small design on a 15" block



Same design on a correct sized block



How are the T-shirt blocks laid out?

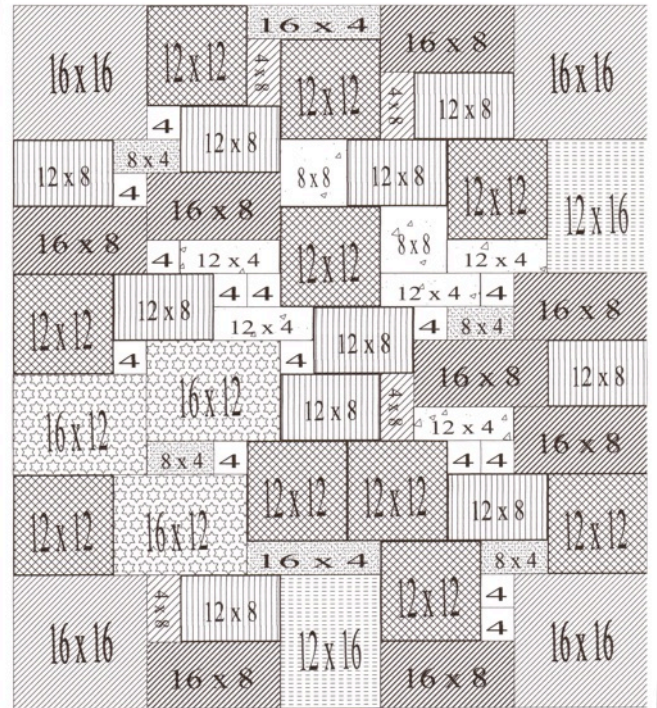


Most T-shirt quilts are laid out in a grid. This is a simple method of arranging the blocks and does not make your quilt unique.

Some T-shirt quilt companies allow you to layout your own T-shirt quilt. Being able to determine the placement of your block does make your quilt a little more personalized, but this does not drastically increase the custom quality of the T-shirt quilt. But it does save the T-shirt company work.

Even when using variable block sizes, most companies still lay T-shirt quilts out in columns - it is easier to lay out and easier to sew.

The most custom and quality T-shirt quilts will be laid out using a puzzle method that is designed according to the blocks cut from the designs on your T-shirts. The puzzle layout method offers an extremely one-of-a-kind T-shirt quilt because a new layout is made for each customer according to their T-shirts rather than one set layout for all customers.



Does the company use sashing in their T-shirt quilts?



Sashing is the cotton fabric that is typically sewn between the T-shirt blocks to divide them into columns and rows. This method of using sashing is a very traditional style of quilting that was adopted by some of the first T-shirt quilt makers. The use of sashing is really more of a preference rather than a quality attribute. Some companies claim that sashing is necessary to create a long-lasting T-shirt quilt, however, several companies have proven that T-shirt quilts made without sashing can still last a lifetime.

The sashing material is generally 100% cotton - a material does not stretch. T-shirts stretch. In order to sew a stretchy material to a non-stretchy material, you need to make the stretchy material not stretch. To do this,

quilters iron on interfacing to the T-shirt material. After the interfacing is applied, the T-shirt material is no longer stretchy. And it is no longer soft. It is stiff.

Over the last 20 years, applying interfacing to the T-shirts has been the industry norm. There are all sorts of reason given for using interfacing; from keeping the shirts from drooping to making sure the T-shirt material will hold up over the years. But, the only true reason for using interfacing is to be able to sew T-shirt material to cotton sashing. If a quilter says that they have to use interfacing, they have not tried it any other way, are unskilled sewers or use it so they don't have to spend extra time quilting a quilt.

T-shirt quilt without sashing will be softer and more comfortable than a T-shirt quilt made with sashing. Other quilters use interfacing on T-shirt quilts that are not sashed. After seeing Too Cool T-shirt Quilt work, sewer realized that they did not have to use sashing and could just sew T-shirt together. But coming from the sashing tradition, they continued to employ interfacing in their work. They would rather use interfacing to make T-shirt material easy to sew and work with rather than soft for you to use.

How many backing and binding color choices are offered?

What type of material is used for the backing?

The backing is the fabric used on the opposite side of the T-shirts. Most companies offer customers a choice from only about a dozen standard colors. This limitation does not offer an opportunity for your T-shirt quilt to be unique. The more backing color options a company offers, the more opportunity you have to customize your T-shirt quilt.



There are different types of material that can be used on the back of a quilt. An inexpensive poor quality material will not wear well over the years. Check with the quilter to see what type of backing material is used. Ask for a sample of the material if you are concerned with the feel of the fabric.

- 100% polyester material - will feel thin and pill over washes. (Pilling is when little balls of fiber are on top of a fabric)
- 50% cotton/50% polyester - will also feel thin and pill with successive washes.
- 100% cotton - The best choice - feels thick, does not pill and will stand up to washing. The higher the thread count of the fabric, the better it will wear.
- Flannel - This is an okay choice - but it does not wear as well as cotton.
- Fleece - This can be used for a backing material if the quilt is machine tacked or hand tied. This material cannot be machine quilted.
- Bed Sheets - when used for the backs of quilts, they will always look like bed sheets. Not a good choice.

The binding is the cotton fabric that covers the raw edges of the quilt. Similar to backing, most companies limit binding color options. Most companies also only provide solid binding colors. If you would prefer a pattern that can express your individuality, be sure to ask the T-shirt companies you are researching if they offer print or batik options. Unfortunately, you will find that only a very few T-shirt quilt companies will actually provide pattern fabric for binding.

How is the T-shirt quilt quilted?

There are several different quilting methods available for T-shirt quilts. Some techniques, such as tying and stitching in the ditch, are rarely used, but can still be found used on some T-shirt quilts. When searching for a quality T-shirt quilt, know which method the T-shirt company uses and which method you would prefer.



Tying Quilting Method - This method uses thread or embroidery floss to make a single large stitch in the three layers of the quilt. The thread is knotted on the top of the quilt. This method will hold a quilt top, batting, and backing together, but is not a long-lasting method. Over a relatively short period of time the batting will sag and bunch over successive washings. The T-shirts will also sag.

Stitching in the Ditch Method - This method is done with a home sewing machine. The three layers of the quilt are pinned together and then sewn together. The stitches are placed in the ditch - where the seams of the blocks come together. This will hold the quilt together, but the areas that are not stitched will be floppy and perhaps droop over time. The other issue with the stitching in the ditch method is that the batting is not quilted together close enough. Most batting manufacturers suggest that for the best results, the quilting needs to be quilted no more than 4" apart. In the ditch quilting may leave large areas not quilted. Similar to the tying quilting method, this method is not a long-lasting method. After several washings, the batting may fall apart and ball up inside the quilt, which can make a lumpy quilt.



Computerized Long Arm Quilting - A long arm quilting machine moves over the three layers of a quilt. A computer or a human can control a long arm-quilting machine. When it is computerized, the T-shirt quilt is quilted with an overall quilting pattern. The same design will be repeated over and over on the quilt. Computerized long arm quilting also uses iron on backing on the T-shirt blocks so the T-shirt material is stiff enough not to move around when being quilted.



This quilting method does result in a quilt that will last for a lifetime if quality materials have been used for the backing and thread. However, most companies which use computerized long arm quilting only have a few patterns, meaning the customer has a limited choice. And the quilting on your quilt is just like someone else's quilt. If you do choose a company which uses computerized long arm quilting, be sure you like the pattern they use.

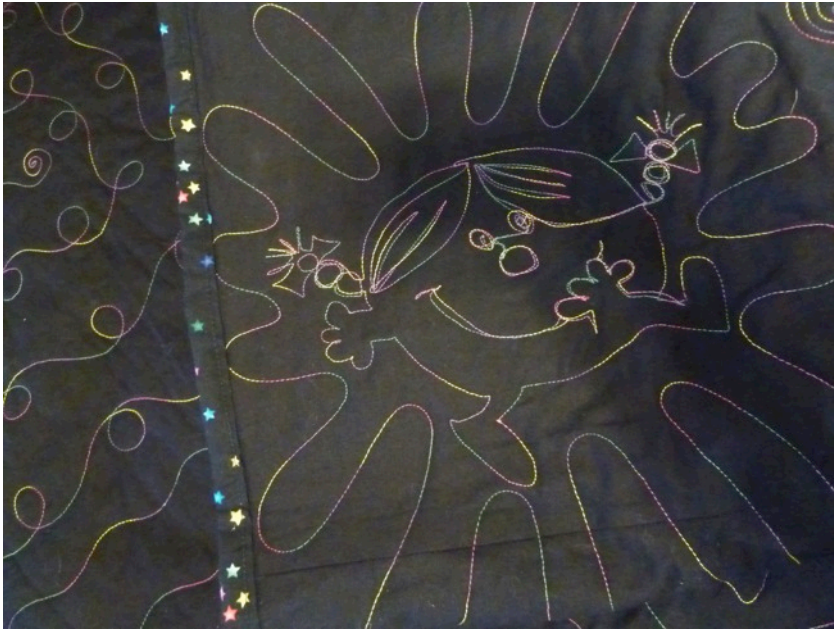
Non-Computerized Long Arm Quilting - This is similar to computerized long arm quilting, except the machine is operated by a human from either the front or back of the machine.

When the long arm machine is run from the back of the machine, the operator stands or sits behind the long arm machine and follows a printed paper pattern on the bed of the sewing machine with a laser pointer. As in computerized machine quilting, the designs are repetitive and the T-shirt material has to be stabilized with iron on backing so the top of the quilt does not bunch.



When the long arm machine is run from the front of the quilt, the quilt does not require iron on interfacing, because the operator will make sure the quilt remains smooth. The designs being quilted can then be unique and tailored to the particular block that is being worked on rather than an overall pattern. The result can be a quilting design that is exciting and different on each block and the back of the quilt is as fun as the front. It is up to the long arm artist to outline the designs on the T-shirts or freehand designs as they work.

Does the company strictly use clear or cream colored thread or do they offer a wide variety of complimentary thread colors?



Most T-shirt quilt companies use clear or cream colored thread for quilting. Usually companies choose these thread colors to hide the quilting. Some T-shirt quilt companies, like Too Cool T-shirt Quilts, do use a variety of thread colors to compliment the colors of your T-shirts and the backing and binding chosen for the quilt. When a T-shirt quilt company uses colors other than clear or cream, most often the company wants to show off the quilting.

This means the quilting is done by an artist or in a unique way, which can further result in a custom one-of-a-kind quilt. In the photo above, variegated thread is used.

Is the quilt made entirely by the quilt company?

Purchasing a long arm-quilting machine is expensive. Basically they cost the same as a small car. Not all quilters making T-shirt quilts own a long arm-quilting machine. If they do not have a long arm machine, they will send your T-shirt quilt top to another quilter. This opens up many issues. First, your T-shirts leave their care and custody. The quilt top might be shipped to and from the quilter. Each time something is shipped, the chance of loss goes up. Second, do you know who is doing the quilting? Do you know if the location is smoke free? Does the long arm quilter even know what you would like? And third, with a middleman between the long arm quilter and you, the long arm quilter may not be as invested in the quality of her quilting.

Here at Too Cool T-shirt Quilts we do long arm quilting for other people making T-shirt Quilts. And the quality of the sewing we see is often very poor and sloppy. Not high quality.

Ask if your quilt will be sent out for long arm quilting. Then decide if you can live with it.

What does the finished T-shirt quilt feel like?

Everyone wants a quilt that is soft and cozy to cuddle with. Although all T-shirt quilting companies claim their T-shirt quilts are soft, this is not always true. Any T-shirt quilt that uses iron on backing will result in a T-shirt quilt that is stiff. Be sure to ask the T-shirt quilt company if they use iron on backing and ask yourself whether you are alright with a stiffer feeling quilt. You can ask for a sample of the three layers so you can know exactly what the T-shirt quilt will feel like.



For more information about high quality custom T-shirts, please visit Too Cool T-shirt Quilts at:

- Web site <http://www.toocooltshirtquilts.com>.
- Call: 517-641-8225
- E-mail: andrea@toocooltshirtquilts.com

Copyright 2012 Too Cool T-shirt Quilts Inc. and Too Cool T-shirt Quilts International LLC