

Technique of the Month

Printing on Fabric

by Vicki Welsh

Printing on fabric is really quite simple and once you have a printed image you can do all sorts of things with it. You can include the prints as blocks in a memory quilt, add some thread painting to the image in an art piece, or alter the image with paint or ink or create custom labels for your quilts. You can do anything to a printed image that you can do with any other piece of fabric, provided that the image is printed on properly treated fabric.

Supplies

Special Treated Fabric made for printers or fabric that you have treated with Bubble Jet Set

Ink Jet Printer (Laser printers do not work)

Part 1 — For people who have never printed on fabric

Occasionally when I am printing images to use in fabric postcards I will not use treated fabric. As long as the fabric doesn't get wet, the printed image will hold up fine for the normal life of a fabric postcard. This is a great way to try out printing on fabric to see how well your printer feeds and prints on fabric before investing in pre-treated fabrics or the chemicals needed to treat your own.

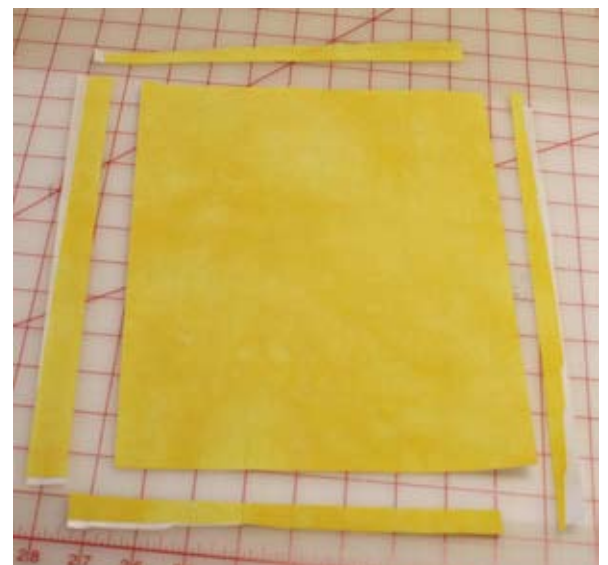


All you need to get started is fabric, freezer paper, an electronic image and an ink jet printer.

Before you can print on your fabric you'll need to stabilize it by ironing it to freezer paper. Cut a piece of freezer paper and a piece of fabric about 9.5" x 12". Iron the wrong side of the fabric (if there is a wrong side) to the shiny side of the freezer paper.

Trim the fabric/freezer paper to 8.5" x 11". I think it's easier to cut both pieces larger and cut to size rather than try to align the pre-cut freezer paper and fabric perfectly.

When you load the fabric to your printer, pay particular attention to how you place it in the paper tray. In mine, the front side of the paper is placed down in the tray so I loaded this with the fabric side down. Also, make sure that the fabric is completely flat in the printer tray. Sometimes the fabric sheet will curl. Just roll it in the opposite direction to flatten it.





I created a file of Happy Birthday labels. These are great to make very fast birthday postcards. After the sheet is printed, peel off the freezer paper and cut the fabric in long strips.

I used the Happy Birthday labels on the green and black cards and stitched them down with some decorative stitching. You can add the labels to any background and finish a card like this in about 15 minutes.



In addition to these directions I've prepared a PDF file for you with three printable pages. The Birthday labels shown above are included plus two other pages using some of my nature photos with birthday greetings added. With those all you have to do is print the fabric, fuse it to Timtex, fuse on a backing fabric and add the edge stitching. The Blue Jay card in the middle is done this way. There's no stitching other than the edge!

Part 2 — Evaluating pre-treated fabric sheets

You can purchase printer-ready fabric sheets in cotton and silk and I purchased several brands of the cotton fabric and ran a few tests to evaluate how well they print.

I printed two groups of images per sheet. The image set included a color gradient, a photo with a lot of detail, script font and a monogram with a linen print texture background. I cut the fabric in half and washed one piece with a mild detergent in very warm water trying to treat as it would be if it were in a quilt.

In the photo at right, the unwashed sample is folded and placed on top of the washed sample.

I followed the manufacturer's directions on the packages and had the following results:



The black ink printed perfectly and didn't fade at all on any of the samples.

Blumenthal Crafter's Images (about \$2/sheet) – had quite a bit of color loss in areas containing red ink.

Jacquard InkJetPrinting (about \$2.50/sheet) – had some color loss across all colors. The fabric also shrunk about 1/8" across the width of the fabric.

EQ Printables (about \$2/sheet) – lost only a tiny amount of color but the fabric shrunk about 1/4" across the width of the fabric.

Pimatex 100% cotton fabric that I prepared with Bubble Jet Set (one \$16 bottle treats 40–60 sheets) – had almost no fading and no shrinking (the fabric was pre-washed prior to treating it so any shrinkage was handled prior to printing).

With all of the sheets, including ones treated with Bubble Jet Set, let the image dry (recommendations range from 15 minutes to 24 hours) and then wash with a mild detergent to remove excess ink. The fabric is washable after that.

Part 3 — Preparing your own printer sheets

My preference is to prepare my own fabric. It's easy to do and means I can use any color or weight of fabric. You can use silk or cotton, even silk organza, which prints beautifully.

Prepare your fabric by pre-washing it to remove any finishes. I like Pimatex for most of my printing. A tighter woven fabric, like Pimatex, will give you better results for very detailed images. I prepare two or three yards at a time so that I have a stack of sheets ready to go whenever I need one.

Place the fabric, folded or scrunched in a bowl or shallow dish and pour Bubble Jet Set over the fabric. Let it soak for five minutes, lightly wring out the excess liquid and hang the fabric to dry.

Meanwhile, cut freezer paper sheets to 8.5" x 11" or purchase the C. Jenkins Freezer Paper sheets. I have found the C. Jenkins sheets do hold to the fabric better than plain freezer paper.

Once the fabric is dry, press it with a dry iron and then iron the freezer paper sheets to the fabric with shiny side on the fabric. Trim off the excess fabric along the edges of the freezer paper. Now you have a supply of sheets ready to go.

Part 4 — General tips

What can I print on fabric sheets? Anything! If you can print it on paper you can print it on fabric.

What about the image size? Just as with printing images to paper, higher resolution images (300 dpi or greater) will work best.

How do I arrange the images to print? This fabric is expensive so try to use as much of it as you can. I often make multiples of my postcards so I squeeze as many images on a sheet as possible. If you are using the images in pieced quilt blocks be sure to leave seam allowances around the images.

How do I know if my printer will work? All printers are different so it's a good idea to test one sheet with a few small images just to make sure fabric will feed through your printer properly. To save ink, just put a small image in each corner and one in the middle for your test run. That will help save some of your ink. Select the best print quality setting when you print your real images.

Ideas

- Use family photographs and add funny captions in your editing software.
- Find a pretty small image and use it as a center of a Crazy Quilt pieced postcard.
- Scan or print photos to fabric for a memory or family celebration quilt.
- Arrange fresh blooms on your scanner in a wreath shape and print the image to fabric. You can also scan buttons, coins, rocks...anything! If what you are scanning has rough edges, put the items in the bottom of a clear, plastic picture frame or on top of a clear piece of plastic to protect the scanner glass.

[Click here for Birthday labels and image pdf file](#)