

INTRODUCTION

TO

CROSS-STITCH



Alice T. Miner Museum
Chazy, New York



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♥ CROSS-STITCH BASICS ♥

The cross-stitch is a simple stitch that can be used in a variety of ways. You can use it to spell out letters, create pictures, or make geometric patterns. Here are the basic tools and supplies you will need:

♥ **Embroidery hoop.** This keeps your fabric taut and stable as you stitch. It can also be a frame for your finished piece!

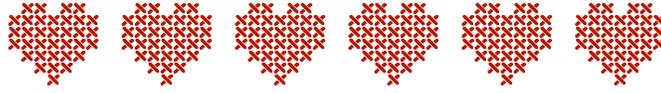
♥ **Evenweave fabric.** Cross-stitch requires fabric that has the same number of threads running horizontally as it does vertically. Aida cloth (the red fabric pictured here) is specially made for cross-stitch and has clearly visible threads and holes for stitching. You can also use fabric like the tan example here, which will require you to count threads as you stitch.

♥ **Embroidery floss.** The standard embroidery floss that you'll find in most craft shops is made up of six strands of thread twisted together. You'll need to separate out a smaller number of strands, usually two, to stitch with.

♥ **Needles.** You'll want a tapestry needle, which has a large eye to make threading easier, and a blunt point.

♥ **Scissors.** Small and sharp ones are best!





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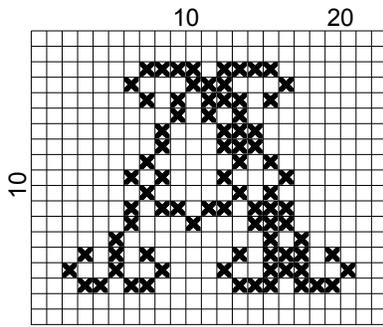
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Your cross-stitch pattern will probably look something like this. Each square represents one stitch. Sometimes different symbols are used to represent different colors.

The size of your finished project will depend upon your fabric. All fabric for cross-stitch will be marked with a thread count, a number that tells you how many stitches will fit in each inch of fabric. The lower the number, the larger the stitches will be.

As a general rule, patterns are stitched from top to bottom. You can work left to right or right to left; the important thing is to make sure that the upper half of your stitches are all facing in the same direction.

When working from left to right, start by stitching all the right-slanting halves of a stitch across a row. Then come back and complete the stitches with the left-slanting halves.



Step 1



Step 2

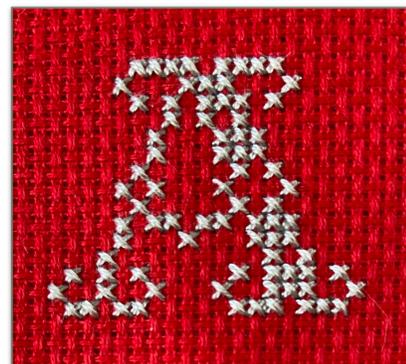


Don't make a knot at the end of your thread. Leave a tail and catch the loose end underneath your stitches at the back. It will look like this on the back when you have completed a row.

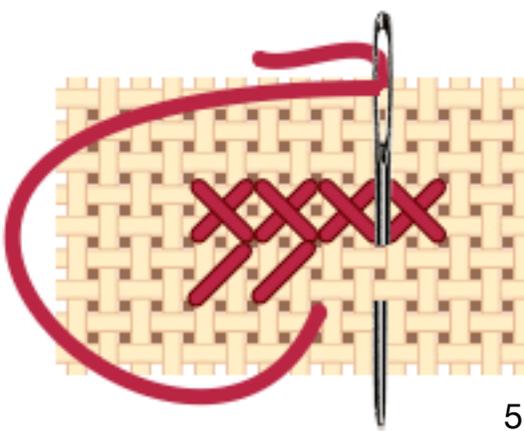
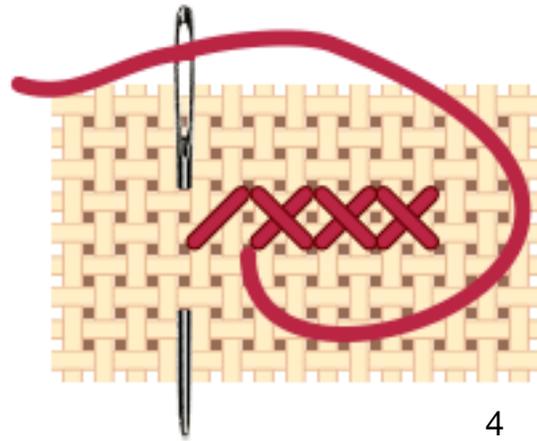
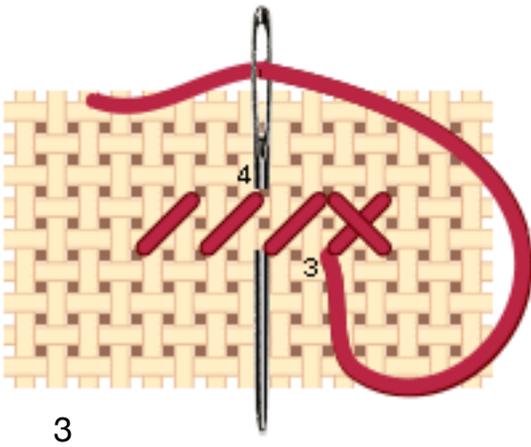
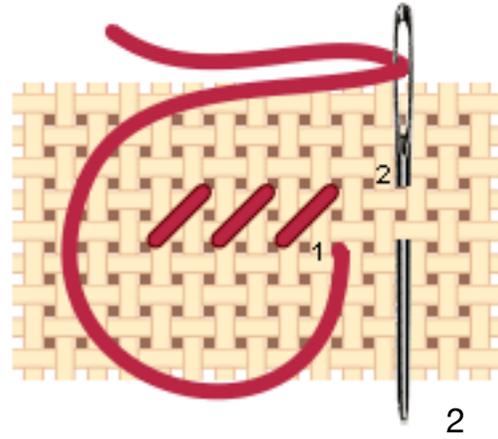
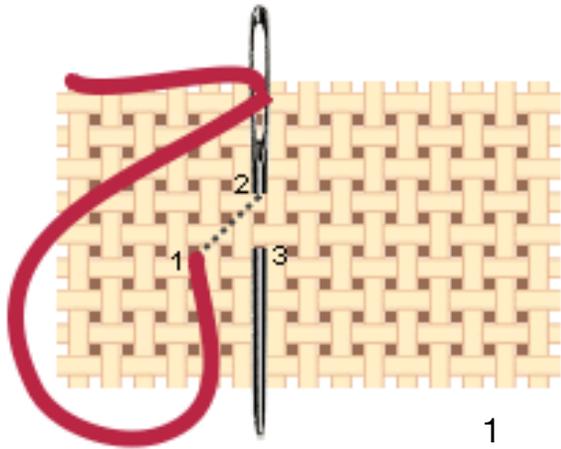
End the same way, by running the needle under a few stitches at the back.

The finished motif ("A" for Alice, of course!)

This example was stitched on 14-count Aida cloth using two strands of floss and a size 24 tapestry needle.



Here's a more detailed stitch diagram to help you visualize the process:



These diagrams show cross-stitch being done on evenweave fabric. Each stitch goes over two threads.

♥ TIPS FOR HAPPY STITCHING ♥

- ♥ A shorter length of embroidery floss is less likely to become tangled or knotted. Start with a piece no more than 18 inches long.
- ♥ The size of your needle should correspond with the fabric you are using. If the needle is too small, the floss will fray a little each time it is pulled through the cloth. On the other hand, too large a needle can distort the small holes in evenweave material.
As a general guide—
 - 8-count Aida fabric: size 20 needle
 - 11-count Aida or 22-count evenweave: size 22 needle
 - 14-count Aida or 24-count evenweave: size 24 needle
 - 16-count Aida or 32-count evenweave: size 26 needle
 - 18-count Aida or 36-count evenweave: size 28 needle
- ♥ Remove your fabric from the hoop after each stitching session so it will not develop a permanent crease.
- ♥ Cover the edges of your fabric with masking tape to keep them from fraying.
- ♥ Your thread will almost certainly become twisted as you stitch. Every so often, drop the needle and let the floss unwind.
- ♥ Wash your hands frequently to keep your embroidery clean! (This is good general life advice, too.)



♥ CROSS-STITCH PATTERNS ♥



Many cross-stitch patterns are available for free online, and many more can be purchased through sites like Etsy. Most designers offer instant downloads of PDF patterns, so you can get started right away!

Here are some of our favorite sources for patterns:

♥ DMC, one of the world's largest suppliers of embroidery materials, offers a wide variety of free patterns: <https://www.dmc.com/us/free-patterns-5041/>

♥ Simple (and free) motifs that will look great framed in an embroidery hoop, from Country Living magazine: <https://www.countryliving.com/diy-crafts/a6380/cross-stitch/>

♥ Beautiful designs inspired by historical needlework: <https://www.etsy.com/shop/modernfolk>

♥ The place to go for top-quality reproduction 17th-19th century sampler kits since the 1980s: <http://www.scarlet-letter.com/>

♥ All your favorite pop culture characters in tiny pixelated form: <https://www.etsy.com/shop/weelittlestitches>

♥ Cross-stitch for adults only: <http://subversivecrossstitch.com/blog/>

♥ And remember you can sketch out your own patterns using graph paper!

♥ CONCERNING SAMPLERS ♥



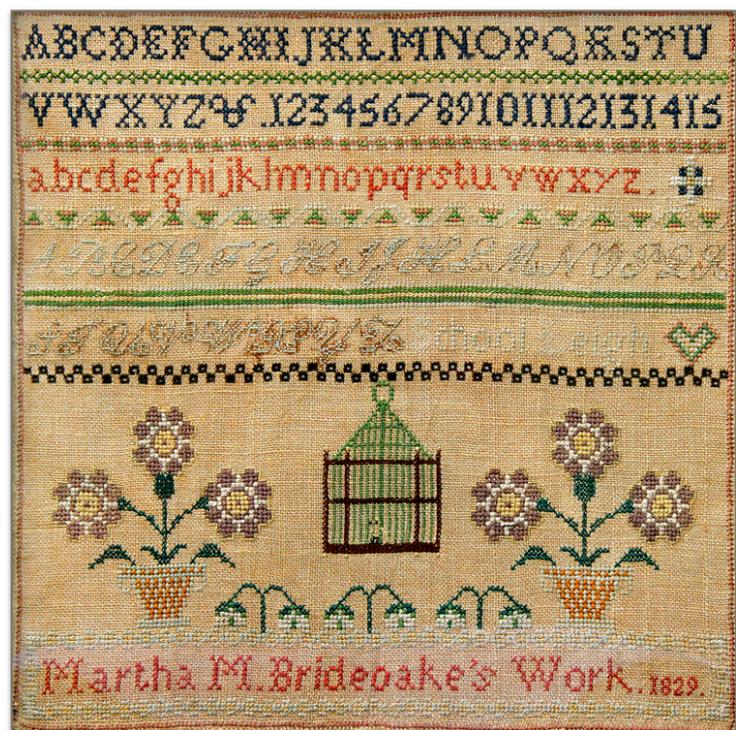
Until relatively recently, needlework skills were an essential part of female education. All girls learned basic sewing skills, and some pursued more advanced embroidery. The sampler emerged sometime in the 16th century and was originally a pattern record of stitches and techniques (the term *sampler* comes from the Latin *exemplum*, or example). Colonists brought this tradition of sampler-making to North America in the 17th century, though very few examples have survived from that period.

By the 18th century, distinctive sampler styles were beginning to develop, identified with specific regions and often with particular schools or teachers. However, American samplers shared common elements: alphabets and numbers, religious or moral verses, names and dates (often in the form of a family record), floral motifs, landscape scenes including people, houses, and animals, and geometric patterns.

In the years after the American Revolution, educational opportunities for girls expanded dramatically. Although academic subjects were offered, there was still a great emphasis on fashionable accomplishments or what were called “ornamentals”—embroidery, painting, drawing, and music. The period from about 1800 to 1835, when more and more girls were attending school, was the golden age of samplers.

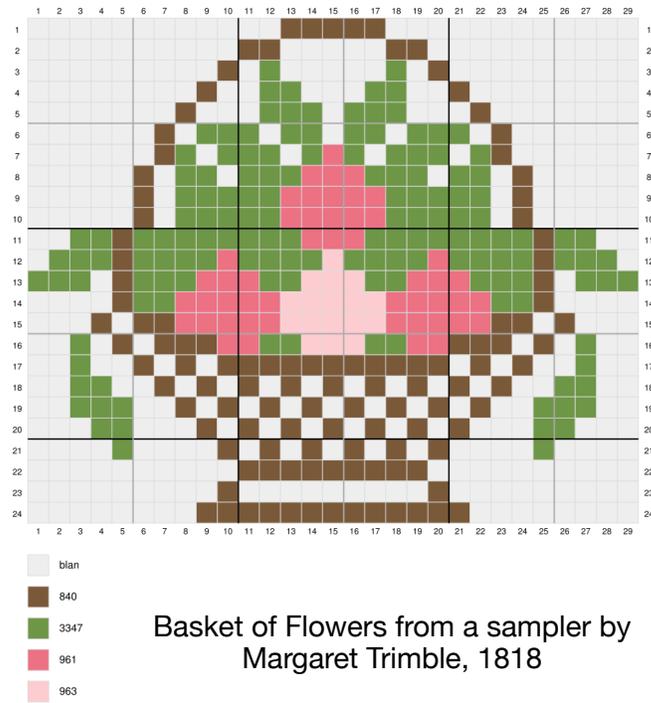
A girl generally made her first sampler between the ages of five and nine. This would usually be a marking sampler, intended to teach basic sewing and literacy skills through the stitching of letters and numbers. If her education continued, the young lady might then make a more decorative sampler or needlework picture. This piece might be part of an exhibition at the school, demonstrating her skill to family, friends, and local dignitaries, and would serve as an advertisement for the school. She would then bring the framed needlework home to be displayed as a sort of “diploma,” testifying to her educational and artistic accomplishments.

Samplers began to fall out of the school curriculum in the 1840s, as educational reformers argued that girls should receive the same type of education as boys, though girls continued to stitch them at home. In the early 20th century, collectors like Alice T. Miner “rediscovered” samplers, which they treasured for their historical associations as well as their charm and originality.

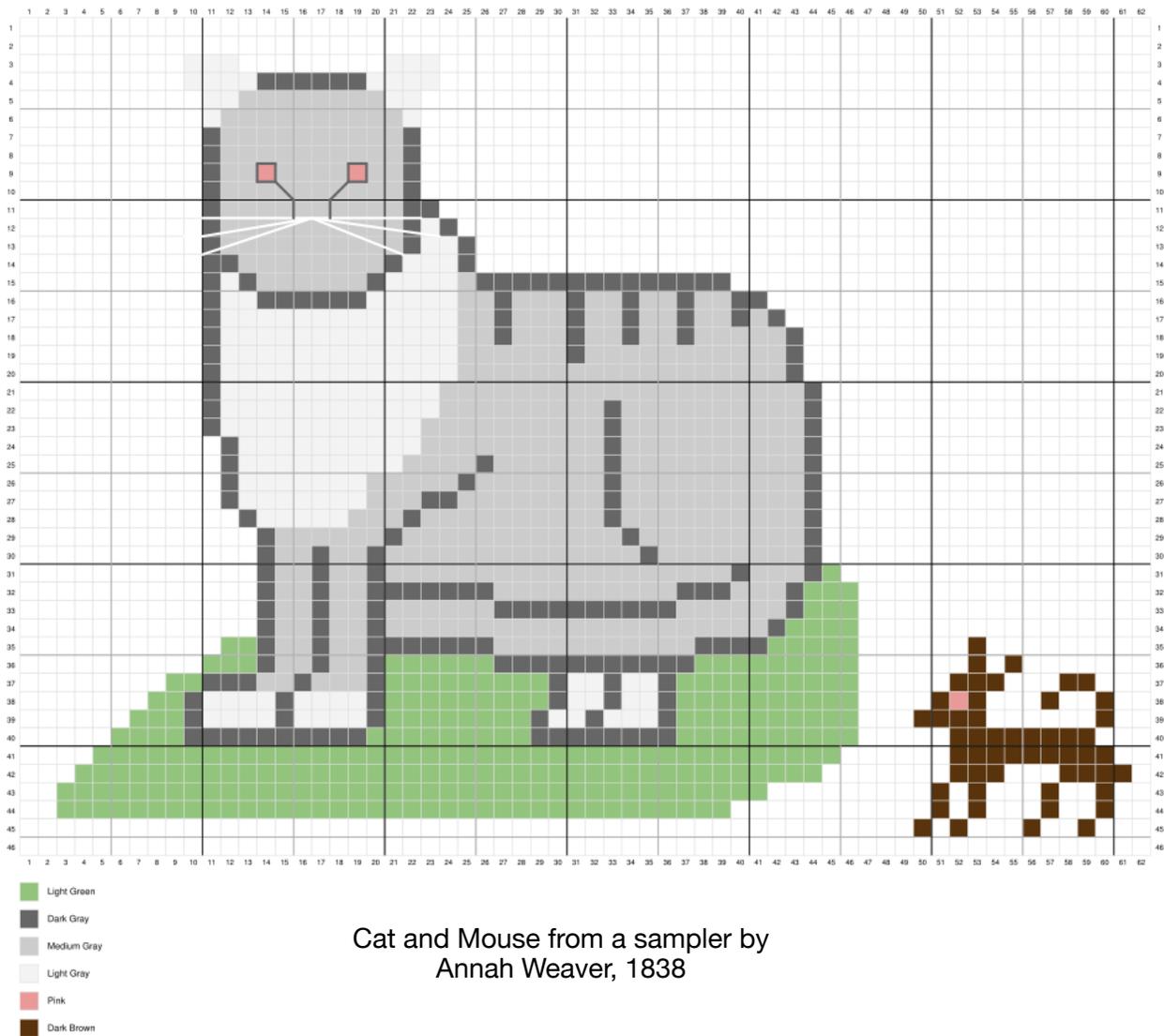


Sampler made by Martha M. Brideoake in 1829, in the collection of the Alice T. Miner Museum

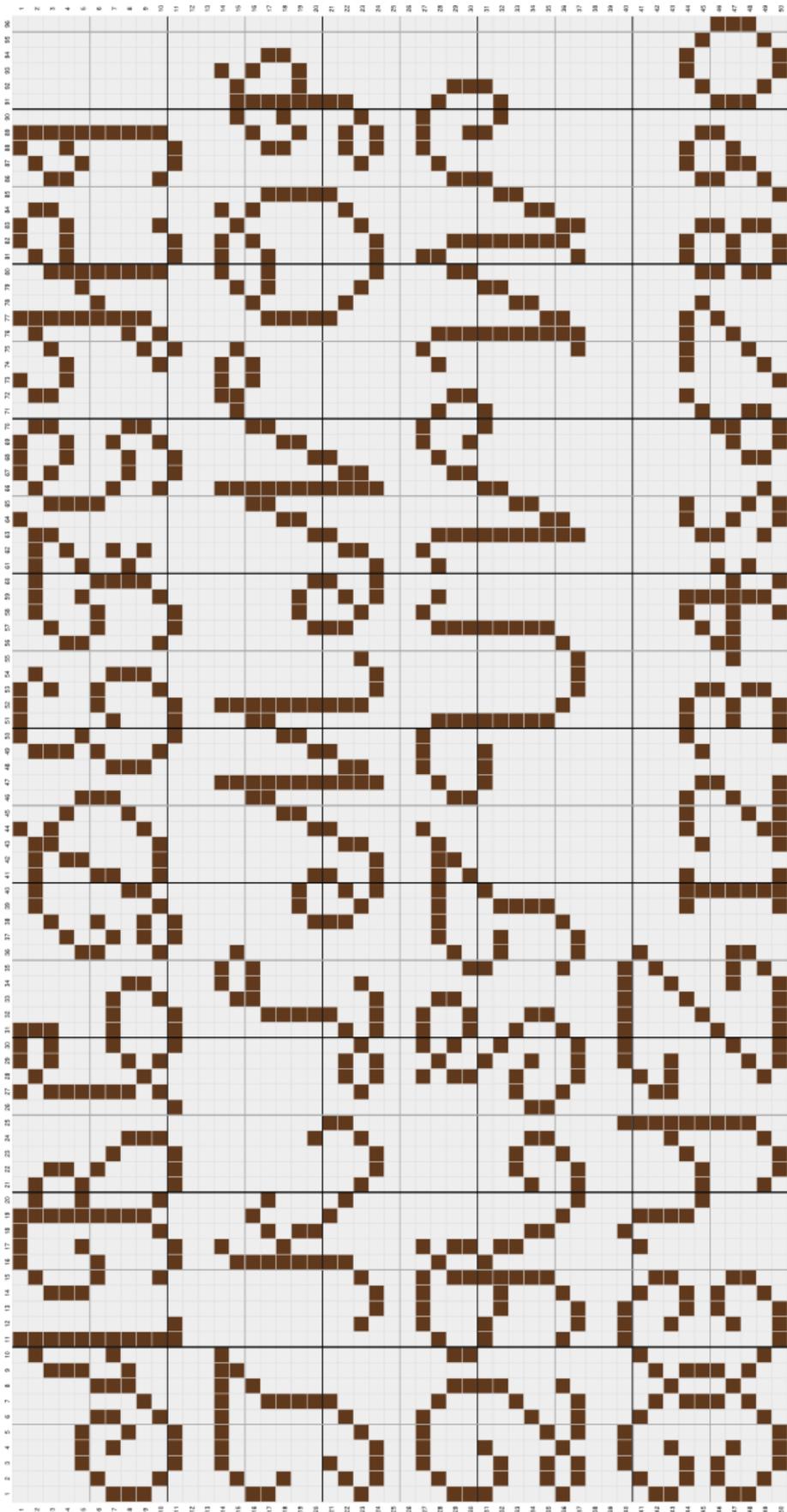
These patterns are adapted from samplers in the collection of the Alice T. Miner Museum



Basket of Flowers from a sampler by Margaret Trimble, 1818



Cat and Mouse from a sampler by Annah Weaver, 1838



Alphabet and Numerals from a sampler by
Emily Maria Kingsbury, 1837