

under the iron if they're pressed.

Quilters' pins are handy too, as they are longer than normal ones and the slightly thicker shaft helps when easing seams.

Flowerhead pins sit flat and won't get caught and be moved around while you're machine-quilting.

Appliqué pins are short and have a small head which won't catch threads when they're used for positioning hand-appliqué pieces.

Lace pins are very fine, don't puncture the fabric, and work well with finer fabrics.

IRON

A good iron is essential for pressing seams, stitcheries, blocks and anything else made with fabric. It's best to have one near the sewing machine, ready to be used at any time. Pressing, as distinct from ironing, is the secret to success – it's best to rest the iron on the work then lift it and replace it over the work, rather than drag the iron back and forth as this can distort your work.

Pressing seams ensures that those little widths of fabric that can get lost in a seam are flattened out. If you get into the habit of pressing every seam as you piece, the final result will be much improved. Whether you use steam or not is a personal choice; the best advice is to try pressing with and without it and seeing which way works best for you.

LIGHTING

Good lighting is essential for accuracy in stitching and colour matching. There's nothing worse than inspecting good work done the previous night only to find clashing colours or worse, the wrong-coloured thread used because of poor lighting. There are some good, affordable lamps available and with the daylight-quality bulbs they can turn night into day in any craft room.

TAPE MEASURE

These are essential for so many projects. A good tape measure should include metric and imperial increments and it's handy to have one at each work station and one in your handbag or shopping bag – for retail emergencies.



ROTARY CUTTER

Rotary cutters save time and work best when the blade is sharp and even. As soon as it feels a little blunt, or if it's been dropped and the blade is nicked, it's time to replace it, taking care to dispose of the old one safely.

RULERS

Rotary cutting rulers are worth their weight in gold. They're accurate and the varieties of shapes and sizes now available offer countless possibilities for fast, easy rotary cutting. It's a good idea to buy a new ruler every year – either to replace an old one if the corners have broken, or to try a new shape and have some fun experimenting on a new project.

MAT

Cutting mats withstand a lot of wear and tear but they don't like the heat, so leaving them in a hot car or in direct sunlight is to be avoided. If one side is marked with ruled lines and the other side is blank, use the blank side first – the lines aren't needed for rotary cutting as the rulers should be used for

measuring and cutting, not the board. Then, when one is too worn to use any longer, simply start using the other side.

FRIENDS AND IMAGINATION

Where would any of us be without friends and imagination? When we're stuck for ideas or encounter a technical hitch, our friends are who we turn to first. Our crafty friends can be fun, see life with a different perspective, be good listeners, loyal, supportive and, best of all, honest. When something's not quite right, they'll let you know.

"If it were my quilt ..." is a line often heard – and welcomed – at group meetings.

Imagination is what inspires us to strive to achieve goals and improve techniques.

Albert Einstein said, "Imagination ... is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."

If you believe we've missed an item, please let us know. Send an email to mroberts@expresspublications.com.au and give us your thoughts on your favourite tool and why. ❖