

SQUARING THE QUILT BACKING FABRIC

Trying to do justice to a nicely pieced, flat, quilt top is almost impossible when the backing fabric is not square. Having accurate 90° angles on your backing is easy and it makes for happy quilters and customers.

Before cutting your backing fabric to size, it is always a good idea to pre-wash it, even if your top fabrics have not been pre-washed. Shrinkage of individual small pieces of fabric used on the top can be insignificant. Shrinkage of a single piece of fabric two or three yards long will make a difference in the appearance of the finished quilt.

Once your fabric is washed and pressed and pieced together if necessary, the first thing to do is to make sure you have the extra 4-6" I need in the length and width. (If your quilt is 60 X 80 your backing needs to be at least 66" X 86"). All the selvages need to be removed, including any that are enclosed in a seam. To provide for this I usually sew my backing seams using a 1" seam allowance, and then rip the selvages off. This leaves a smooth seam and adequate seam allowance. Press these seams open.

When this preparation is complete, fold the fabric in half lengthwise, so you are holding the edges of the longer sides. Stand up to do this and look for any diagonal folds in the fabric as it hangs in front of you. If you see these, slide the front and back edges of the fabric you are holding in opposite directions until you find the spot where the fabric hangs straight, with a nice smooth fold. Keep the edges you are holding even with each other. This will probably cause the edges of the fabric you are not holding to not line up evenly. Don't worry; we're going to fix that.

Lay the folded fabric on a table and bring the short edges together, as if you were folding a bed sheet, so you have 4 layers of fabric. Place the fabric on your cutting board with the original folded edge closest to you. Make sure the folded edges and top edges are even and that the fabric lies very flat. On the right should be four cut edges which will be uneven. At the top of your cutting board should be four cut edges which line up evenly. You now need to use your rotary cutter to even up those right hand edges, creating 90° angles at the top and bottom edges of your folded fabric. Your backing fabric should now be "squared," even if it's a rectangle!

Recommended resource:

www.christianlanequilters.com. Look for “Wide Fabric Tips and Uses” under the FatBacks! Quilt Backs tab.