

Christmas Tree Skirt

By Tish Douglas



A patchwork skirt around the base of the tree is a lovely background for the crinkle and color of Christmas, but I think it is most appreciated after the secret-filled boxes are gone. When the tree looks oddly empty, a bright spot of fabric under the branches is just the right thing. This skirt is so easy to make that you will want more than one. It's a perfect gift for a December bridal shower. It would be a terrific gift for grown-up children starting their own holiday traditions. Something for the boss's wife? Dear friend miles away? Favorite aunt?

The block I chose was an ol' pal, the Pinwheel. If you look at the picture, you will see half-square triangles (HSTs). Look again and note that the skirt can be divided into quadrants, and each quadrant consists of two pinwheel blocks, two half-blocks, and one large white triangle. We will make it one step at a time, and you'll be amazed at the ease of it. In this first week we are going to just make fabric decisions and prepare the fabrics. Next we'll make the HSTs and the four quadrants of the skirt, and then we'll add the eyelet trim and finish the skirt. Piece o' cake!

You can skip the eyelet edging, of course, or substitute a ruffle you made yourself. Prairie points would work too. If you want a table topper instead of a tree skirt, don't cut the slit, don't cut the circle in the center, and just finish it as a small quilt with binding all around instead of eyelet or lace. It measures approximately 40 inches side-to-side, finished size.

What We Need

QUILTING THINGS –

We need our rulers, a new needle in the sewing machine, good thread, rotary mat and cutter, sharp scissors. Pins. A piece of freezer paper and a pencil. Need a drop of oil for your machine? I try to clean mine between projects, getting rid of dust and lint around the bobbin case with a soft little paintbrush. They say we shouldn't use cans of air to clean sewing machines because the strong puffs force the fluff deeper into the working parts.

Motif/Fabric Choices

I used one green fabric and one white fabric for the patchwork, and a red print for the lining. The skirt is reversible. It would have been eye-catching made with all kinds of prints and colors, or red and green and no white at all. I could have used the pinks of a Victorian Christmas. Buttons at the corners of the triangles would be wonderful. We could choose only fabrics with snowmen in them. I could have used faded colors for the patchwork and then appliquéd holly leaves and sleds and candles and angels in bright colors. There are endless ways to make this our own, and to express our individuality.

What We Need (con't)

FABRIC –

Note, please, that the yardage given below is exactly what you need, and not an inch more. It might be wise to buy an extra 1/4 yard of both dark and light fabrics "just in case."

Blocks:

3/4 yard dark fabric (I used green).

1 yard light fabric (I used white).

Backing:

One piece about 42 x 42 inches, or 1-1/4 yard (mine is bright red).

BATTING –

Thin batting, a piece about 42 x 42 inches.

LACE OR EYELET –

(Optional) 4-1/2 yards of eyelet or lace, 2-1/2 to 3 inches wide.

BINDING –

Zero! We are going to stitch all around and turn the tree skirt right side out without binding, and then topstitch the edge.

RIBBON –

We will use some ribbon for ties, and we need about 4 yards. Of course you can use whatever you already have, but if you are buying new ribbon, choose washable woven ribbon. A width of 1/4 inch looks best, unless you are making a Victorian Christmas tree skirt and would rather use pink velvet in big, swirling, soft bows.

What To Do First

Wash and iron the fabrics. You might spritz them with spray starch to restore the original firmness. Let the starch soak in for a few seconds before you hit it with the hot iron to avoid getting white flakes. Before you turn off the iron, put the green and the white fabrics right sides together and give them a quick touch of the iron to make them cling to each other.

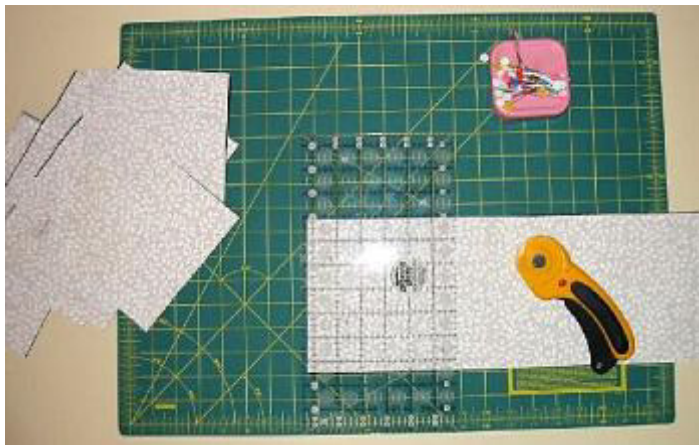
Cutting



With green and white fabrics right sides together, fold them in half the long way, and then fold again. I line up a couple of rulers when I trim, making sure the big ruler is absolutely straight. This helps me avoid getting the "V" that results when the cut is just a little crooked. Trim off the uneven ends.



Don't pick up the fabric, but instead just turn the cutting mat around. We are going to cut slices that will become the HSTs. Because they were folded together, we are going to cut both colors at once. We need a slice that's 6-1/4 inches wide. Actually, we need four of those slices. (The little tissue box on the table is one of my favorite quilting gadgets, a miniature trash can.)



Cut the four slices into smaller pieces, making squares that measure 6-1/4 inches. You should get six squares from each slice, for a total of 24 squares.

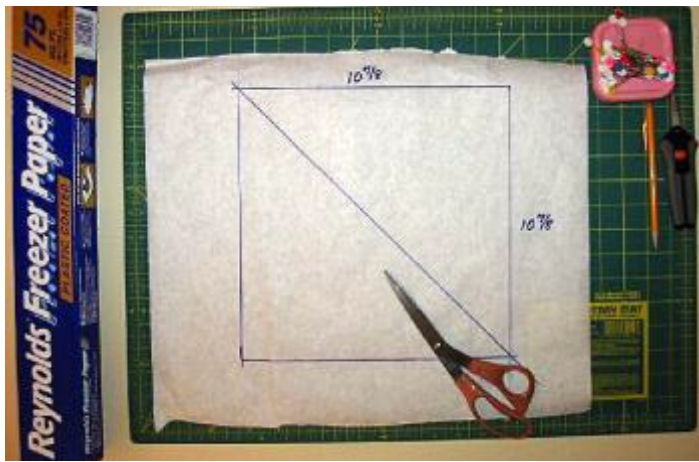


We are going to make our HSTs too big and then pare them down. This will give us perfect patchwork. Guaranteed! To make the HSTs, with the green and white squares still stuck together, use a pencil or a Pigma pen to draw a diagonal line on each light square. I exaggerated the line with a marker so you could see it clearly.

Let's finish cutting out what we need before we start sewing.

We need eight small dark triangles and eight small light triangles, so let's cut on four diagonal lines.

That gives us eight green triangles and eight white ones. Put them to one side for use later.



The design also calls for four large triangles. We are going to make a template from freezer paper. Draw a square on the paper that is exactly 10-7/8 inches on each side. Cut it corner to corner. One of those triangles becomes the template. Use it to cut four white triangles, with the straight grain the fabric running along the short arms of the triangle, and the bias along the longest diagonal edge.

Sewing

Now we want to make 40 HSTs. Not hard to do! Each pair of green and white squares (with the diagonal lines already drawn) will give us two HSTs. Pick up one stuck-together pair of fabrics, and get ready to make a seam on the white fabric, 1/4 inch away from the diagonal line. Let it feed under the presser foot without pulling or twisting. This is bias ... please sew gently. At the end of that seam, take four or five stitches in the air, and then make a seam on the second square. This time, though, stitch 1/4 inch away from the diagonal line on the other side. Chain stitch 18 more squares, putting the seam on alternating sides. When you have sewn a seam on 20 squares, cut the threads between them, stack them up, turn them around, and make seams on the other side of the diagonal.

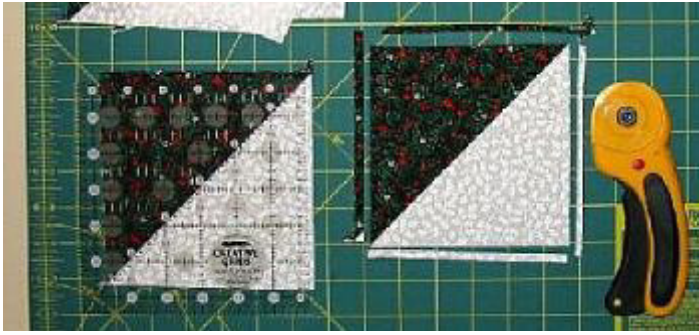


If we stagger the way the patches are fed under the presser foot, we don't have to handle triangle tips. I tried to get close to it with my camera to take a picture for you.



Cut the threads between the squares.
Cut each square on the diagonal line.

Press the squares open, always pressing to the darker color. The easy way to do the pressing is to put the sewn triangle on the ironing board with the dark side up. Place the iron on the unopened seam to set it. Then flip the triangle up and use the iron to nudge the seam fully open. Press it flat.



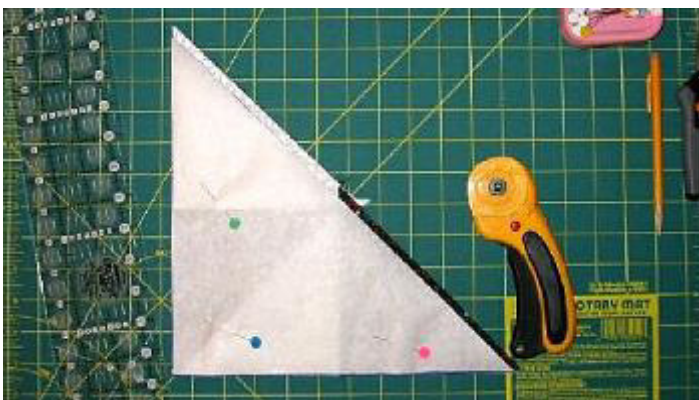
Now we'll trim them down to a 5-1/2 inch size, taking some fabric from all four sides. Match the diagonal line on a square ruler to the seam in the HST, and trim off the extra fabric on two sides. Turn the HST around (or put a smaller cutting mat on top of your bigger one, and turn the cutting mat around) and trim the other two sides, making a 5-1/2 inch square.



We will use the HSTs now to make eight Pinwheel blocks, each one 10-1/2 inches square. Press one seam allowance this way, the other seam allowance that way, and the intersecting seams will snuggle up and fit beautifully.



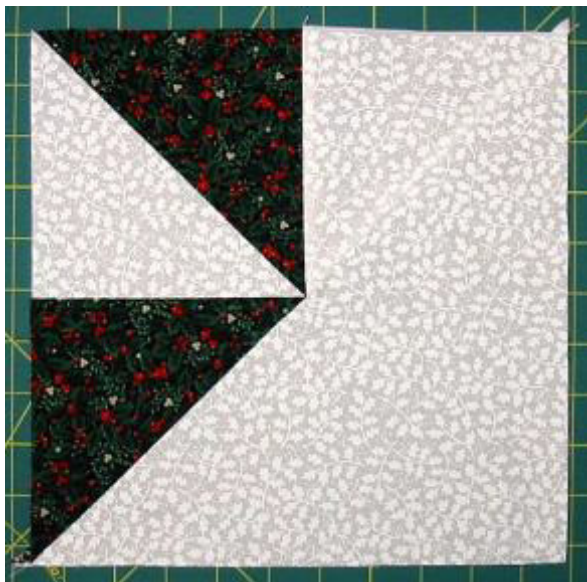
Also, we need to make eight triangle units. Each one is really one-half of a Pinwheel block, and each one consists of a HST, a small green triangle and a small white one. We already have the large and small triangles, so we just need to sew. Be careful how you turn the triangles, matching the picture. Sew one on and press the seam allowance away from the HST. Sew on the second one and press away from the HST. Remember to make eight of these triangle units.



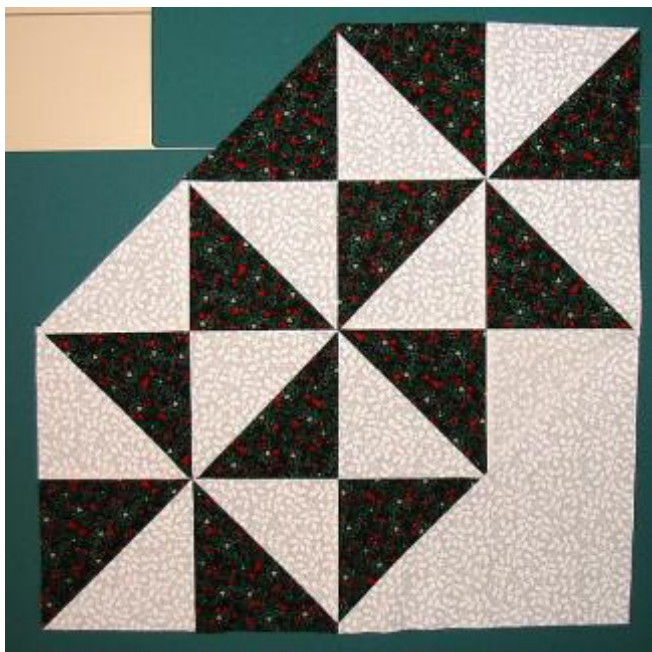
We need to trim the triangle unit down to size. Remember the paper template we cut? Aha! Carefully match the square corner of the template to the square corner on the triangle unit. We want to trim excess fabric from the longest side of the triangle. You will have about 1/4 inch to trim off. Not much ... but it does make a difference.



To four of the trimmed-down triangle units, we will add large white triangles. Use a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch seam, as usual, and then press toward the white. I know it seems backwards, but it snuggles up better. Just please be absolutely sure that your seam allowance is trimmed carefully so that a dark stripe won't shadow through the lighter fabric.



When pressing is finished, you will have four blocks, each $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches square.



We want to make the four quadrants of the tree skirt. They are exactly the same. As you stitch, keep pressing towards the dark whenever possible. In most places the seams will nestle up and be a wonderful fit. When both seams want to go in the same direction, take four or five stitches across the seam to check the match-up before you sew the whole long thing. It's not hard to pull out five stitches and do them over. Press each quadrant well when the stitching is done.



Before we make the last seam (the one we will baste), we want to sew on the eyelet ruffle. After you have made the three regular seams, pin the eyelet to the edge of the tree skirt, just along the bottom edge, right sides together, with the ruffle facing the center of the skirt. Fold the ends of the eyelet over twice to make a nicely finished edge.

Using a very long stitch, machine baste the eyelet all the way around, using a scant 1/4 inch seam allowance. You will want to pin the pretty edges of the ruffle out of the way to ensure its not getting caught in the final seam. Go ahead and pin it all around, using a pin every two or three inches. Saves grief (don't ask me how I know, please), and then put in those long machine basting stitches.

Now let's go back to the final seam between the quadrants. It is important to machine baste it with big stitches because we will be pulling out the thread and opening up the seam to get to the backing. Use a 1/4 inch seam allowance, being sure the eyelet isn't caught in the stitches. Press that seam open. Yes, open. We are going to use the raw edges of the seam allowance on both sides as stitching guides. Keep reading ...

The Final Steps

Put the batting down on a big flat surface. Put the backing on top of it, right side up. Put the pieced skirt on top of the backing, right side down. Pat everything into place. Smooth it out. Don't stretch anything, but be sure there aren't any tucks in the lining or black threads on the batting that will show through later. We are going to stitch around the whole skirt, along the outer edge, down the sides, and around the circle, leaving an opening for turning about eight inches long on one of the straight sides.



Here comes the only tricky part in the whole tree skirt. I used a purple marker to draw the sewing lines. I hope you can see them clearly. See the basted seam that is pressed open? We'll stitch right beside the raw edges of that open seam, and we will leave an opening about eight inches long on one side for turning the skirt right side out.

Pin carefully with lots of pins, and then stitch all around about 1/4 inch in from the edge. Stitch right next to the raw edge on the pressed-open seam. Don't forget to leave about an eight-inch opening. I left too small an opening (you can see it in the picture) and had to do some un-sewing.



When you have sewn all around the skirt, pull out the basting stitches. See the backing fabric with the batting underneath? Cut through all the layers, cutting between the two lines of stitching. Cut around the center circle, leaving a 1/4 inch seam allowance, and then clip the seam allowance there like we always do on curves. If you want to trim off the excess seam allowance from the previously-basted seams, now is the time to do it. Trim all around the bottom edges of the skirt, leaving a 1/4 inch seam allowance. Nip the corners off like we do when we make a collar.

Viola! Now here comes the tree skirt! Reach in through the opening and pull the skirt right side out. Gently nudge it into shape. Be sure the corners are all the way out and as square as you can make them. Ease the bottom so that it's even and straight. When you are satisfied with it, use hand-stitching to close the opening.

Top stitching: Lengthen the stitch on your sewing machine (top stitching looks better with a longer stitch) and sew all the way around the tree skirt, about 1/4 inch in from the edge. Be sure the lining stays in place. Don't let it slip out and show from the front.

Quilting Machine quilt any way you want to. I simply sewed in the ditch with clear nylon thread, thinking that fancy quilting would only disappear under the branches.

Ribbon Ties



Cut eight pieces of ribbon, each one 18 inches long, and sew them to the sides of the slit, four on each side, at evenly-spaced, matching intervals. There are places where the points of the HSTs were cut off, and I sewed my ribbons right over those places for camouflage. When you put the skirt under the tree, of course you will put the slit where it shows the least.

Six Blocks from EQ

Other Choices

The end! Pretty cute, isn't it? And not hard at all. I know you can look at the design now and see that you could use any 10-inch block with a diagonal line in its design. I imagined you would reach for graph paper, so I used *Electric Quilt 5* to find some blocks with a clear diagonal line to inspire you.



Hour Glass



Arrowhead



Job's Troubles



Wheel of Destiny

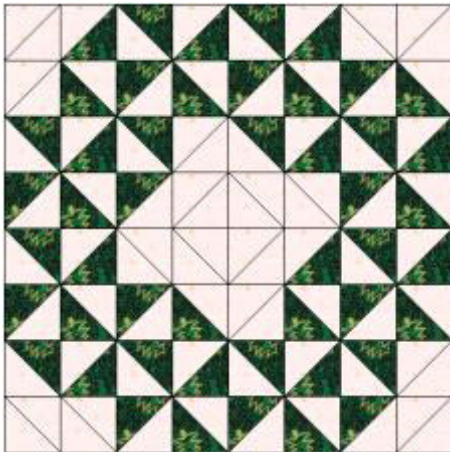


Unnamed



Unnamed

The EQ Quilt



I thought you would like to see the *Electric Quilt 5* graphic that I worked from as I figured out numbers and measurements. It might be easier to look at this and see how another block would work in the design.

The smell of pine!



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Much effort was involved in making sure that the directions are accurate. Sometimes, mistakes can go undetected. If you find any errors, please email anotherpat@gmail.com

Tree Skirt, directions and photos by Tish Douglas Graphics and this file by Pat Tribbey

Merry Christmas!

I hope you will send us a picture for the Gallery when you are finished.
anotherpat@gmail.com ~~~~~ tishdouglas@aol.com

Pat joins me in hoping your holidays are bright with love and laughter.

I'm only an e-mail away if you need me.
tishdouglas@aol.com
... blessed are the piecemakers ...

Christmas Tree Skirt

by Tish Douglas
Tishdouglas@aol.com

NOTE: This is a very condensed version of the directions, very printer friendly. You might want to print out this and the next page, instead of all the preceding pages. Take the 2 pages with you shopping or to the sewing room.

SHOPPING LIST

FABRIC:	<p>BLOCKS: 3/4 yard dark fabric (I used green). 1 yard light fabric (I used white).</p> <p>Please consider buying an extra 1/4 yard of each color.</p> <p>BACKING: One piece about 42 x 42 inches, or 1-1/4 yard (mine is bright red).</p>
BATTING	Thin batting, a piece about 42 x 42 inches.
LACE OR EYELET	(Optional) 4-1/2 yards of eyelet or lace, 2-1/2 to 3 inches wide.
BINDING	None.
RIBBON	4-1/2 yards of woven ribbon about 1/4 inch wide.

WHAT TO DO NOW:

Wash and iron the fabrics.

Before you turn off the iron, put the green and the white fabrics right sides together and give them a quick touch of the iron to make them cling together.

CUTTING:

1. Cut four slices across the width of the two fabrics (still right sides together), making each slice 6-1/4 inches wide.

2. Cut the four slices into squares that measure 6-1/4 inches. You will get six squares from each long slice, or a total of 24 squares of each color.

3. Without separating the white from the green squares, draw a diagonal line on all of the white squares.

4. Using only four of the paired-up squares, cut on the diagonal line, yielding eight little triangles of each color. We are going to use the other 20 squares to make HSTs, so don't cut them yet.

5. Cut out a 10-7/8 inch square of freezer paper, and then cut on the diagonal.

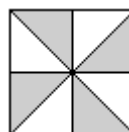
6. Use that paper template to cut out four large white triangles.

SEWING:

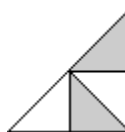


1. Make 40 HSTs by sewing 1/4 inch away from both sides of the diagonal line on 20 squares.

2. Cut on the diagonal line.
3. Press the HSTs with the seam allowance to the dark side.

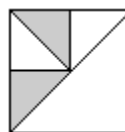


4. Make eight Pinwheel blocks, each one 10-1/2 inches square.

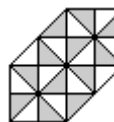


5. Make eight triangle units. Use one HST and two triangles from Cutting: Step 4.

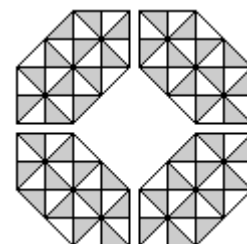
6. Trim the triangle unit down to size, using the paper triangle template.



7. Sew the triangle units to four of the large white triangles. Use triangles from Cutting: Step 6.



8. Make the four quadrants of the tree skirt and press well.



PUTTING IT TOGETHER

1. Sew three quadrants together with a ¼ inch seam.
2. Baste the eyelet around the outside edge with a scant ¼ inch seam.
3. Use machine basting to sew the fourth seam (large stitches).
4. Press the last seam open.
5. Put the skirt together in layers:
 - Put the batting down.
 - Put the backing on top of it, right side up.
 - Put the pieced skirt on top of the backing, right side down.
6. Stitch around the whole skirt, leaving an 8-inch opening on one straight side.
7. Pull out basting stitches in fourth seam.
8. Cut through backing and batting, and cut around circle.
9. Turn skirt right side out.
10. Hand-stitch the opening closed.
11. Lengthen machine stitch a little, and then topstitch around entire skirt.
12. Embellish, if desired.
13. Quilt as desired.
14. Sew on ribbon ties.

I hope you will send us a picture for the Gallery when you are finished.
anotherpat@gmail.com ~~~~~ tishdouglas@aol.com