

To Strip Piece, or not to strip piece - that is the question!

When I am using a lot of different fabrics in a 4-Patch or a 9-Patch block, I tend to cut my squares to size, and then sew them together individually. This is because I'm often using small scraps of fabric, and couldn't cut a strip if I wanted to. Piecing small squares one at a time also has the nice side effect of allowing me to be sure that the same two fabrics are not continually pieced next to each other. This can often cause an unwanted secondary pattern.

But we've all seen the marvelous "jelly rolls" that are on the market, and they are perfect for strip piecing. So, if you decide to strip piece, here are a couple suggestions.

1. **If possible, cut your strips on the lengthwise fabric grain.** There is less stretch, and it can help prevent unwanted puckering. Using an even feed foot also helps to eliminate any stretch caused by sewing.

2. **Don't cut really long strips.** First of all, long strips tend to become slightly skewed when sewn together, which makes cutting them down to size problematic. Also, the shorter the strip, the less often the same two fabrics will be next to each other in the quilt block.

3. **Adjust your pieced strip with each cut,** and trim as necessary. When you're cutting your pair or trio of squares from the pieced strips, be sure that the seams are falling **exactly** on the lines of your cutting board. This will insure that the squares are actually square, and not just close to square. If they are only close, it will be really hard to make the seam intersections match!