

Seams Like the Perfect Crime

Anastasia's Quilted Memories Ideas

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Anastasia chose memory quilts for her January craft feature in *American Woman* because the theme works well for every level of quilter, from beginners to experts, and the amount of time involved can range from a few hours to many weeks or months.

Memory quilts are made with personal items that have special meaning for the recipient of the quilt. They're often made from items of clothing, such as neckties, T-shirts, or dresses, but can also be made from linens, such as napkins and doilies, that have been passed down through generations. Memory quilts have been made from military uniforms, athletic jerseys, scouting uniforms, wedding dresses, ball caps, baby clothes, T-shirts from favorite music groups, concert T-shirts, men's or women's hankies, or any other garment that holds sentimental value.

Although traditional quilts are made from cotton, don't worry about combining different fabrics, fiber contents, prints, and colors for a memory quilt. What counts are the memories these items hold.

If you don't have enough memory fabrics for your project, you can supplement with filler fabrics, perhaps a color that ties all the other fabrics together. Thrift stores are a good place to pick up additional T-shirts and neckties. Antique shops often sell embroidered hankies and napkins as well as scraps of lace that once decorated clothing.

There are many ways to create a memory quilt. They can be intricately pieced using traditional quilt patterns and methods or freeform pieced in the style of Victorian crazy quilts. The quilts can be handsewn and hand quilted or entirely machine stitched. The easiest quilts are made by piecing together 12" x 12" squares. If you're quilting skills are minimal or nonexistent, there are many companies that will turn your squares into a quilt of any size.

Applique, embroidery, buttons, and decorative pins are often used as embellishments. Hand-coloring, using fabric paints, crayons, and markers, can be incorporated when the quilt is a family project where you want to include children.

Tips

Make sure that all your fabrics are washable. Most fabrics, even those that recommend dry cleaning, can be washed on a gentle cycle in cold water. Stay away from any fabric that states dry clean only.

Prewash all fabrics before beginning your project.

For very lightweight fabrics and knits, first apply lightweight iron-on interfacing to the back of the fabrics to stabilize them.

When using garments, you first need to deconstruct them by taking apart the seams. Use a stitch ripper for this. Depending on the project, you may want to keep some of the seamed fabric to incorporate sewn pieces, such as jeans pockets or shirt plackets, into your quilt.

Quilts that Aren't Quilts

Children often get attached to a special shirt or pair of pajamas. However, they usually outgrow their clothes before they wear them out or outgrow their attachment. They get extremely upset when you want to hand the item down to a younger sibling or cousin. To avoid tantrums and meltdowns, think small.

A memory quilt doesn't have to be a throw or a full-size quilt. It doesn't even have to be a quilt. Use the garment to construct a quilted pillow for the child's bed or a stuffed animal. These can be made from one garment or by incorporating several different ones. What child wouldn't want a teddy bear made from different outgrown T-shirts or pajamas?

For adults, pillows are also an option for a small quilt of hankies, napkins, and/or doilies. Or sew them into a quilted table runner or window valance. Framing is another option.

A Quilt for the Grands and Great-Grands

This is a special gift for grandparents or great-grandparents celebrating a milestone birthday or anniversary. You can either use old garments that have special meaning or choose new fabric in their favorite color or colors.

Cut squares of muslin. Using fabric markers, have each member of the family write a personal message on their square. For children, trace their hands on the muslin and have them write their name inside the hand. If you're really ambitious, embroider

the words and hand outlines. Sew the squares together or intersperse them with other fabrics for the quilt.

You can also use iron-on transfer sheets and a copy machine to create fabric photos of family members. Fabric transfer sheets are available at most craft and some office supply stores. Use photos of current family members or ancestors. Go a step further by embellishing the photos with fabric markers or embroidery.

Memorial Quilts

Use the clothing of a deceased relative to create memory quilts for the children and/or grandchildren of surviving family members.

Other Ideas for Memory Quilts

School Memories—Use an assortment of clothing from sports teams, Halloween costumes, school plays and other special events in a child's life to create a memory quilt as a gift for a college dorm room.

Baby's First Year—Very few of those cute outfits your baby wore will survive without spit-up and other stains. Cut them into squares for a quilt to celebrate baby's first year.

Bridal Shower Quilt—Friends and relatives of the bride and groom are invited to create quilt squares with their names or initials drawn or embroidered on muslin squares. The squares are then sewn into a quilt presented to the bride at her shower.

Family Record Quilt—Each quilt block represents a milestone, chronicling major events in the family's life. These are often sewn around the center of a larger square that depicts the family's home.