

Half Square Triangles

4-H Quilt Camp 2013

Half Square Triangles (we are going to call them HST's for the rest of this document!) are everywhere in quilt patterns and blocks. They are a basic shape, but they take practice to do well. Here are some simple instructions to help you master the perfect half square triangle!

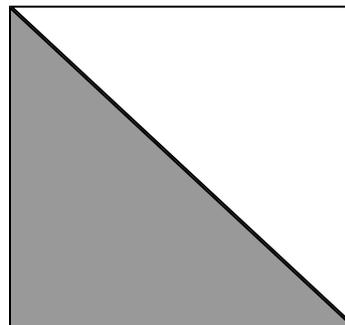
HFT's the "Old Fashioned Way" - The cutting for HFT's can be hard to master. You could cut 2 triangle shapes (like they did in the olden days) and sew them together...but to do a good job of that you would have to cut perfect triangles, then sew them perfectly on a diagonal line and press well. Most HFT's that are made that way do not turn out to be square or to have the two fabrics forming perfect points in the corner.

"Traditional method" - Some patterns and books will use the following formula to cut and sew HFT's:

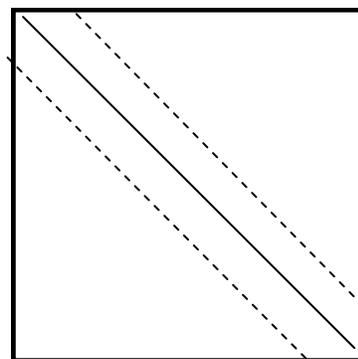
1. Determine the finished size of the HST block (this is the size of the block without seam allowances).
2. Add $\frac{7}{8}$ " to the height and width of the finished size. For example: If you want to make HFT's that are 3" square after they are sewn into a quilt, the two fabrics should be cut $3\frac{7}{8}$ " square.
3. Draw a thin diagonal line from point to point on the wrong side of the lightest color square.
4. Place the two blocks, right sides together and pin.
5. Sew $\frac{1}{4}$ " away from both sides of the drawn line. Cut the 2 blocks apart along the drawn line.
6. Press the block open – with seam allowances pressed toward the darker fabric.
7. If all of the cutting, sewing and pressing is done accurately, the squares will measure $3\frac{1}{2}$ " – this is a 3" finished square with $\frac{1}{4}$ " of seam allowance on all sides of the HST!

"Easier and accurate method!"

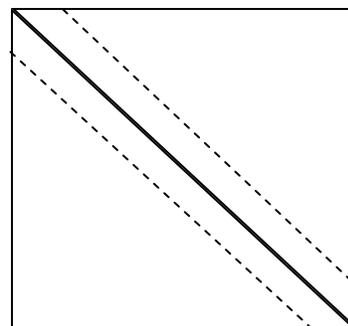
1. Cut a square of both fabrics that is 1" larger than the finished size of the block. For example, if you desire a 3" finished HST, cut each fabric into 4" squares.
2. Draw a diagonal line from point to point on the wrong side of the lightest color square.
3. Place the two blocks, right sides together and pin.
4. Sew $\frac{1}{4}$ " away from both sides of the drawn line. Cut the 2 blocks apart along the drawn line.
5. Press the block open – with seam allowances pressed toward the darker fabric.
6. Now your block is slightly larger than the $3\frac{1}{2}$ " finished size you desire.
7. Take a ruler and cut the block to the desired size (in this case $3\frac{1}{2}$ ") being sure to have the diagonal line pointing into the corners! NOW your finished HST should measure exactly $3\frac{1}{2}$ " and the finished size will be 3" when sewn into your quilt!



The finished Half Square Triangle (HST) looks like this!



Cut size of squares equal
Finished size + $\frac{7}{8}$ "



Cut size of squares equal
Finished size + 1"

Trim the block to the correct size after pressing the block open!

This is an easier and very accurate way to make many HST's at one time! –

Use Half Square Triangle Papers to make lots of HST's quickly and accurately! Triangle paper comes in many sizes and is made by many manufacturers. You may have seen products called "Triangles on a Roll" or "Thangles" in quilting stores. At quilt camp, we are using another brand found in stores that are called "Pieceful Patches" – In Wausau you can buy them at Sew Smart on Rib Mountain Drive across from the Rib Mountain IGA. Pieceful Patches are made by folks from Stanley, Wisconsin.

The great thing about papers is that all of the math is done for you! And you make several HST's at once! You purchase the papers based on the finished size of the HST's you want to make. At Quilt Camp we are making 3" finished HST's. All HST papers come with directions that are pretty similar to the ones below...

1. You need 2 pieces of different colored fabric that are cut large enough to be covered by the HST paper. The fabrics are placed right sides together with the lighter color placed on the top. These can be pressed with an iron to be sure they are wrinkle free!
2. Then you put the HST paper on top, making sure the outer border of the group of triangles does not extend past your fabric edge. If you are using Pieceful Patches, you will press the paper to the wrong side of the light colored fabric. It has a waxy finish that will temporarily stick to the fabric to keep it from sliding. (Other brands do not have this feature!)
3. Pin the papers and both pieces of the fabric in a couple of spots to stabilize all the layers.
4. Next you take your pinned layers to the sewing machine and sew on the dotted sewing lines (not the solid cutting lines). Use a very short stitch to do this! When you are all done, use a rotary cutter and ruler to cut the blocks apart on the solid cutting lines.
5. Before you take the papers off, turn the block over and press the block open by lifting the darker fabric triangle and ironing it away from the sewn line. When this is done you can carefully tear off the papers from the block and you will have stacks of very accurate HST's (without any of the math to do!)

