

Inset or Y-Seam Tutorial

by Nancy Noah

Eight-pointed LeMoyne Star, Star of Bethlehem, Texas Star, Tumbling Blocks, Five Pointed Stars, Hexagons, Grandmother's Flower Garden, Six-pointed Stars, Attic Windows, Bow Ties, and Spool blocks, among others, are a special group of quilt blocks.

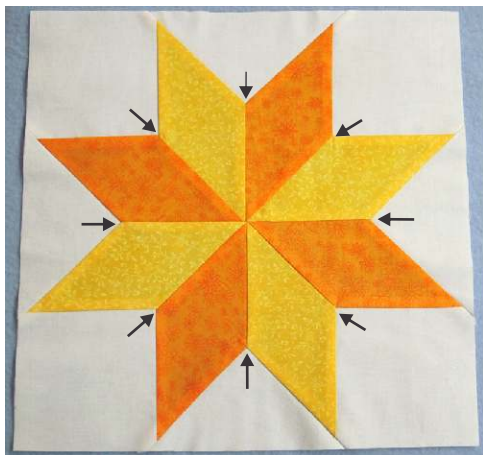
What do all of them have in common? They have inset or Y-seams, the intersection of three or more different pieces sewn together at an angle other than 90°. The resulting join often resembles the capital letter Y.

Many quilters cringe at the thought of machine sewing a Y-seam. There are numerous methods employed to avoid them, but they often create more seams in the block which necessitates more intersections to match up thus adding the extra bulk of fabric layers.

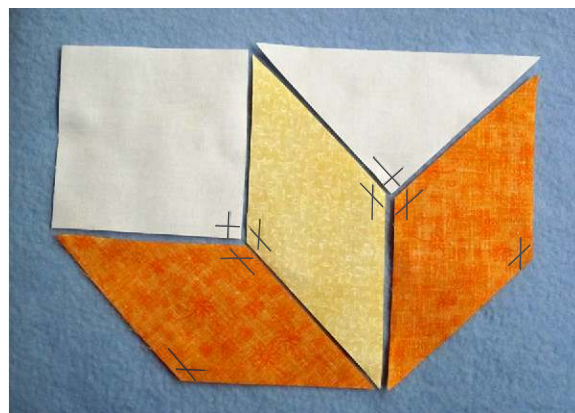
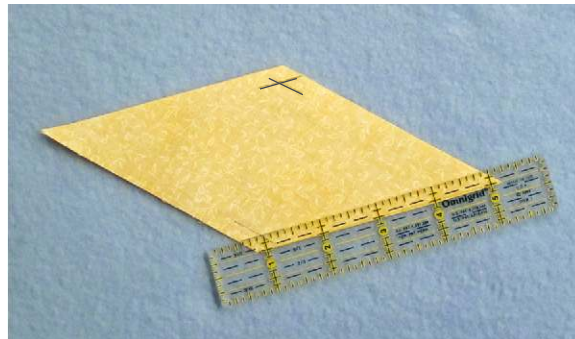
The reality is sewing a Y-seam can be as simple as remembering to stop 1/4" away from the edge of the fabric and not sew over or into any seam allowances where the pieces intersect. The easiest way to do this is to take a few moments to mark the pieces where the Y-seam is created. Then sew them together one area at a time stopping on the marked spots. Some people refer to it as "dot-to-dot" sewing.

1. Determine where the Y-seam will be on your pieces. You can do this by laying them out as they will be placed in the final block.

Notice where the Y intersections are on the LeMoyne Star sample.

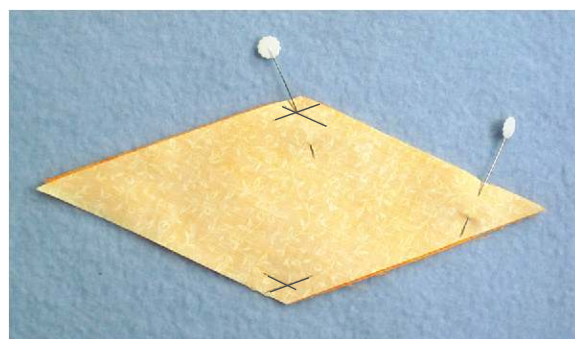


2. On the back of each piece that will be part of the Y-seam, use a mechanical pencil (or other preferred marking tool that has a sharp, precise point) and a ruler with 1/4" markings to draw short intersecting lines 1/4" inch away from both edges. There should be a + (or X) where the two lines intersect.



Remember to handle the pieces carefully as some will have bias or other off-grain edges.

3. Place two of the pieces right sides together. Make sure the marked + is at the same edge of both pieces. Place a pin through the center of the marked + making sure the centers match on both sides of the pieces.



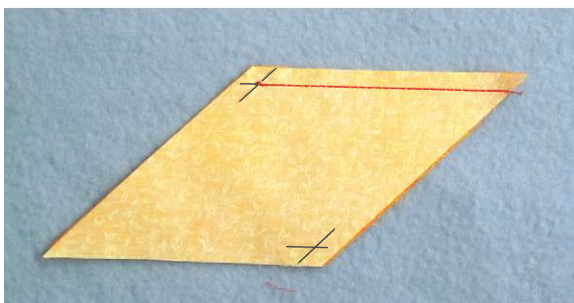
4. At the sewing machine, place the end with the marked + toward the needle. Carefully lower the needle into the center of the +.



Note: An open-toe or clear foot allows you to see the placement of the needle more precisely and helps with accuracy.

5. Slowly take 2 or 3 stitches. Carefully backstitch 2 stitches. This short backstitch is necessary because these seam ends will be manipulated in constructing the block and will not be sewn over by another seam to secure them from coming open later.

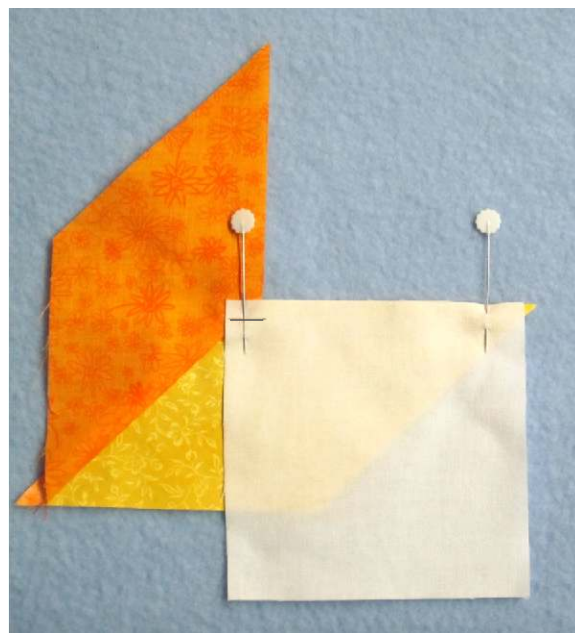
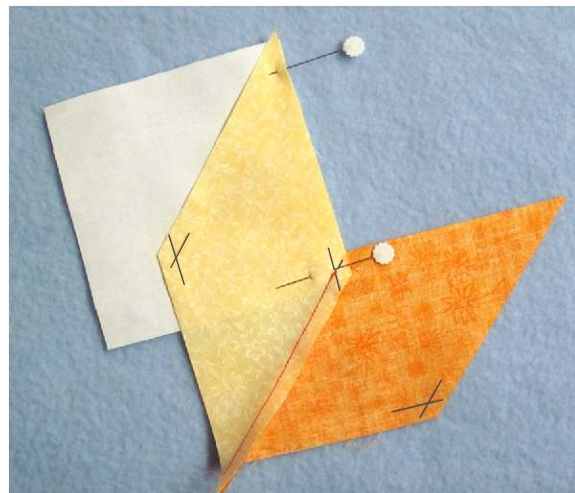
Sew the rest of the 1/4" seam to the edge of the fabric as you normally would.



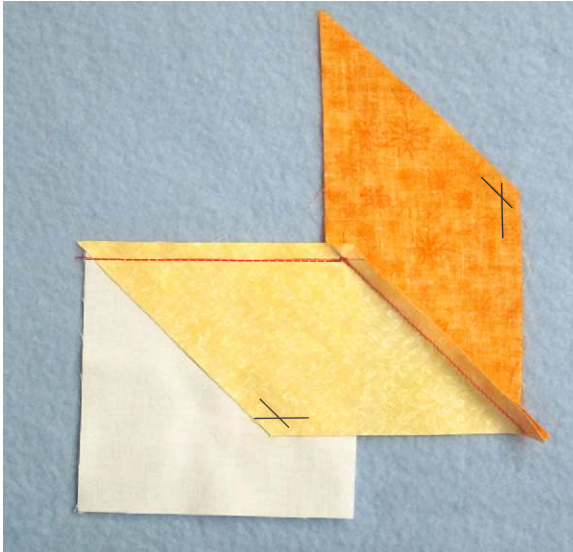
Note: If you are making a block that has a Y-seam at both ends of a section (such as a 5-pointed star, tumbling blocks, or many hexagon blocks), stop sewing when you reach the marked + at the opposite end and back-stitch a couple of stitches to secure the sewing.

Finger press the seam to one side. Finger pressing the seams throughout the construction process is recommended because using a hot iron may distort the bias edges. A finger pressed seam is also easier to move from one side to another as additional pieces are added.

6. With right sides together, take the next piece that will be sewn to form the Y-seam (in this case a square) and align one edge with the inside edge of the piece from the previous step. Place a pin through the marked + of the new piece and into the marked intersection of the 2 pieces sewn together in step 5. Make sure the seam allowance from the previously sewn pieces are facing away from the new piece. Add additional pins as needed.



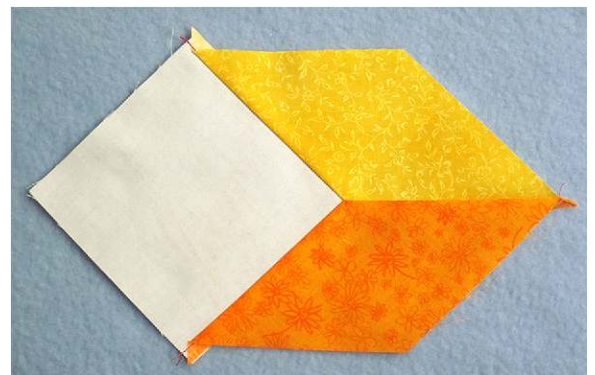
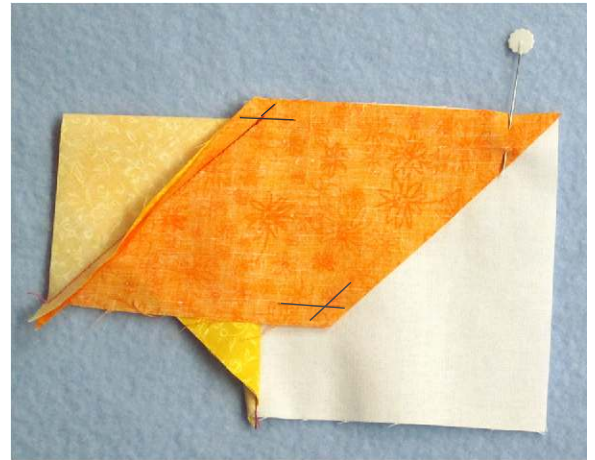
7. Carefully lower the needle of your machine into the center of the marked +. Slowly take 2 or 3 stitches. Carefully backstitch 2 stitches. Sew the rest of the 1/4" seam to the edge of the fabric or the next marked intersection as you normally would.



Check to make sure you did not sew into the previously sewn seam area and did not catch the previous seam allowance in your stitches. If you did, remove any errant stitches.

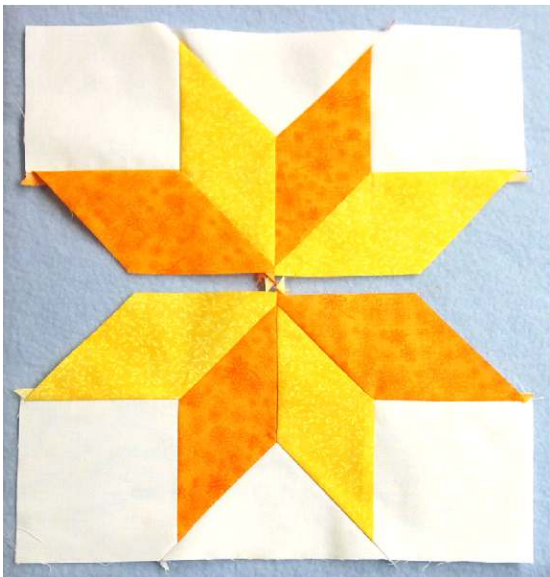
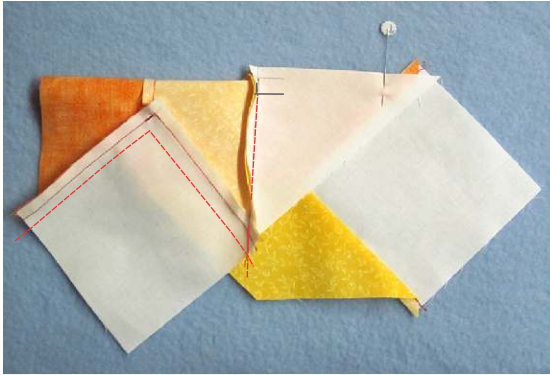
Note: By starting at the marked intersection of the Y when sewing the pieces together, there is less chance of creating a pucker at that point, as any excess movement of the fabric will be at the outer edges of the seam

8. Align the remaining side to be sewn together, and pin as needed. You may need to fold the previously sewn piece onto itself to do this. Making sure the previous 2 seam allowances are out of the way, position the intersecting area under the machine, and slowly lower the needle into the marked +. Slowly take 2 or 3 stitches. Carefully backstitch 2 stitches. Sew the rest of the 1/4" seam to the edge of the fabric or the next marked intersection as you normally would.

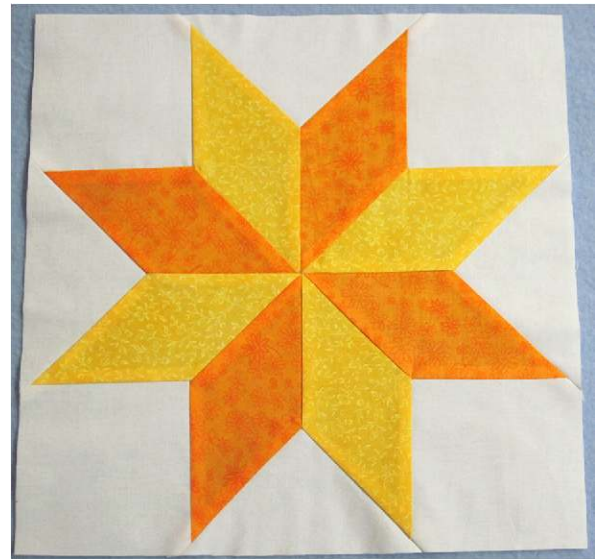


Check to make sure that you did not sew into the previously sewn seam areas or catch the previous seam allowance in your stitches and that there are no puckers at the intersection of the Y from the front. If needed, remove any errant stitches and try again.

9. Continue sewing pieces together to finish your block.



Mastering the Y-seam may take some practice, but once you do, it will open up a new realm of quilt-making possibilities.



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