

Quilts - To Prewash Your Fabric or Not

To tell you the truth, I had not really thought much about the question prior to last week. Long ago, I took a quilting class, and the teacher told us to arrive at class with our fabric already washed and ready to cut.

When we arrived for the class, she explained that quilters always pre-wash their fabric - for many reasons:

- 1) To remove all of the sizing (chemicals) the manufacturers add to the fabric to make look more attractive, prevent wrinkles, and make it come off the bolt easier in the store. Although it makes the fabric easier for them to handle, sizing makes the fabric a little stiffer and more difficult for quilters to handle; plus it may leave a residue on your needles and thread as you are sewing.
- 2) Fabric with a high cotton content will shrink - even if it says it is pre-shrunk. (We all know about the pre-shrunk jeans that don't fit any more after one washing! Eeek!) Since not all cottons are born "equal", they don't shrink "equal" either. That means that some cotton fabric will shrink 1%, other cotton fabric will shrink 3% or possibly more. The result is that once your quilt is washed, the fabrics will exert their own shrinking personality, and you will have a quilt that has puckers - and some patches will pucker more than others.
- 3) The color bleeds out of some fabric; and may deposit itself into other fabric. Reds, blues, yellows and purples are famous for sharing their beauty with whites, muslins, and tans. Translation - the beautiful, bright white in your quilt may end up with a pink, blue, yellow or lavender haze, if the excess color is not removed from the colored fabric.

I wasn't surprised when the beginning quilter asked the question in an on-line quilt discussion group about whether to pre-wash the fabric, and I wasn't surprised to see that several quilters answered with all of the above reasons. I was surprised, however, at the quilter who responded that she never pre-washed her fabrics because she liked the puckered look.

I understand completely liking the puckered look; I love it! It makes a quilt look well-loved and handmade. And I am always happy when my quilts develop that look, whether it is the first time they are washed or after several years. I would do almost anything to make sure that my quilts (although maybe not my wallhangings) could have that look of love. I just wish I could figure out a way to get the sizing and excess color out of the fabric without washing it before I sew.

Happy Quilting!

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