



Fabric

Die 
Cutting
TIPS

TABLE^{OF} CONTENTS



What's in This Book	1
Introduction	3
Getting Started	7
All About Die Cutters	9
Choosing a Die Cutter	11
AccuQuilt Studio/AccuCut GrandeMark	15
AccuQuilt GO!	23
AccuQuilt GO! Baby	27
Sizzix Big Shot	31
Sizzix Big Shot Pro	35
Other Cutters	39
At a Glance	41
All About Dies	47
Getting Them Home	49
Handling Dies	53
Die Construction	55
Die Sizing	59
Marking Dies	61
Die Compatibility	67
Strip Cutters	73
Geometrics	85
Traditional Quilting Shapes	99
Appliqués & Specialty Dies	103
Rag Dies	115
Custom Dies	121
All About Consumables	127
What are Consumables	129

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Trays	141
Adapters	145
All About Cutting	149
Making the Cut	151
Materials You Can Cut	161
Fabric Preparation	165
Minimizing Waste	177
All About the EDeN System	181
What is EDeN	183
About the EDeN Numbers	185
Using the EDeN Chart	191
Using EDeN in a Pattern	195
Common Questions about EDeN	197
Beyond the Cut	203
Sewing & Piecing	205
Space & Comfort	213
Storage & Maintenance	217
Storage	219
Maintenance	221
Resources	225
Where to Buy	227
Consumable Parts	229
Membership Groups & Forums	233
Social Networking Sites	235
Video Tutorials	237
Die Cutting Quilters and Other Favorite Sites ..	239
Your Tips	241
Kickstarter Thank You	244
You Might Also Like...	245
Work & Play with Ebony Love	246
About the Author	247

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What's in this Book



Who am I, and why am I writing a book about fabric die cutting? I'm someone who wishes I had this book when I got started! I've spent the last several years learning everything I possibly could about fabric die cutting. Fabric die cutting has absolutely transformed my quilting and sewing – and with the tips in this book, it can do the same for you too.

INTRODUCTION

My venture into die cutting came in a most unusual way. I started out with a crazy idea to make round fabric coasters with pinked edges. I cut a few circles using a template that I had, and used a pair of pinking shears to finish the edges. If you've ever wielded a pair of pinking shears, you know the weight and force required to use them makes your hand ache miserably. After finishing the first set, most people would have abandoned the idea entirely; but instead, I went searching for a perfect way to cut pinked circles.

After a bit of digging, some failed purchases, and other experiments, I found a company who could make something called a “custom steel rule die.” Fantastic! I called them and told them what I wanted, and they got to work on my custom 5" pinked circle die. Unfortunately, I had to call them back to ask what I needed to actually use the die. Yes, you guessed it... I didn't even have a die cutter.

So here I was, with a custom die on order, needing to research machines to use it. I went looking online for people who had experience with them, and that's how I discovered the world of

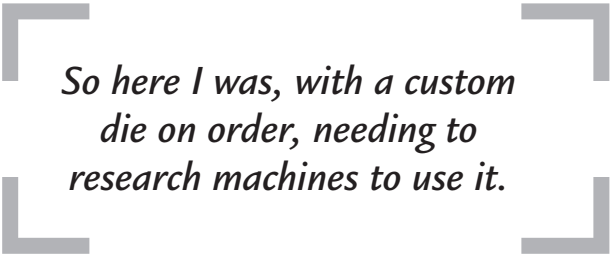


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Yahoo Groups. When I joined, all the quilters in these groups were essentially teaching each other through trial and error how to use these die cutters. There wasn't much information provided by the manufacturers directly, and no one seemed to have been using these systems long enough to be considered an "expert" yet. The beauty of this group format, though, is that we could share what we were learning with each other, and build our expertise together.

The online groups continue to be an excellent resource for information and advice, but for new people who are getting started, it can be overwhelming to try to navigate the archives to find information, or even to know what to look for or what questions to ask. In effect, our early efforts to share and learn together actually do a disservice to those who come after us, because we've made it nearly impossible for them to learn everything we know without needing to read 20,000 messages individually. It became increasingly clear that we needed some sort of reference manual, and with the increasing popularity of die-cutting machines, we needed one fast, written by someone who knew what they were talking about.

The funny part about this story (to me, anyway) is that a lot of people consider ME to be the expert in this field. They email me out of the blue to ask for my advice, my recommendations, and my help in



*So here I was, with a custom
die on order, needing to
research machines to use it.*

troubleshooting their issues. I don't attribute this necessarily to the fact that I "know" more than anyone else, but rather that I'm more "visible" and accessible by being very active in the various communities that support die-cutting quilters, and I have a ton of how-to videos on YouTube. I seem to experiment more, I have a knack for explaining things to people, and I'm willing to share everything I know with anyone who will listen.

It's this expectation that people have of me—as the expert—that made me realize that I needed to write this book. It is my gift to the quilting and die-cutting communities—for the experienced quilters and those who are new—and I hope it serves as a valuable resource for everyone to use, rely upon, and build upon.

*"It is nothing for one to know something
unless another knows you know it."*

—Persian Proverb



GETTING STARTED

In theory, fabric die cutting can be explained in three easy steps:

- ❶ Make a sandwich with your die, fabric and cutting mat;
- ❷ Roll the sandwich through the cutter;
- ❸ Remove your fabric and repeat!

The devil, as they say, is in the details.

The biggest mistake those new to fabric die cutting make is forgetting that everything has a learning curve. **EVERYTHING.** You have to set your expectations at a level that allows you to make mistakes, then learn and improve, rather than expecting the machine will magically transform you into the world's best quilter. Lots of people get frustrated early on because their expectations are too high. They think, "It should be as easy as 1-2-3. So why can't I cut perfect shapes?"

*It will be easy, and you will
get perfect shapes—
once you get the hang of it.*

The point is, don't get frustrated if your results are not perfect at first, because what works for one person may not work for someone else. It's like learning to ride a bike; some kids need training wheels, others want you to hang onto the seat while they pedal, and the rest want to try on their own first. In the majority of situations where kids are learning to ride a bike, very few failed attempts have to do with the bike!

That's why this book is all about teaching you different ways to die cut fabric. We'll present you with the facts, go over different options, and in the end, you'll figure out what techniques will work for you. We'll also review the most popular systems for fabric die cutting that are currently on the market, so that you understand the options and limitations of each system. You may indeed learn that the cutter you've chosen is the wrong "bike" for what you want to do, but at the end of it all, you **WILL** learn how to get perfect die cuts from fabric!

"Before beginning, prepare carefully."

—Marcus Tullius Cicero



All About Die
Cutters



Choosing the die cutter
that is right for you really boils down
to the type of quilter you are,
what features are most important to you,
and your budget.

CHOOSING A DIE CUTTER

There are probably dozens of companies out there who make die-cutting systems, and still more that make dies to fit the various systems. However, we're going to focus our attention on just a few of the more popular systems: the hand-operated roller models that are most heavily marketed to quilters and that are friendly for fabric die cutting. **AccuQuilt** and **Sizzix** are probably the best-known, but each company has several different cutters; which one you choose depends on lots of factors like:

Do you have dedicated space to leave the cutter set up?

Will you want to cut fabric for other people?

Do you want to make and sell kits?

Do you have trouble using a rotary cutter?

What types of quilts do you like to make?

Do you like to make pieced quilts or appliquéd quilts?

How often do you quilt?

What's your budget to spend on the machine?

What's your budget to spend on dies?



Notice how “budget” is the last of the considerations. After you weigh the types of projects you want to make and some of the other factors, your budget might change, and so might your timeline. It’s tempting to go for the machine you can afford “right now,” but I think it’s far better to save for the equipment you need, rather than buying what you can get “right now.”

At the same time, don’t feel obligated to purchase the most expensive machine just because it seems like the best; truly, what matters most is the machine that’s going to work best for who YOU are and the types of projects you want to make, regardless of what anyone else thinks.

The basic components of these roller-die systems include the machine itself, a steel-rule die encased in foam (this is what cuts the shape), some sort of platform or tray to carry the dies, and a cutting mat or pad that protects the machine from the blades of the die. These systems use pressure and a cookie cutter-like action to actually make the cut; as you crank the handle, the die travels through the machine, compressing the foam and forcing the blades into the fabric. Before we get into all that though, let's talk about the common die-cutting machines.

“Quality is not an act, it is a habit.”

—Aristotle