

# Let's go sew!

with Joanne Banko

## Happy Hemstitching! Guide to sewing stitches in the Hemstitching category.



In this tutorial I'd like to introduce you to the art of hemstitching with various stitches included in the hemstitching category. Hemstitched items have been around for many years. Formerly created with tedious handwork, in the late 1800's a machine was developed to produce hemstitching in a fraction of the time it took to create by hand. Somewhere along the line a specialty needle called a wing needle was developed. Combined with special decorative stitches suited for use with a wing needle, sewing enthusiasts can now create hemstitched effects as easily as sewing a straight stitch. In this tutorial you'll learn how to create these delicate, delightful stitches yourself. Are you ready? Let's Go Sew!

### Materials and Supplies for Hemstitching:

- Sewing machine with hemstitches. **Note:** Machine featured in this project is the Brother Luminaire. You'll learn more about possible stitches below. Compare the images of the stitches to those found in your machine. Note that your manual may also include a list of stitches labeled as hemstitches.
- Fine, smooth thread such as 60 weight silk finish cotton, 80 weight cotton, or 100 weight silk. Feel free to experiment with other threads. In general, natural fiber threads work best. You'll want the thread weight not to exceed 60. Thicker thread will not produce pretty stitches. Check the numbers on the spool and always use good quality thread.
  - Optional – Fine crochet cotton, for threading through wing needle stitching.
  - Large-eyed tapestry needle for threading crochet cotton through holes.
  - Wash out marker for marking lines on fabric.
  - Preferred fabrics include natural fiber fabrics that are not tightly woven. I have successfully hemstitched on the following: Linen, linen/ramie or linen/cotton blends, cotton batiste and cotton lawn. Feel free to try other fabrics, keeping in mind the fact that holes created by the needle are more prominent on lightweight natural fibers without a tight weave.
  - Stabilizers include wash away and wash out liquid stiffener for fabric such as Terial Magic or Perfect Sew. includes the following. Ordinary fabric spray starch will work but it tends to cat the surface of the iron and needs up to five applications to make fabric stiff enough.
  - Wing needle, size 16 to 19. You can also experiment with a size 16 topstitch needle.

**More about the wing needle:** This specialty needle is large, with wide “wings” or flanges on each side of the eye of the needle. When used with stitches that enter the same spot on the fabric multiple times, the wing pierces the fabric and spreads apart the threads that make up the weave of the fabric. The stitches then fill the area around the hole, keeping the threads separated and creating a lacy, open work look. It’s essential that the fibers are easily pushed apart and the thread is thin so that the hole is not filled up from the thickness of the thread. Natural fibers work best because they stay in place. Synthetics have memory and tend to “bounce back, while the natural fibers stay pushed apart.

Sewing Hemstitches:

1. Important set-up and rules to follow for hemstitching:

- ✓ Begin with a clean machine. Pop up the throat plate and clean out the dust bunnies. Be sure your bobbin case is seated correctly when you put the machine pack together.
- ✓ Wind a matching bobbin with your chosen thread. When threading the machine **do not** use the automatic needle threader. Simply thread the eye of the needle by hand. In addition, **do not** use the auto cut function or the scissors key.
- ✓ When sewing, be sure to stitch at a slow to medium speed so the holes have the chance to form properly. I like to pull one or two vertical threads out of the fabric to both mark my lines of stitching and give the wing needle an improved chance of spreading the fibers apart. If this is easy for you to do, go ahead and try it. If not, it’s perfectly okay to skip this step.
- ✓ Pre-treat fabric with spray starch to make it smooth and somewhat firm. If you choose to use strips of the water-soluble stabilizer you will not need to heavily starch your fabric. However, without this stabilizer you’ll need several applications of starch, ironing until the fabric is completely dry between each application of spray. **Tip:** I prefer an old-fashioned flat bottom dry iron for this process. The addition of strips of water-soluble attached to the wrong side of your fabric underneath the stitching area makes it really easy to stabilize the fabric for this type of stitching. I like to save leftover strips from embroidery to use for decorative stitching like this. Peel away the paper and apply the adhesive to the wrong side after lightly starching the fabric. See stabilizer in **Figure #1**.

**Figure #1**

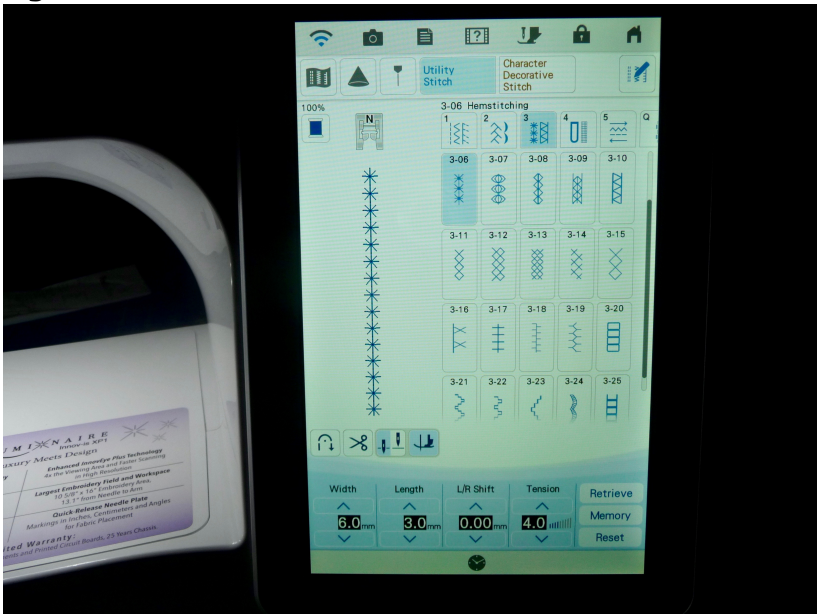




Insert needle in machine, making sure it is pushed all the way up. Select menu in your machine with included hemstitches. Hemstitches vary but they all have one thing in common, the needle enters the same spot multiple times. This is essential for forming the distinctive holes. **Tip:** Feel free to experiment with other stitches that have the same characteristics of hemstitches, making certain that your stitch width stays between 5-6 mm. It is always a good idea to hand walk the stitch with the flywheel before you start to sew.

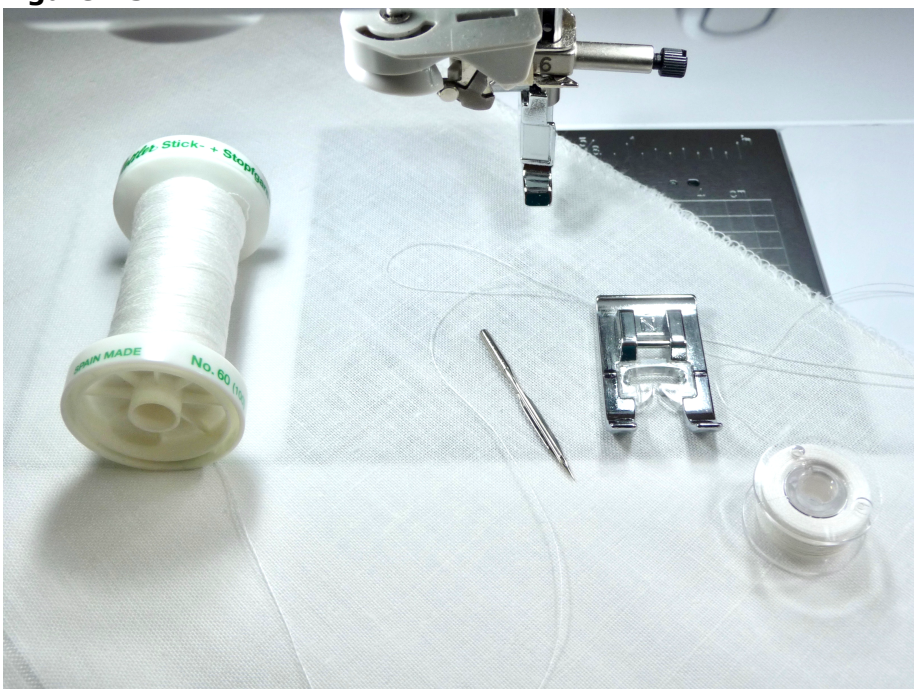
See example of hemstitch menu in Figure #2.

**Figure #2**



2. Mark fabric lines either by pulling thread or using a wash out pen. Gather supplies for hemstitching. See Figure #3.

**Figure #3**



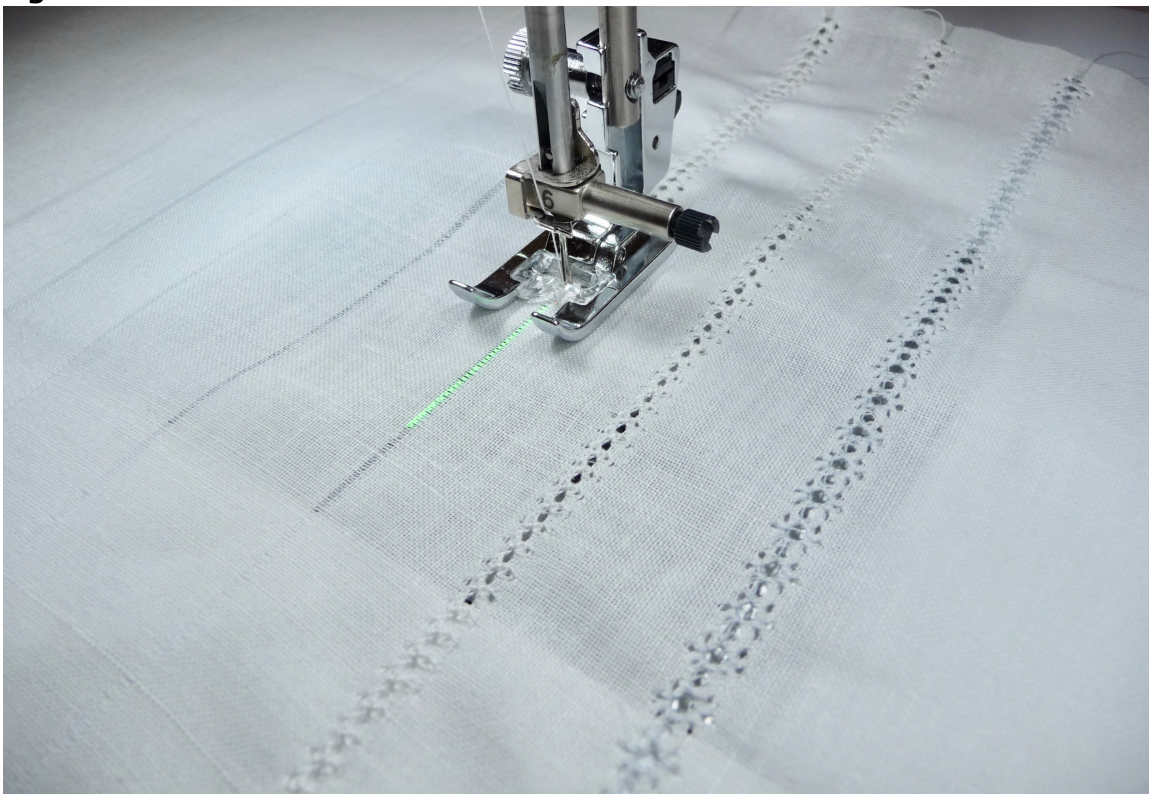
Sew along the lines with various hemstitches. **Tip:** Stitch No.3-06 is commonly found stitch on many machines. I like to call it the star stitch. It is one of my all-time favorites for wing needle stitchery. The prominent holes in the center of this stitch make it ideal for inserting cording through the stitches. See my example in Figure #4 where I used a large eyed tapestry needle to weave crochet cotton into every other hole. Again, there are so many possibilities with these stitches!

**Figure #4**



Once you are all set up for stitching, try various stitches and threads on your fabric. If you have the guideline marker capability on your Brother machine you can use it to help guide your stitching in a straight line. See Figure #5.

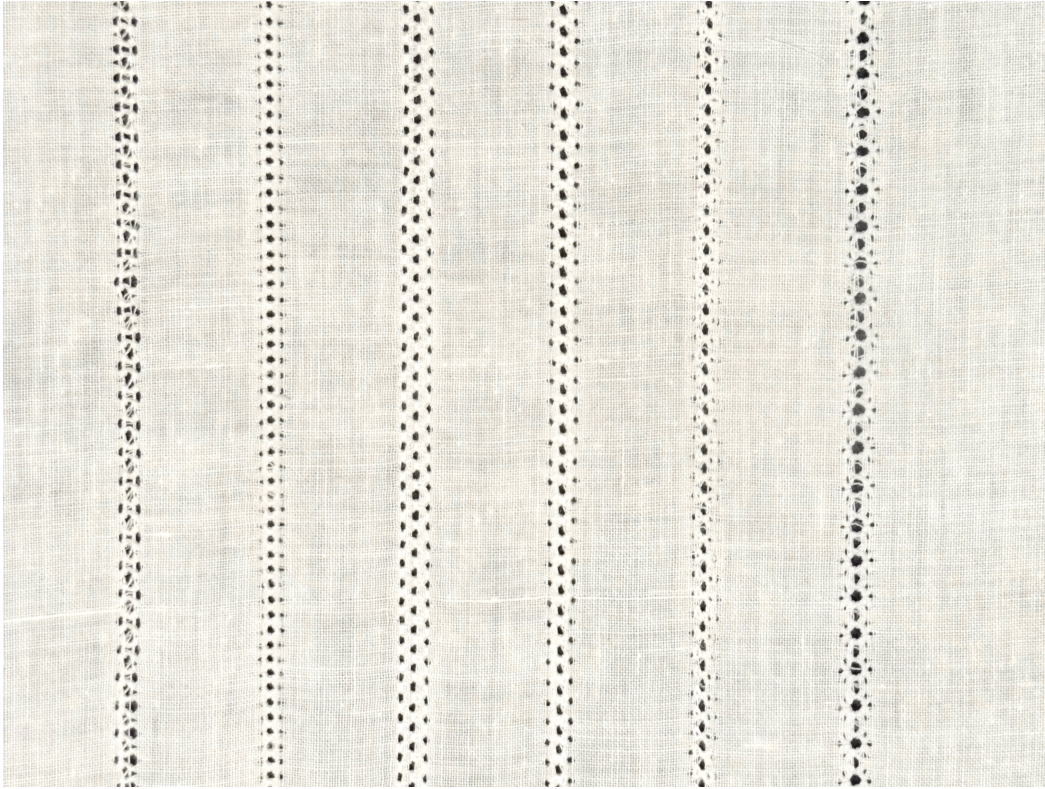
**Figure #5**





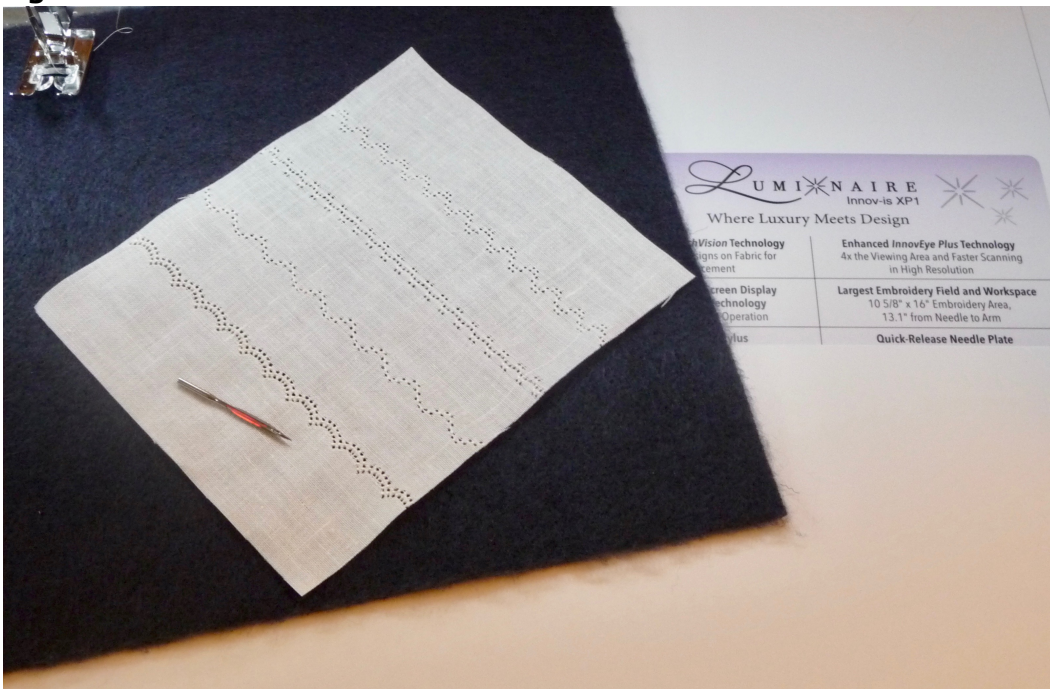
I like to experiment with different threads but the 60-weight cotton is what I tend to use most often. Stitches shown below were created with the cotton 60-weight thread. See Figure #6.

**Figure #6**



I switched to 100 weight silk thread for stitches No.3-21 through No.3-24. See example in Figure #7.

**Figure #7**



When you're finished with stitching, wash out all markings and stabilizer, and then lightly starch your fabric for a smooth finished look. I hope this tutorial encourages you to try hemstitching!



## **Options and Ideas:**

- Traditionally, hemstitches are done on white or off white natural fiber fabrics, using matching thread for a tone on tone look. However, don't overlook the possibility of experimenting with alternative colors and other fabric selections. Just know that the fibers need to separate easily for the featured holes to form.
- Hemstitches are popular in the realm of heirloom sewing but once you see them stitched out it's likely you'll find ways to use them in many other projects.
- A common way to use hemstitched fabric is to create an oversized section of fabric, also known as a "fancy band." Once the fabric has been embellished you can lay a pattern on top and cut yokes, cuffs, hem bands, and other sections of fabric as desired.
- Hemstitched fabric makes great accents for home décor too! Pillows of any size and style, including neck roll pillows are beautiful when made with hemstitched fabric!