

## Seams-a-poppin'...

I received an e-mail from a friend yesterday asking me to remind her about what to do with the seams on four-patches... "that thing that gets all the seams to abut..."

I call it "popping the seam", others call it "collapsing the seam", I've even heard it called "opening the seam". Whatever you call it, it is one of the things I am always asked about in classes. As I was trying to figure out how to explain this, I realized that pictures would probably help. (A picture is worth a thousand words, right... though with me, you get both.)

And since I had the pictures... well, lucky you.

The first thing to tell you is that this works with any block that has four parts. Any block. Pinwheels and Four-Patches are obvious. Double and Triple Four-Patches, same thing. Buckeye Beauty - the block with two half-triangle squares and two four-patches, both in opposing corners -- is another example of a block that can use this technique.

Start by assembling your four-patch -- with seams abutting. That means - one up, one down. In this case, they were pressed to the dark.



Using a seam ripper or pin, remove the stitches above the horizontal seam line. I prefer to slip them out rather than break them, but as I have never, ever, not once had a seam come apart because of doing this, it probably doesn't matter. While the stitches don't have to be itty-bitty, it's probably best that they not be too long.



No, I don't worry about trimming that little thread tail.

Now do the other seam - the other side.



There are two seams at this junction, and for this to work, the stitches above the horizontal seam line need to be removed on **both** seams.

This is what it needs to look like after the stitches have been removed -- the seams are unstitched above the seam.



Depending on your stitch length, your thread, your fabric and your luck, you can also "pop" the seams just by putting your fingers right next to the seam and **gently** twisting them away from each other -- the same sort of motion you would use to tear a small piece of paper. I repeat - *gently*.

But if the fabric is a looser weave or a finer, lighter weight, or your stitches are very small and "locked in", be careful with removing the stitches this way as it can pull and distort your fabric.



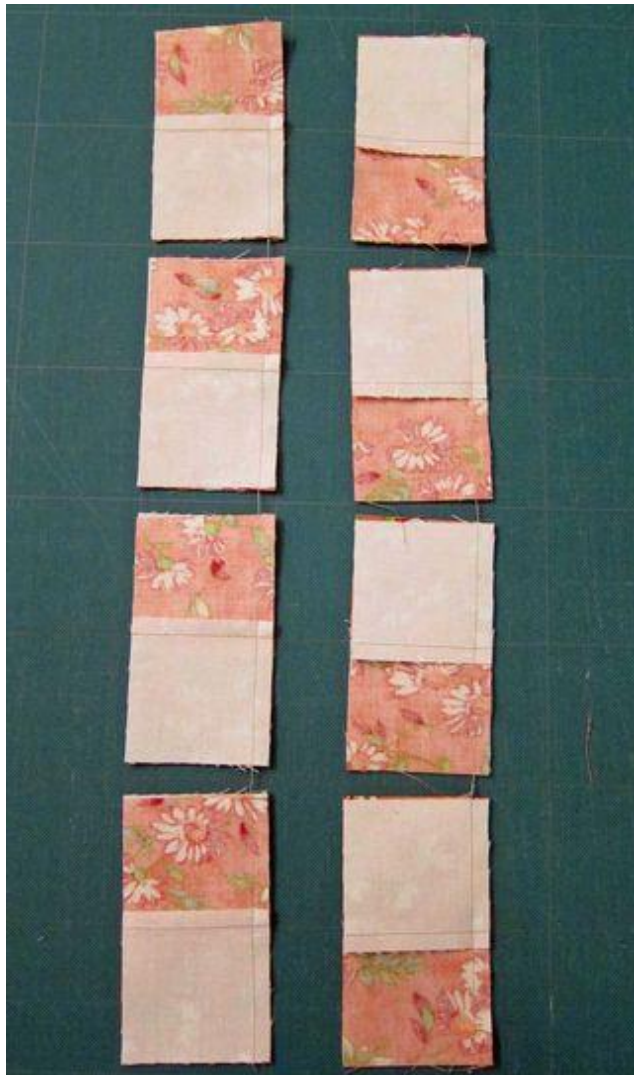
Un-stitching that little part of the seam above the long vertical seam of the block allows the seam to be "split" in two for pressing -- half the seam goes in one direction, the other half goes in the opposite direction. So after the seams have been pressed, they should all be going in one direction around the block, and the center seams should be open, with the right side of the fabric showing. It should also be a "mini version" of your block -- on a pinwheel block, the center of the block is a mini-pinwheel.

Now there is one more important thing you need to know when using this technique -- how to get all the seams on all the blocks going in the same direction.

Maybe this only happens to me but sometimes... some of the blocks have seams that are going in a clockwise direction while other blocks have seams that are going in a counter-clockwise direction.

Here's what you have to do to prevent that - to make sure that all the blocks are the same. As you are chain-piecing the blocks, the pieces all need to be aligned the same way.

Seams up. Seams down. It doesn't matter so long as all the blocks are the same.



Left -- seams up. Right -- seams down.

By up and down, I mean the direction the cross-wise seam is "facing" as the lengthwise seam of the block/four-patch is being stitched.

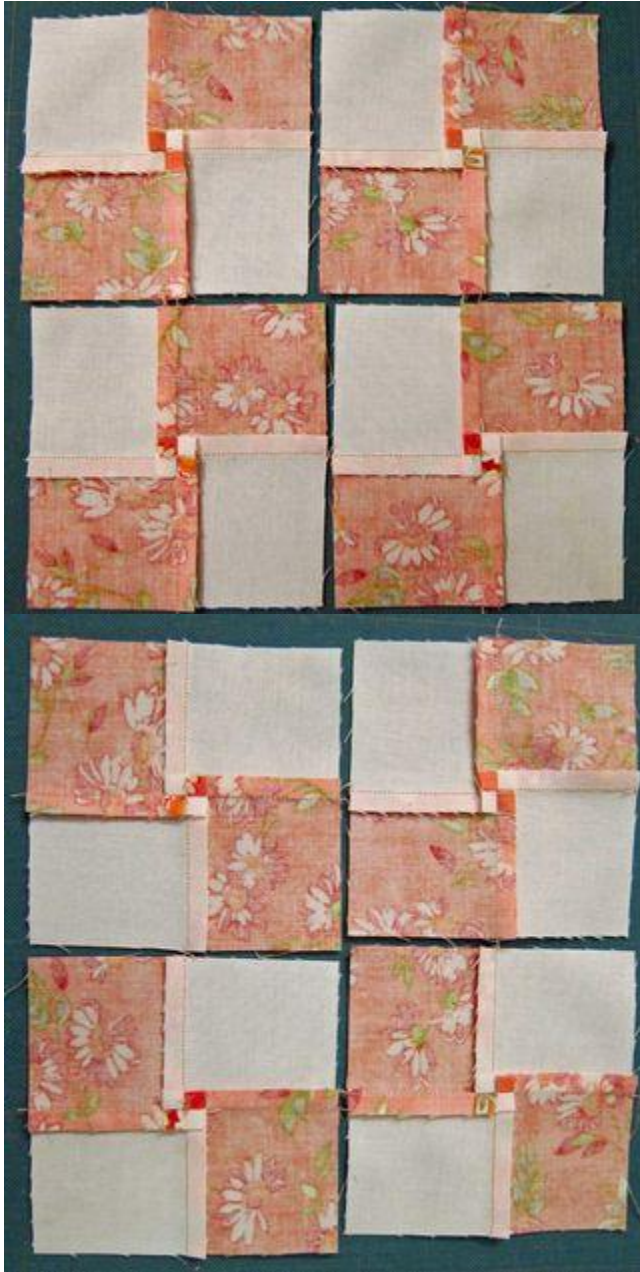


Same four-patch, right? It will look the same on the front... but not on the back.

Left -- pieced with seams up results in clockwise seams. Right -- pieced with seams down results in counter-clockwise seams.



Here are four matching blocks with the seams all going in a clockwise direction.



Here are four matching blocks with the seams all going in a counter-clockwise direction.

Even if you get a piece turned sideways, the seams are still abutting. That can be good – and bad. Good because that might be what you're trying to do in some places... bad because you won't realize it is wrong until after the block is assembled. Been there... ripped that out.

This is one of those little techniques that can make your quilting life easier because the abutting seams means that the block will fit together more easily... it will be flatter... you won't have to fight seams... you can eat all the chocolate you want without gaining weight... okay, maybe not that last one. But no matter what you call it, this really will make life easier.

And coincidentally, I'm working on a little quilt right now where knowing this technique will probably qualify as "useful".

Have a Happy Quilting Day!