

Using variegated thread adds fresh visual interest to your embroidery. From subtle blending using the color-family gradations of ombré thread to the bolder stripes of multicolor thread, having a few of your favorite variegated shades on hand can help you create areas of beautiful, fun, and unique embroidery on a variety of projects.

### *What Are the Different Types of Variegated Thread?*

Thread that is “variegated” is dyed different colors on the strand. The color changes in different ways depending on the type of variegation. For example:

**Multicolor** - Multicolor thread is a dye pattern characterized by a series of long lengths of repeating colors. These can be either contrasting colors that stand out against each other or analogous colors that blend softly into one another. They result in a larger area of each individual color before the next color change.

**Blended** – Blended color threads are dyed with much shorter lengths of repeating colors than the Multicolor threads. The changes between the colors have a subtler transition and overall look. Blended color threads vary by the length of the color change and the range of colors included. These threads can create a naturalistic effect especially when the color shifts are random.

**Ombre** - Ombre colored thread is dyed with shades from the same color family in a longer repeating pattern for a soft, subtle look. In French, ombre means “shaded.” When stitching with ombre, you will notice that the thread pattern will undulate from light to dark and then from dark back to light in the same color family. When stitched on a similar colored fabric, you can achieve a lovely gradient effect, where the colors blend into the fabric. This is often referred to as tone-on-tone, which can add a touch of sophistication to your embroidery.

When choosing designs for variegated thread, the most important thing to be mindful of is the type of stitches you will use. The stitch patterns you choose and the length of

the stitches themselves will affect color placement, color repetition, and, ultimately, the overall look of the finished piece. When you first admire your beautiful multicolored cone or spool of variegated thread, it is more challenging than you think to anticipate how the color repetition pattern will appear when stitched out. Preliminary experimentation and test runs using your chosen variegated thread and design combination are strongly recommended to achieve the results and visual impact you're looking for. It is not unusual to find you might need to make a few design element adjustments before you settle on fabric color, design placement, and stitch type.

## *Variegated Thread and Stitch Types*

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**Running Stitch** - The run stitch is the most basic kind of stitch with a lot of uses and much versatility. Running stitches essentially look like regular dashes of thread following each other. Stitch lengths can be varied and can be layered on top of each other by the software being used for creative effects. The places where running stitches can be utilized is almost unlimited: contour stitches, outlines, decorative flourishes, small or thin details, underlay stitching, or in parallel rows to create areas of wider, less dense color fill. When selecting a running stitch in My Design Center, choose either the Double Run or the Triple Stitch. The Double Run stitches with two consecutive passes. Variegated thread colors will overlap using this stitch. The Triple Stitch stitches continuously in one direction by stitching forward and back before advancing. Variegated thread will transition from one color to another without any color overlap. When using variegated thread with Triple Stitch, you will see the repeated pattern follow each other along the stitched line.

The color effect can look different depending on individual stitch length and whether or not you are using one length of a run stitch singularly or in a group of run stitch lengths laid out side-by-side. If you are laying down regular, repeating rows of running

stitches side by side, you can achieve a subtle, airy gradient effect that has a softer look than the clear stripes of satin stitch.

**Satin Stitch** - Satin stitch is a commonly-used type of stitch in which the stitches are laid down in a close, side-by-side repeating pattern more or less parallel to each other. Each stitch can change its angle if necessary for a wavy, feathered, or jagged effect, or if they are all kept in the same angle, satin stitches can make lovely, straight columns. Satin stitches lie flat against the fabric and can create a glossy and flat or, with some layering, a slightly mounded texture. This type of stitch is also often utilized for areas of lettering, longer decorative stitches, contouring, or even for covering an area of fill stitch for a layered, dense effect. Using variegated thread with a satin stitch will result in a distinct striping effect as the different shades lie down on the fabric, making it easier to see all the colors in the variegated thread. Depending on the interaction between the multiple shades in the thread and the color of the accompanying fabric, this can be a very desirable and fun look, particularly when stitching lettering with decorative or chunky fonts.

**Fill Stitch** - A fill stitch is intended to provide dense cover over a large area in a design. Fill is laid down in closely-placed rows of stitches that create an overall pattern. Stitches in one area of fill generally go in one angle at a time across the fabric. However, a design can be digitized so that adjacent areas of fill can be angled in different direction for decorative effects, such as wave spirals, feathering, density gradients, and more.

Stitch length, density, area size, angle, and edge shape can all change the look of an area of fill. When using variegated thread in a full stitch, the pattern and angle will interact with the amount and frequency of the color repeat and can make the area of fill appear to be striped, gradient, or even somewhat stippled or speckled. You can achieve a variety of interesting looks and cool effects with a multicolored thread. Testing is very important to verify how your chosen fill will look with a variegated thread.

**Random Stitches** – Stitches that run in different directions are often used for naturalistic effects such as animal fur, tree trunks and landscape elements. A single cone of variegated thread can do the work of multiple colors. Shorter color repeats, especially with muted or closely related colors, results in a more blended look. Because these stitches run in different directions, a “striped” effect is less common. When random stitches are digitized to overlap with different solid colors to create shading, variegated threads may not be effective in creating the shaded effect.

## *My Design Center Modifications for Variegated Thread*

Embroidery larger than the maximum hoop size will be stitched with multiple hooping.

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