

Batting – What the Pros Know

Batting is that “stuffing” in the middle of the quilt. It is the stuff that makes a quilt a quilt and give it the comfy feel we associate with a quilt. It can, however, be a positive asset, or it can actually cause issues for the Longarm quilter.

Batting not only comes in many sizes, but is available made in different fiber content and various thicknesses. Batting can be very inexpensive or, depending on the content, rather expensive. What factors are important in selecting batting?

1. When selecting batting, select the fiber content based on how the quilt will be used. Will the quilt be washed frequently, such as a baby or child quilt? Will the quilt be hung on a wall, lying on a bed and used, or given as an heirloom gift and rarely used? Poly or blend battings are a good choice for quilts that will be washed frequently. I prefer to use a blend, such as Quilters Dream 70-30 blend for wall hangings because of its stability over time. For bed quilts and quilts that will not be washed often, cotton is a good choice. Other specialty fibers, such as wool, silk or Quilters Dream Oriental (blend of several fibers including bamboo, silk and Tensel) are a good choice. Wool is light weight and breathes, and the Oriental has beautiful drape. Quilters who quilt for shows often use two layers of batting for stability and the look they want to achieve, often the bottom layer cotton or blend and the top layer wool.
2. Always choose good quality batting. It is never worth it to use cheap or inexpensive batting as they often do not stand the test of time. Another very important factor is that these battings are often inconsistent in thickness making it very hard to maintain an even tension. There is nothing worse than finding a tension problem after quilting several rows, or having to tweak the tension all of the time to make it look OK. When the batting is inconsistent in thickness, where it is thicker the tension will be OK, where thinner, the tension will not be OK because there is no place for the top and bottom thread to knot. Show quilters know the secret of consistent tension, too, and often use two layers of batting. With two batting layers tension becomes a non-issue as the knot has lots of space to form in. You can achieve the same results by selecting a batting with sufficient loft (thickness) for the knot to form in.
3. Select a batting only after checking the package to see how closely the stitching must be for it to keep its integrity with use and washing. Some battings must be quilted as close as 2” apart, others can be quilted up to 8-10” apart. The quilting density certainly will determine your choice of pattern and the time you plan to spend quilting.
4. Shrinkage may affect your batting decision. Some battings do not shrink or shrink very minimally, such as poly. What is the look you want after washing? Cotton battings have a more vintage look because they do shrink with washing, especially is using hot/warm water. If you want the quilt to look the same after washing, choose a batting with little or no shrinkage.

Whether you are a professional quilter or just want your quilts to look their upmost best, your choice of batting is as important as choice of thread and pattern in reaching your goal.