

CREATING A FABRIC MOBILE

A creative tutorial brought to you by:



Sew, Mama, Sew!
Fabulous Fabric and Patterns



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SUPPLIES

The supplies list looks long but many of these items may be readily available around the house. You will find more details about the supplies throughout this tutorial.

MATERIALS

- fat quarter of novelty fabric
- coordinating spool of thread
- 5-10 yards (or meters) of microfilament wire or low-stretch fishing line
- 10-15 decorative beads
- lightweight craft board
- spray or acrylic paint
- eye hook for hanging
- additional fabric scraps [optional]
- additional embellishments [optional]

TOOLS

- small hand-sewing needle
- scissors
- lacquered chopstick or turning tool
- fabric pins
- small hand drill
- sandpaper [optional]
- bamboo skewer or doll-maker's needle [optional]
- hera marker or fabric pen [optional]

SELECTING YOUR FABRICS

There are so many wonderful novelty and large-scale fabrics that finding the perfect piece for a mobile shouldn't be too much trouble. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

PATTERN SIZE - Choose designs that are 2-5" (5-12.5cm) in diameter. Bigger designs are easier to work with.

PATTERN SHAPE - Look for patterns with simple shapes to sew. If the shape is complex, plan to leave a border.

PATTERN SYMMETRY - Symmetric designs allow you to make double sided fabric dollops more easily. Asymmetric designs can be made double-sided but often it's easier and visually pleasing to simply choose coordinating scraps for the back.

PATTERN SPACING - Ensure your designs are spaced on your fabrics to allow for seam allowance and borders if needed.



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TEN FABRIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Almost any novelty fabric will work for mobiles. I've already experimented with quite a few, here's some that I think are tops:



Pictured:

Russian Dolls by Kokka
Retro Rocket Rascals by Michael Miller
Wonderland Metamorphosis Collection by Momo for Moda
Creatures and Critters by Amy Schimler for Robert Kaufman

Not Pictured:

Apple Alphabet by Kokka
Calaveras by Alexander Henry
Cookies by Shannon Lambden
Pears by Kokka
Owl and Tree Panel by Saffron Craig
Starling by Alexander Henry

SELECTING AND PREPPING YOUR CRAFT BOARD

Kaiser Craft board (<http://www.kaisercraft.net/site/general-craft/craft-wood>) is a terrific material for the base of our mobile. KAISERwood products are available internationally, but many brands are available at craft shops in a variety of sizes and shapes. I've successfully used pieces sized from 4-12" (10-30cm). Craftboard or a similar MDF product is preferable to wood because it's both lightweight and durable.



BOARD PREP STEP 1: Decide how you would like to finish your craft board. I recommend non-toxic acrylic or spray paint, but you could also bond decorative paper or matching fabric to the craft board. The order of the next steps is up to you and

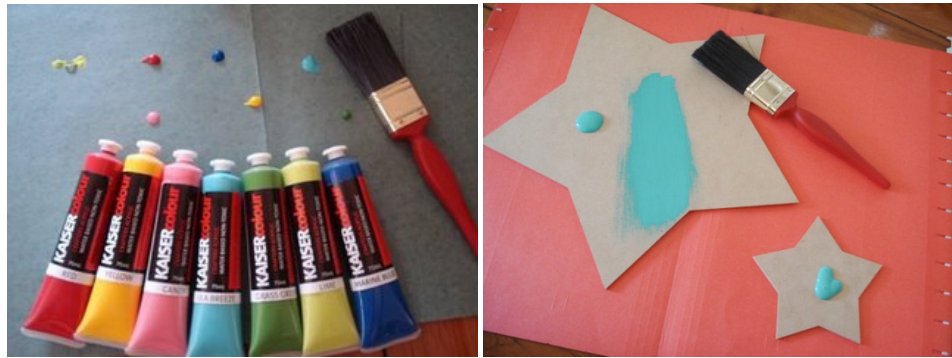


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depends on the type of covering you select. With spray paint, I recommend drilling first, then painting. With goopy paint like acrylic or bonded materials, I suggest covering the craft board first and then drill.

BOARD PREP STEP 2: Mark location of your holes roughly 1-2cm from edge on your board. For the shapes above and for purposes of the tutorial, I refer to five holes. On larger boards, you may want to include a center hole. You do not have to be precise as the final step determines how flat things hang instead of the precision balance. *Hurrah for that!* Using a hand-drill, make a small hole at each location marked. Choose a bit size big enough for your fishing line and small enough that your beads won't slip through. Optionally sand the edges of the holes and board with extra fine sandpaper for a smoother finish.

BOARD PREP STEP 3: Finish your craft board with the paint of your choice. I initially used acrylics, but my husband decided spray-painting would be more fun.



Craig's tip: If you are spray-painting, you can insert a doll-maker needle or small skewer inside one of the drilled hole to help you hold the board while you paint. When you are finished you can insert the other end in a candle. Allow to dry overnight.

CREATING FABRIC DOLLOPS

While your board is drying, it's a good time create our fabric dollops.

FABRIC DOLLOPS STEP 1: Trim your fabric into reasonably sized pieces to work with. It's much easier to sew smooth curves if you aren't trying to rotate large bulky pieces through your sewing arm. I usually cut the fabric into 5-10" pieces. Be sure to leave plenty of room around the designs for seam allowance.

FABRIC DOLLOPS STEP 2: Pin your front and back together. If you are making double-sided dollops you need to align the pattern. A window or lightbox is very handy to see if your fabric is lined up. More tips on alignment in the next step.

FABRIC DOLLOPS STEP 3: Determine where to sew. With single-sided or symmetric dollops, where to sew is usually straight forward. Choose a path with relatively smooth curves and outline your object with as much border as you like. For the Russian dolls, I've opted for no border because they already have a smooth outline.



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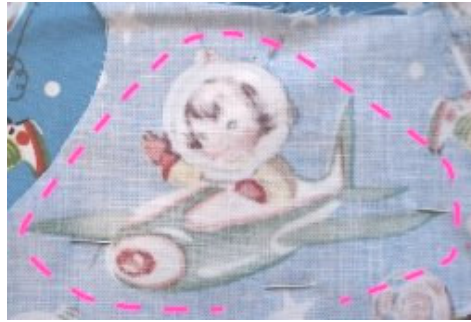
More often than not, your design will be asymmetric or complex which means you need to determine a boundary for sewing that works for both the front and the back. First, mark the key features of the design from that you want to preserve. In this photo, I've marked the edges of the wings, and bottom of her spaceship.



Flip over the pinned fabrics over to show the reverse piece. Do not unpin, keep fabrics with right sides facing. You will see the mid-section of your pins which give you an idea of what features from the back that you want to preserve.



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Next pin or mark this side to indicate where you want to sew or lightly trace the outline with a Hera or fabric marker ensuring a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance.

I've cut that close in this example, but it was because I was demonstrating that right sides were facing. I've also off her antenna and edge of the wing.. No worries. No one will look that closely.

FABRIC DOLLOPS STEP 4: Using a very tight stitch width, sew along your marked path leaving 1" gap for turning on the straightest edge you can find. Avoid leaving the opening at the very top.

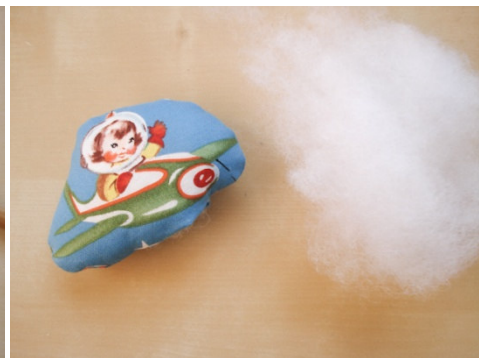


FABRIC DOLLOPS STEP 5: Cut around the edge of your sewing leaving rough $\frac{1}{4}$ " around the edges and slightly more at the opening.

Next, clip around your curves and notch any indentations like the necks of the Russian dolls in the example. You do not need to clip or notch at the opening. This will make for smoother shapes on your mobile.

FABRIC DOLLOPS STEP 6: Turn inside out and then run a lacquered chopstick or turning tool around inside edge to push out any stubborn areas. Do not push hard with your chopstick and by all means do not use a wooden takeaway chopstick. *No one likes splinters.*

FABRIC DOLLOPS STEP 7: Stuff lightly with toyfill, just enough to hold its shape.



FABRIC DOLLOPS STEP 8: For this step, you will need clear wire to hang mobile with. Monofilament wire found in craft stores is ideal, but my local shop was out. I opted for



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fishing line instead. Fishing line has a tendency to yellow overtime, so I selected a slightly blue tinted one to counteract the yellowing. Also grab a spare ugly button or jump ring which will not be seen.

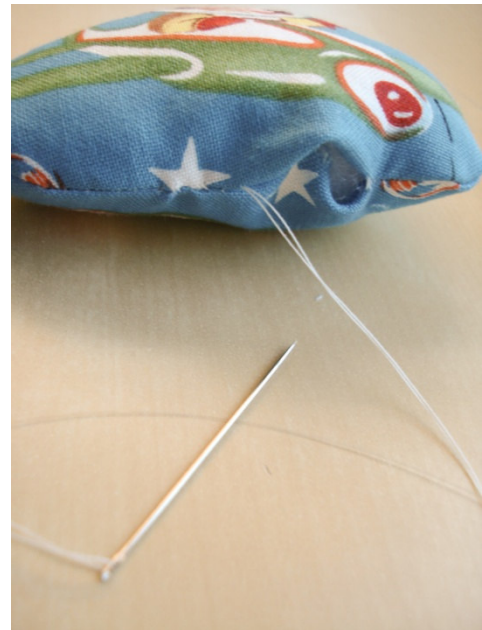


To prepare your first dollop, cut approximately 40" (1 m) of clear line.

Because fishing line and monofilament wire is more slippery than most threads, a standard quilting knot may not hold. Using a fishing line knot, attach your ugly button or jump ring to your fishing line. YouTube has tutorials on fishing knots. (<http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=llfEuy-S5wQ>)

Now using a needle, pull the clear wire and button through the opening in your fabric dollop. Continue threading the cable through the top of your dollop. The button will end up inside your dollop wedged against the toyfill. This helps ensure the wire won't slip out of the dollop.

FABRIC DOLLOPS STEP 9: Using normal thread, close your fabric dollop with a ladder stitch or slip stitch and set aside for later. Repeat with other bottom dollops. If you want to have multiple dollops on the same string, I will teach you how to attach the higher ones in the next step.



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ASSEMBLY

There are four basic parts to assembling the mobile. The craft board, the fabric dollop strands, beads and an eye hook. We have already painted our craft board and prepared our fabric dollops strands.

BEADS

During this tutorial, I will refer to three types of beads. These could, in fact, all be identical, but it will help with assembly to name them. So here's a quick bead vocabulary breakdown.



Top Bead – bead at the top of a mobile which holds the strands together (large blue bead at top)

Key Point Beads – beads attached to each dollop strand which the craft board will rest on (small blue beads directly under star)

Decorative Beads – beads that are attached to the wire and provide no support or stability to the mobile (free floating beads above birds)

I've found beads that are roughly 4mm are an ideal size for decorative and key point beads. Square and round beads work equally well. Make sure you choose a solid material. Shell or wood based beads may crack under the strain. For the top bead, use something a bit larger.



ASSEMBLY STEP 1: Assembly begins by adding decorative beads to your strands. Placement of decorative beads is up to you. Add as many or few as you like.

To add decorative beads, draw your wire through the bead then loop back around and through again as pictured. *Apologies, it's hard to take photos of transparent wire.*

Loop two more times. When you are finished, you should see three small loops of wire on the outside of your bead. This ensures the bead won't slip down the thread. Give your bead a slight tug to make sure it is firmly held by your wire. If your bead has a very large opening, you may need to loop through more times.

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Extra fabric dollops are attached in a similar way as decorative beads. Thread the clear wire through the bottom of your dollop and bring wire out of your unsewn opening. Add a bead to your clear wire, looping around three times. Then thread the wire back inside your dollop and out the top pulling the wire taut to embed the bead inside of your dollop. This solid bead will keep the upper dollops from sliding down the wire. Ladder or slip stitch dollop closed after stringing.

ASSEMBLY STEP 2: Next we want to add the key point beads. For this step, I like to lay all five of my bottom dollops side by side on the floor. I'm a random gal, so I don't measure the distance between the height of the key point beads and the dollop. I just try to ensure I get a bit of variation so they hang at different lengths. If you are very obsessive, you can measure and place them exactly to the height you like. This is the distance that the craft board will sit above your dollops. Key point beads are added exactly like decorative beads with a triple loop.

The next three steps feel a tad like juggling. An extra set of hands to help wouldn't hurt, but it can be achieved solo.

ASSEMBLY STEP 3: Slide your dollop strands with decorative beads and key point beads through the holes in your craft board. You do not need to pull the wires tight quite yet. Continue sliding each of your wires through your decorative bead so all five strands come through the center of the bead. Do not loop back around this bead. It will freely slide up and down the strands.

ASSEMBLY STEP 4: Now carefully pull each strand tight so the craft board rests directly on the key point beads. This will take a bit of juggling to ensure it sits flat but it can be achieved without worrying about balance and weight of the dollops. Instead try to make sure the top bead is perfectly centered over your board. That way all five strands will be equidistant to resting points. If one or two don't touch, but it is basically flat then don't bother fiddling with it. No need for perfection, we like things with character!





ASSEMBLY STEP 5: Once you are happy with how your mobile hangs, use a single fishing knot to attach all five strands to your eye hook. Trim the ends of the strands, but leave enough tail to ensure the knot does not slip back out.



Hang up, sit back and enjoy!

WRAP UP

Important Safety tip: Due to long strings and small parts, caution must be taken when hanging mobiles around small children.

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This tutorial was created in February 2009 by Amy Gunson of Badskirt for Sew, Mama, Sew's Fat Quarter Month. This document cannot be reproduced without permission of the author.

A number of resources are available for questions or comments on this tutorial. Have fun and happy crafting!

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