

Create it ... for less

I joke (sort of) with my husband that I have a job to support by crafting addiction. I'm embarrassed to write that I have DOZENS of tubs of yarn, boxes of fabric and containers of cross-stitch kits in my corner (half) of the basement. It almost makes me dizzy to think of the money I have tied up in crafting supplies.

When you start a hobby, the financial impact on your budget is something you need to consider. Quilters will tell you that their hobby is an expensive one. But it doesn't have to be that bad. My co-worker Merri has a few tips on how to save some dough before you build your next quilt sandwich.

First, shop the sales, but don't skimp on quality. "You might be tempted to visit one of those chain discount stores for some of the more inexpensive fabrics, but resist the temptation," Merri says. All 100 percent cotton fabric is not the same! When you have invested hours and hours in a quilt that you hope will be passed down from generation to generation, the last thing you want to happen is for the seams to come out or for the fabric to tear. That's why, in quilting cotton, quality is key.

But quality can be expensive. Why is there such a difference in price for varying 100 percent cotton fabrics? It basically comes down to three things: cotton staple length, thread count and the fabric finishing process.

Longer cotton fibers, or a longer staple length, make stronger fabric, but they cost more. And you know the difference between high thread count and low thread count bed sheets. The same is true for quilting cotton. But, the higher the thread count, the more cotton it takes to make an inch of fabric and the more expensive the fabric. Manufacturers add a final finish to quality fabrics. This seals the dyes and gives the fabrics a softer feel or "hand." But cheap fabrics don't get a final finish. So, they feel stiffer and they wrinkle more easily. And some manufacturers try to disguise inferior fabrics with heavy layers of starch or other chemicals. This makes the fabric look thick and stable. But it's only temporary. Once you wash out the chemicals, you're left with thin, limp fabric.

There is a place for those cheaper fabrics in quilting, and that's another tip from Merri. Practice your pattern with the cheap stuff, she says. Don't use your top quality cotton for the first couple blocks you make. Use the inexpensive fabric for those practice blocks until you feel comfortable enough to start the real thing.

Keep an eye out for sales and routinely shop the "Clearance" section of your local quilt or quality craft store, Merri says. And become a coupon clipper. Some stores, like The Craft Barn, accept competitor coupons for in-store sales. One 50 percent off one cut of fabric coupon can come in really handy.

One of Merri's best tips is to plan carefully. Make sure you are getting the most out of a piece of fabric so you don't waste anything, she says. It may seem like a big puzzle or feel like you're playing Tetris, but when you've paid \$15 dollars for a yard of fabric, you want to get the most out of it that you can.

Employees of your local quilt shop or quality craft store can be a big help, too. They can clue you in to when certain items will be going on sale. So with a little research, planning and coupon clipping, you can save quite a bit on your quilting fabric and supplies. Which will give you more time to Dream it. Create it. Love it.