

Getting Started with Machine Embroidery



Welcome crafty folk, to the realm of Urban Threads. If you're reading this, then I'm going to take a wild guess and say you're looking to learn a little about machine embroidery. Well, today I'm going to show you how to start. First thing you need to know is how to set up that shiny machine of yours...

Products Used

Lonely Robot (Sku: ESP10006-1)

Steps To Complete



To start, get the darn thing out of the box. Keep in mind these suckers can be heavy, and they're pretty darn expensive too. It would be a shame to end your embroidery career on step one, so take it out carefully. All right then? Moving on...



I know there are many people in the world opposed to this, not limited to males lost while driving, but you're going to need to have a gander at the instructions. If you like you can just stare intently at them for awhile, like I tend to do, but I also tend to mess things up and have to dig them back out again...so maybe you should just read them. Or at least take a good hard look at the pictures.



You might notice that your machine comes set up as a sewing machine. There's a removable section you'll need to take off so you can attach your embroidery arm. I had a short panic attack until I realized the arm came in a separate box, so learn from my mistakes and look about a bit before you freak. The arm slides on just the same as the last one slid off.



Plug it in, switch it on, and if you have a machine that needs to hook up to a computer, do that too. Don't laugh, you know at least once in your life you thought something wasn't working because you forgot to plug it in.



If you're like me and have a machine without a fancy little computer built in, install the software that came with your machine. This is usually a simple step of "stick in CD and click install", but if things don't go well, don't blame me for the ineptitude of your operating system. Find a helpful nerd to assist you.

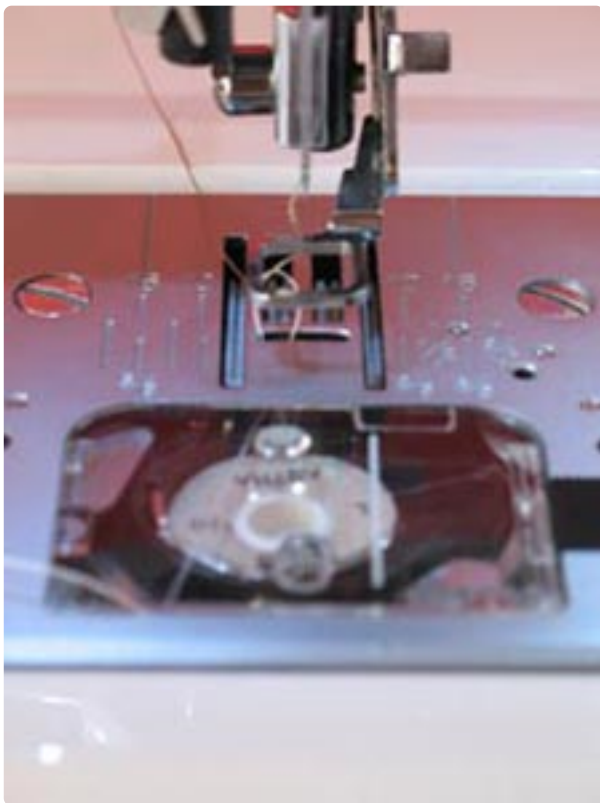


So...time to set up for embroidering. Thread the machine according to its instruction manual (see...I told you you'd have to read it...). My machine threads remarkably similar to a regular sewing machine, so if you've done any other sewing you're in familiar territory. Make sure you get it through all the hoops and doodads (technical term) otherwise your machine will beep angrily and refuse to sew.



Open up the shiny cover that slides over the bobbin case and insert a bobbin. Your machine might have come with bobbins, but if not you can wind one (refer to that manual again!).

You can see from the little graphic on the right of my machine that you hook the thread around a catch and back up again. Once you've done that, just leave the thread loose, and put the case back on. You'll pull it up through the machine next.



In order for your machine to embroider a design properly, it uses top thread and bobbin thread.

The timing of your machine is set so that it can make these stitches at the speed of light (actually, about 600 per minute, but that's still pretty fast).

So, to set the bobbin thread correctly, turn the wheel on the side of your machine to lower the needle once. When it comes back up it will catch the bobbin thread and pull it up in a little loop. Use a scissors or other small implement to pull it all the way out of the machine and drape it over the back of the machine. Make sure your top thread goes through the metal sewing foot and over the back as well, following the bobbin thread.



And now on to embroidering! First you'll need to hoop your material. My machine comes with two hoop sizes. Make sure your chosen design fits inside your hoop, or your machine gets grumpy. Before you sew on anything too precious, I would advise sewing on some scrap to test it out.



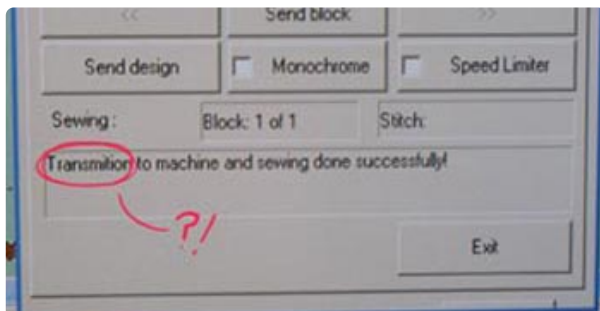
Fabric isn't really made to support the stitches that we want to add to it, so use "stabilizer" under the fabric when embroidering. You can get it online, or from fabric and sewing supply stores, too. There are a bunch of different brands, makes, models, versions, sequels, and types, so you might need to experiment to find the kind that you like. I hooped scrap material that's a similar color to the one I'll be sewing out on later, just to test colors and such. Cut a piece of stabilizer and fabric that's a little bit bigger than your hoop. Hoop it together, and when you do, make sure that it's taut, no slack. And even though the experts advise not to do this, I have been known to tug (gently, really gently) at the edges to take up any slack. When the fabric and stabilizer are snug, but not stretched, you're ready to rock.



I loaded up on of my favorite scribbles design, a sweet little robot with a balloon. He's quick and small and fits inside my hoop nicely. Load him up, make sure your thread and bobbin are cool, and go!



Watch with wonder as little robot sews out in front of your eyes. You might notice in some places that there seems to be thread where there shouldn't be, like between little robot's eyes. These are normal, you just trim them away when the design is done.



Make sure to keep an eye out for any warnings or messages your computer gives you. Read them carefully... because somebody else sure didn't. Spell check anyone?



Once you're done sewing, check to make sure your design looks ok. My little robot has some tension issues. Perhaps he didn't get enough hugs as a wee bot. Do you see that white thread on the top? That's the bobbin thread not behaving. To fix this, adjust the tension on your machine, shown below. And if you're really lazy (or some would say efficient), use a colored marker to fill in the white bits.





So, now you're really ready to rock out. Find something spiffy that isn't quite spiffy enough yet. I found this cute tee at target. Blue bunny thought it looked tasty, but thinks it could look yummiier with a robot on it. Most things do.



So, just follow the same steps again! I hooped my tee up with a bit of stabilizer, and now my shirt has some robot love. Don't worry, I'll go into greater detail in another project about the specifics of sewing on tees. So now you know the basics...go make a plethora of cool things!