

Improv Flying Geese Triangles

by Maria Shell

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Host Susan Brubaker Knapp and quilt artist Maria Shell

Materials

- Fabric—See note below
- Sewing machine with a straight stitch and ¼" foot
- Design wall (a large piece of flannel or batting works fine)

Note: Select a palette of 8–12 fabrics. For this exercise, start small with fat quarters or ¼" yard pieces. I prefer solids over prints as they create the most graphic results. If you don't have solids, tonal prints or batiks will work. When I build a palette, I am always looking for a selection of fabric that is beautiful, dynamic, and each color holds its own. By "holds its own" I mean that no matter where that fabric ends up in the composition, it clearly remains the same color—it is not influenced by the colors around it.

It is super fun to make improv Flying Geese units. This simple bit of patchwork has a lot of potential both as an in-dependent unit and as part of a larger quilt block. Here are easy steps to follow to create your own scrappy improv Flying Geese units.

DIRECTIONS

1. Decide if you are going to use a ruler or not to cut the initial strips of fabric. I usually use a ruler for this step. I cut 1 strip from every fabric to measure 5" wide by the length of the fabric. Keep the fabric folded selvedge to selvedge and iron any other creases out of the fabric strips.
2. Now cut the fabric stripes into 5" squares. I use the lines on the mat and no ruler for this step. You can cut the squares to any size you like. Just realize the final triangle plus background fabric will be about 1" smaller all the way around.

Note: It is up to you to decide if you are going to use a ruler for all of the steps. The more you use a ruler, the more controlled the lines will be. The less you use the ruler, the wonkier the piecing will be.

3. Cut triangle shapes out of the squares. Place the 5" square on the cutting mat with the center of the square positioned over a line. You will be cutting toward that line. Cut from the lower right corner toward the center of the square and then repeat with the lower left corner. Use the lines on the mat to help you make sure the diagonal line lands in the center of the square—that is where you want it. If you use a ruler to cut the diagonal line, it will be a straighter line resulting in less wonkiness.
4. Go to the sewing machine and sew 1 skinny triangle to 1 fat triangle. Select colors while sitting at the machine. Pair as you go. Some fabrics

may turn out to be rejects, and they never find a pair. This is okay and all part of the process. The pieces may not line up exactly. This is part of working with improvisationally cut pieces. Just line the edges up the best you can and stitch. Sew from the top single point toward a base point with the skinny triangle on top. Do not worry about the difference in shapes between the triangles. After you stitch, you will be gently re-shaping them with the rotary cutter.

5. Iron the seams toward the skinny triangle. This will reduce bulk in the next seam. The triangles will be slightly misshapen. The sizes of the triangles will vary quite a bit at this point. Be patient. You will make them approximately all the same size later.
6. With the rotary cutter, slice off the little bit of fabric that extended past the edges of the triangle while also smoothing the edges of the skinny triangle shape. Taking the time to do this step now will make the finished triangles fit together more easily.
7. Repeat the process again for the other side of the triangle. Stitch, as before, from the single point at the top of the triangle toward the base. Stitch with the large triangle on top of the skinny triangle. Iron the seam away from the center triangle. The triangles, at this point, will vary a lot in size and many of them will be misshapen.
8. Now, using the rotary cutter, shape these triangles so that they have straight edges. We still don't care

if they are the same size, but we do care that the edges are nice and straight. It is okay to chop off points. Every triangle needs to have its edges shaped so when you to stitch them together the quilt will lie flat.

9. Once the triangles are shaped and are approximately the same size, they are ready to be used in a quilt. Use a design wall to explore possibilities. Take photos of the arrangement before trying another layout—that way, you can duplicate a previous design if you prefer it over the others you try.

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RESOURCES

IMPROV PATCHWORK—
DYNAMIC QUILTS MADE WITH
LINE & SHAPE by Maria Shell