

by France Nadeau

Embroidery floss is different from thread in that it may be separated. In fact, six strands are intertwined to form the floss. And those six strands give you choices. You can use as many strands as you like. I personally use either one, two, three or six strands. I really cannot recall ever using four or five strands. According to the type of embroidery you make - cross stitching or regular embroidery - the effects will vary. (I know there are other forms of embroidery, like Brazilian embroidery or Japanese embroidery, but they are yet unknown to me.)

To read this text from my blog (and be able to enlarge the pictures by clicking on them), follow this link: <http://francenadeau.com/blog/embroidery-floss-how-many-strands-do-i-use/>

Cross Stitching

For cross stitching, your choice makes a big difference. I use one, two or six strands. If you look at the pictures below, you can see how the number of strands affects the appearance. (The rose on the right is the one I used to make the [birthday card](#) I told you about.)

In the left cross stitches, I used the whole floss (six strands). I love the tapestry look created by the six strands. The colors are intense. We do not see the Aida cloth or fabric that is under the floss. The texture is agreeable to the eyes and the hands. The cross stitch is dense and thick. On the other hand, it is harder to do and definitely requires more energy. You have to push your needle through the hole, even more when the needle is going through a hole for the fourth time. Also, the fabric or the Aida cloth you are working on tend to distort a little.

On the right cross stitches, I used two strands. The needle goes smoothly through the cloth or fabric. You can make a pattern very quickly, even more when the Xs stand alone (as for the heart). The Xs are clearly visible and give the work a more naive look that is quite charming. On the other hand, the cross stitch being less dense, we can see the Aida cloth or fabric that is under the floss. Because of that, the colors are less intense, less "true". A white or beige background will tone down the colors. A red or black background will darken the colors. Also, as we clearly see a X, the edges of a motif is not smooth. And the curves... are not really curves.

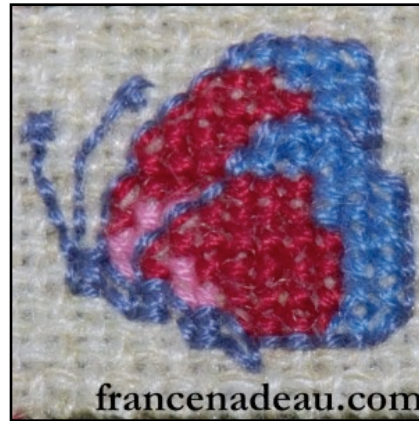
My Attitude About Embroidery

I will not tell you what is the right or the wrong way of doing stitches. I am not an expert embroiderer and do not pretend to be a master in this trade. I make embroidery for the pleasure of doing it, the gesture of passing a needle through fiber and seeing a motif taking form gradually. I am not seeking perfection and never expect it from others. My only wish is that you can also enjoy stitching!

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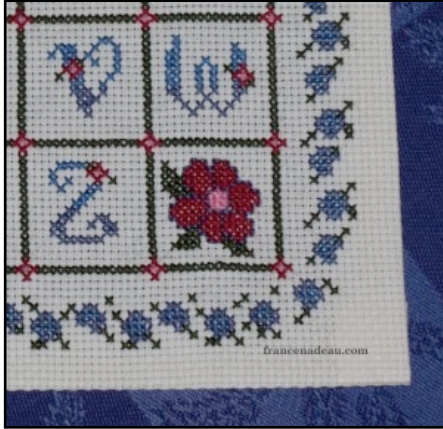
Which brings me to the occasions where I use only one strand. Firstly, to create or accentuate a contrast between two or more colors. Secondly, to smooth a curve or an edge. It is done after all the Xs of a motif have been stitched. For this, I can use a very small needle that will glide smoothly between the already made stitches (it is quite hard, if not downright impossible, to pass more than one strand through the opening of the smaller needles). The two following pictures, from my [Mid-Summer Abecedary](#), demonstrate such a use. Please note that the butterfly and the flower are bigger in the pictures than in reality. Therefore, it looks like I used more than one strand. But it really is one strand... that is itself made of a few twisted threads.



The following bird, from my [Blue Bird Abecedary](#), is an other good example.



On a side note, below are two pictures demonstrating how different a cross stitch may look according to the fabric. The first was made on an Aida cloth while the second was made on burlap. Both projects were made with 2 strands.

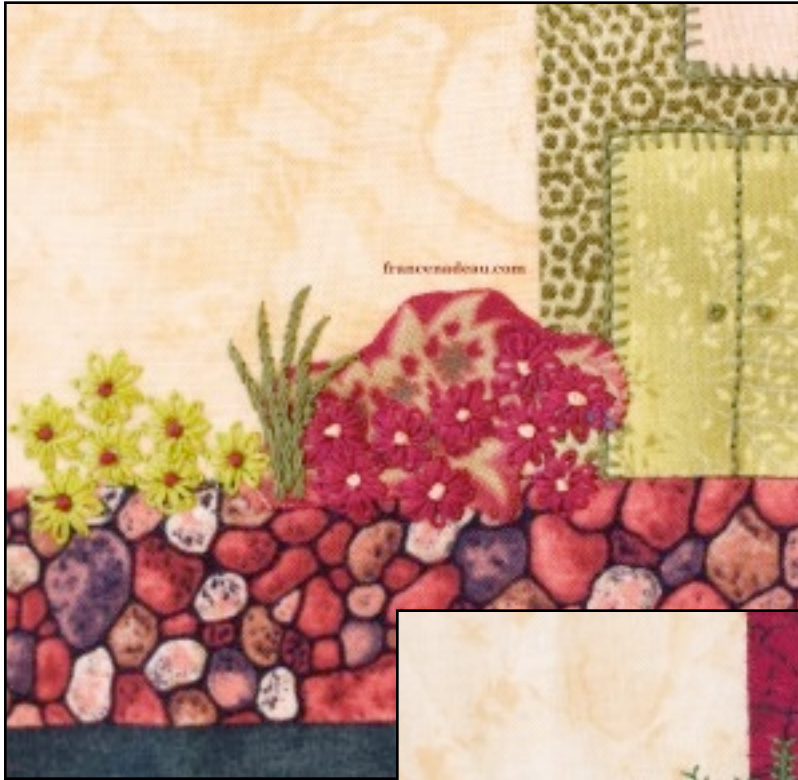


Regular Embroidery

For regular embroidery, I use two, three or six strands. I use six strands when I feel a need for emphasis, like for the veins on the maple leaf below, from my [Fallen Leaves quilt](#) (the blanket stitch around the leaf was made with two strands). But I use the whole floss sparingly. I have to use a bigger needle that usually leaves relatively big holes in the fabric. And passing a big needle through a tightly woven fabric (compared to Aida cloth and burlap) is straining. Doing a few stitches is quite fine, but doing a whole project in this fashion is hard on the hands, particularly the fingers.



I mostly use two strands. Sometimes, three strands for thicker details. Here are a few examples from my [Downtown Houses](#), which were made exclusively with two strands:



With two strands, I can use a relatively small needle that goes through the fabric easily, with no hardship. This ensures that embroidery remains enjoyable and relaxing. When the background is made of cotton, two strands is definitely my choice. If the fabric is thicker, like wool, three strands is more suitable. But using a small needle means that the blunt tip of the needle does not feel so blunt after some minutes. Even if your fingertips are not baby smooth, and mines are not, a small hole take form on the fingertip you use repeatedly. Hence the need to invest in a good thimble. You can see the thimble I use in the following picture. This thimble is my good friend, let me tell you. I can stitch for hours with it and without any pain, whether it is embroidery, appliqués or general hand sewing.



I hope you liked reading my text about embroidery floss. If you have an opinion different than the ones I stated, please do not hesitate to let me know. I would like reading about it. If you agree, you can also let me know. I would read you with as much pleasure. You can contact me at france@francenadeau.com

I have few embroidery [tutorials](#) on my [web site](#). Maybe my post made your fingers itching for a needle... They are free and in pdf. In English and in French. The tutorials can give you, I hope, a good start. And making a few lazy daisies on a piece of fabric is, in my opinion, a good way to enjoy life.

France

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