

Retro Fun: Fancy Border Tea Towels

Editor: Liz Johnson

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As with so many things 'tea related,' the Tea Towel comes to us by way of Great Britain where it originated as a special drying cloth for expensive tea services. Linen was the fabric of choice because its smooth, simple weave was unlikely to scratch fine china or glass. Servants were usually charged with hand hemming and embroidering the tea towels. Their embellishment ranged from simple hand stitching to extremely intricate embroidery. Besides drying, the towels were also often used as a cozy – wrapped around a tea pot, or as a basket warmer – wrapped around or laid on top of a serving bowl to keep scones, cakes and biscuits warm. Our Retro Fun Tea Towels with their fancy *Simply Sweet* fabric borders are more casual than their noble ancestors, but are still a wonderful addition to any kitchen and a perfect gift for a wedding shower or house warming.

This is a great project to use up leftover fabric scraps.

A BIG thanks to our new friend, Barbara Jones, the designer of the beautiful *Simply Sweet* fabric collection for [Henry Glass & Company](#). She very generously provided all the fabric for our retro kitchen projects, and has it all in-stock and available for order on her site, [QuiltSoup](#). We looked at a lot of fabrics for this series, but Barbara's designs are the ones that jumped right off the page as the perfect vintage kitchen combo. There are additional [colorways](#) and designs within the collection. [Check it out](#).

Sewing Tools You Need

- Any Sewing Machine (we recommend the [Janome DC2010](#))

Fabric and Other Supplies



All Simply Sweet fabric is available at QuiltSoup

Supplies listed are for THREE towels

Tea Towel #1:

- 1/8 yard of 44-45" fabric for the wide feature band: *we used Barbara Jones' Simply Sweet in #5117-1 Blue Floral Stripe for Henry Glass & Co. Fabric*
- 1/8 yard of 44-45" fabric for the narrow accent band: *we used Barbara Jones' Simply Sweet in #5123-8 Narrow Red Stripe for Henry Glass & Co. Fabric*

Tea Towel #2:

- 1/8 yard 44-45" fabric for the wide feature band: *we used Barbara Jones' Simply Sweet in #5120-42 Jumbo Pink Dot on Yellow for Henry Glass & Co. Fabric*
- 1/8 yard 44-45" fabric for the narrow accent band: *we used Barbara Jones' Simply Sweet in #5117-1 Blue Floral Stripe for Henry Glass & Co. Fabric*

Tea Towel #3:

- 1/8 yard 44-45" fabric for the front: *we used Barbara Jones' Simply Sweet in #5120-82 Jumbo Pink Dot on Red for Henry Glass & Co. Fabric*
- 1/8 yard 44-45" fabric for the back: *we used Barbara Jones' Simply Sweet in #5117-1 Blue Floral Stripe for Henry Glass & Co. Fabric*
- Three tea towels: *we used Flour Sack Towels from Crate & Barrel*
- All purpose thread to match fabrics
- All purpose thread in contrasting colors for top stitching emphasis: *we used red on tea towel #1 to match the red stripe accent band and blue on tea towels #2 and #3 to match the blue stripe accent bands*
- See-through ruler
- Tape measure
- Fabric pen or pencil
- Iron and ironing board
- Scissors or rotary cutter and mat
- Straight pins

Getting Started

We've given supply notes above for all three towels; the instructions show just one towel. Repeat them over and over for as many towels as you'd like to crank out.

1. Cut one 3" x 44" (width of fabric) strip from the accent fabric (*Simply Sweet Narrow Red Stripe in our sample*).

2. Cut one 4" x 44" (width of fabric) strip from the feature fabric(*Simply Sweet Blue Floral Stripe in our sample*).
3. Measure the width of your tea towel. Add 1" to this measurement, then trim down both your fabric strips to this length.
4. Remove the pre-sewn hem from one end of the tea towel.



At Your Sewing Machine & Ironing Board

1. Fold the smaller accent strip in half lengthwise, right sides together. Sew across both short ends, using a $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam allowance.



2. Clip corners and trim seam allowances to $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Turn right side out and press.
3. Pin the accent strip to the cut edge of the tea towel with the right side of the strip against the wrong side of the tea towel, aligning the raw edges.



4. Lay the 4" feature fabric strip right side down on top of the accent strip/tea towel. Center the feature fabric strip so there is an extra ½" at each end.



5. Using a ½" seam allowance, sew across the width of the tea towel through all the layers. Start and stop at the exact edge of the tea towel.

NOTE: Because of the gauzy nature of the tea towel, sew the seam with the tea towel face down on the bed of the machine against the feed dogs. This will help all the layers stay in line.

6. Fold the feature strip and the tea towel up on either side of the accent strip. The accent strip becomes the bottom of the towel and the feature strip is now laying face up against the right side of the tea towel. Press the seam.



7. Fold the feature strip down - away from the tea towel so you again reveal the seam. Press up the long raw edge of the feature strip $\frac{1}{2}$ ".



8. Fold in the extra fabric at each end of the feature strip $\frac{1}{2}$ " to match the edge of the tea towel. Press in place, adjusting as necessary to make sure the fabric's edge is super neat and flush with the edge of the tea towel.



9. Bring the feature strip back up against the front of the tea towel, keeping the edges flush and the fabric nice and flat against the front of the tea towel. Pin in place.



10. Re-thread your machine with the contrasting thread and edges stitch around all four sides of the feature strip. This top stitching will be quite visible, so be very careful to keep your seam line straight and remember to pivot at each corner.



NOTE: You could switch to a 1/4" foot and run its flange along the folded edge of the feature strip. Although a bit wider than the 1/8" of traditional edgestitching, it would ensure a lovely straight and even line of stitching.



Contributors

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Sample Creation and Instructional Outline: Michele Mishler

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