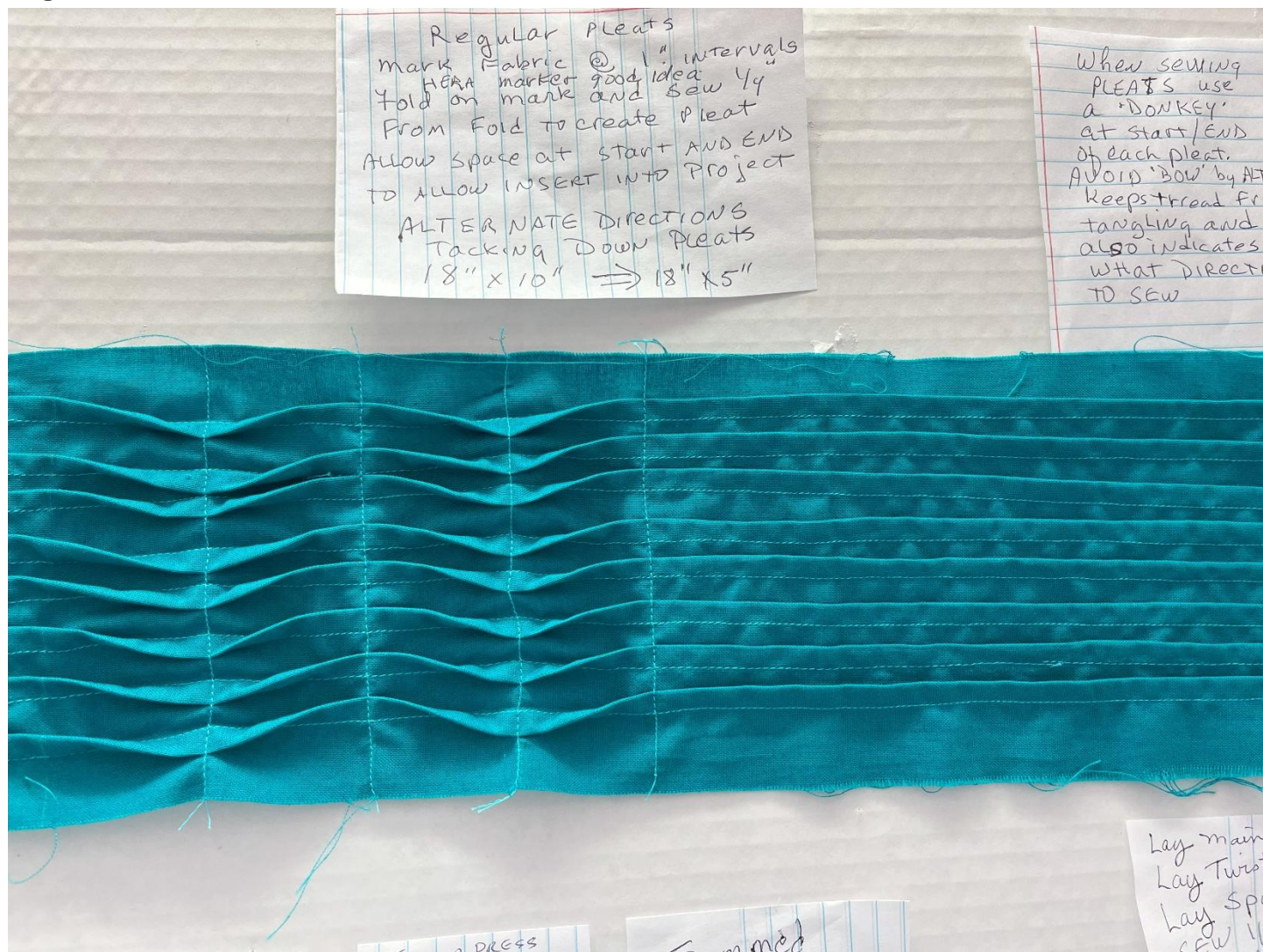


## Creating Pleats by Pat Clark January 10, 2026

Pleats can add dimension to your quilts and other sewn objects. Common uses have been in creating quilt borders, blocks with dimensions, and used as inserts into purses, bags, vests, clothing, etc. Here are just a couple of methods for making pleats along with some online resources to provide you with ideas and further instructions. Let your imagination go wild.

For awareness before starting, consider where your pleats will be inserted in your project. You may need to have the starting and ending part of your pleats to have enough room to use as seams when you insert. Similarly, you will need seams along the folded portion of your pleats for sewing them into your project. Play with adjusting the width of your pleat insert, taking notice of how the pleats appear when the side seams are narrow or wide, which varies the width of your pleats.

### **Regular Pleats:**



Creating Pleats

Mark your fabric at regular intervals (class example used 1 inch). A good tool is a hera marker – (if you press from the wrong side of the fabric, you will be able to see the crease mark on the front.) Once marked, fold the fabric wrong sides together (WST) along the marked line then stitch the width you will want your pleats (class example used ¼” from the fold.)

Once you have sewn as many pleats as you want, you then sew the pleats down all in the same direction on both sides of your piece (within the seam allowance where this this stitching doesn’t show).

The class example resulted in a ¼” pleat with ½” (mostly) between them. That half inch is measured from the sewn lines from one pleat to the next.

This is the basic pleat construction method you can use in your project, but there are ways to step it up a bit. Now you have your pleats all made, try:

- a) Sew the pleats in the opposite direction between the two sides. Flip each pleat as you go.
- b) Same as (a) above, but don’t go right down the center, vary it in a wave or other design

**How much fabric is needed?** The answer is: It depends. Do you want your pleats to have a little breathing room (gap) between them? Or snuggled next to each other? How wide (depth) do you want your pleats (narrow or wide) to be? I’ve tried to think of a rule of thumb to use with the calculations.

Due to folding the fabric in on the desired interval, then sewing to create your pleat, the actual pleat takes up twice as much fabric as the size (width) of the pleat. In the sample, pleats were sewn ¼” from the fold. This means that for each pleat, a half inch was required. And if you are trying to leave a ¼” gap of space between the pleats, you will need an inch between the lines you are going to sew as the pleats. (a ¼” pleat lays across ¼” of the gap, then ¼” of gap showing). This means for the gap, you figure out how much you want to cover with the pleat and how much you want exposed, if anything (you may want your pleats to butt up against each other). In the class sample, lines were drawn one inch apart, folded on the line and sewn with a ¼” depth. I started with an 18” by 10” piece, I made 8 pleats and ended up with an 18” by 5” piece.

I haven’t tested this, but I think if you are pleating away and run out of fabric, you could add another piece by sewing it so the seam will fall where the pleat will be sewn. Choose the edge that will be folded ‘up’. Using the class sample to describe it, sew the extension piece of fabric on to the bottom so the seam will align with the end of the gap. In other words where you will sew the pleat seam. Trim that seam to a little less than ¼”. Then the next step is to fold to make you next pleat. That seam for the extension should be covered up as you fold that pleat up – it will appear as if it is the seam that makes the pleat.

**Avoiding the bow curve:** When sewing the pleats, you want to start sewing from one end of the strip to the other, then the next pleat you want to sew from the edge you ended with back in the other direction. As with many piecing techniques, you don’t want to always sew long lines stitching in the same direction, or you will tend to stretch the fabric in one direction causing it bow out. Jennie Rayment has an easy way to remember which direction you should sew next: Use a leader/ender which she calls a donkey. Lead with a donkey (set your needle in the donkey hopping on), make a few stitches, arrive at the place to stitch

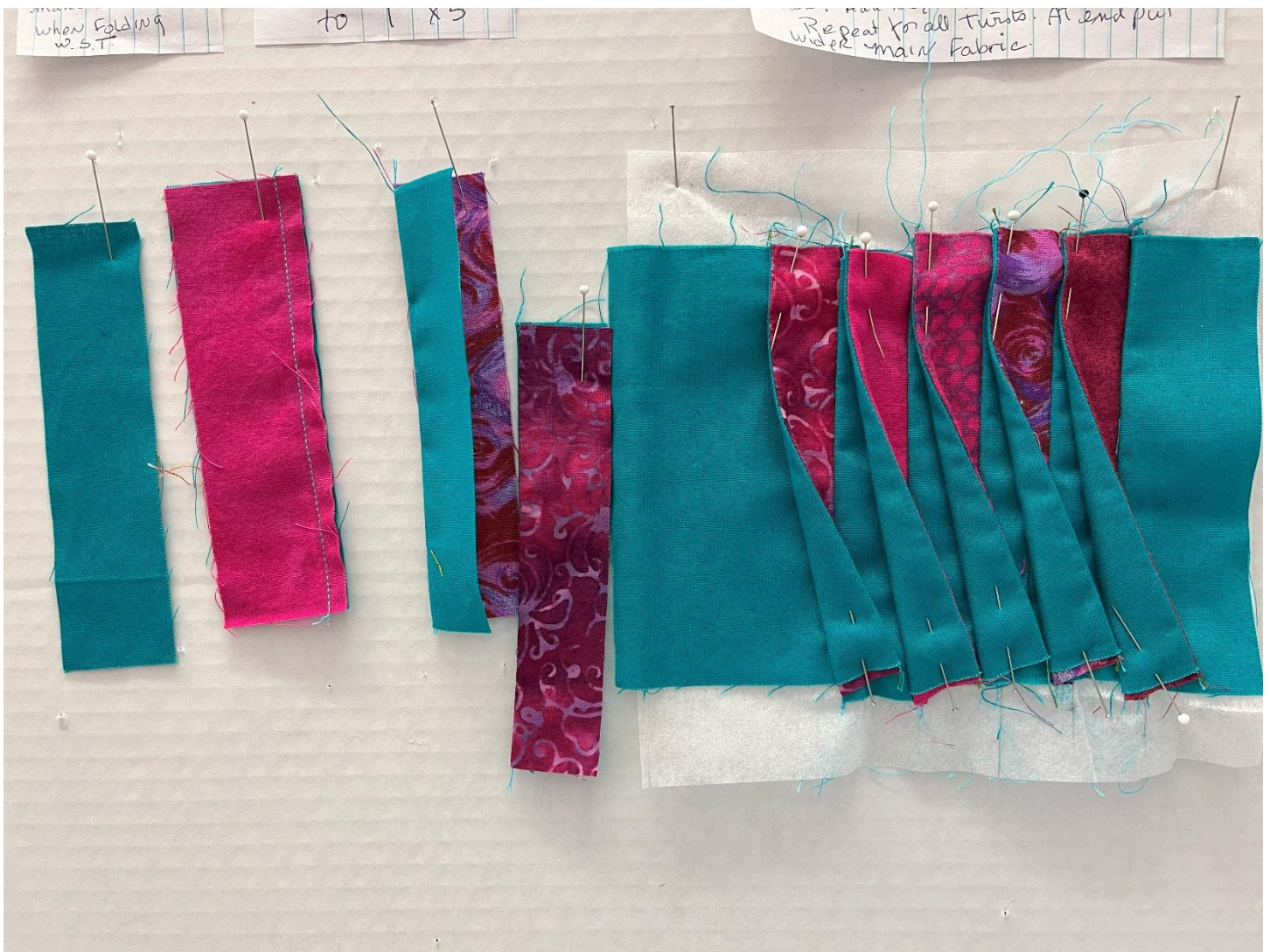
the pleat, hop off the donkey (do not cut thread) and stitch, get to the end and with a second donkey, stitch off the pleat onto the donkey's back. Now cut off the pleated fabric to free it (it should still have a donkey attached on the opposite side). You already have a donkey under your needle, so you know that the side that doesn't have a donkey dangling off of it is what goes under the needle next.

Resource: Jennie Rayment is a great resource on pleats and other textures through fabric manipulation. Her website is [Fabric Manipulation and Origami. Textured Piecing, books, classes, lectures and calico | Jennie Rayment](#)

Tuck into Texture by Jennie Rayment YouTube video has step by step making pleats.

This is her YouTube video on making tucks - [Tuck into Texture](#)

### **Pleats with a Twist:**



Twisted pleats are made essentially using the same method as regular pleats but when sewing down the sides, the pleats on one side go in the opposite direction as the other side. The twist will occur near the middle as the pleat flips, causing the back side of the pleat to show. In my opinion, these look better when the center area is not sewn down and the pleats start out butting against each other.

### **Adding more color/fabrics:**

You can make pleats with a twist out of all the same fabric, or pleats constructed by using 2 fabrics (keeping the background spacers and half of the constructed pleats out of the same fabric), or mixing it all up by using multiple fabrics. Having the pleats made with 2 fabrics looks impressive.

There are 3 component parts to this construction method, and you can vary the number of different fabrics to use depending on your design.

(1) The multi-fabric pleat where 2 fabrics make the pleat component, (2) the spacer area exposed underneath the twisted pleat and (3) the ends where the pleated section gets sewn into your project if a different fabric choice.

Creating the multi-fabric pleat: decide how wide you want your pleat to end up. Add a half inch to that for ¼” seam allowances and cut 2 contrasting fabrics using that width and the length you want your pleats to be (include seam allowances or what you need to sew the long sides into your project). With right sides together (RST) sew the long edge of two contrasting fabrics together. Finger press this seam open, then fold the pieces WST and iron it back closed – this will give a nice sharp edge to your pleat. Make sure the seam is exactly along the folded edge. Make as many pleats as your project needs.

Cut your spacers (the fabric that will show underneath your pleats). This should be the same ‘cut’ width measurement as the pleats.

Construct the pleated fabric by placing an end fabric right side up, lay the pleat on it, matching the raw edge. On top of this, place a spacer RST aligning the raw edge. The edge should have 4 layers of fabric (1 layer from end fabric, 2 layers from pleat, 1 layer from spacer). Sew ¼” seam. Fold the spacer out flat, lay the next pleat on it, then the next spacer on it (RST). Keep sewing a stack of spacer + pleat + spacer until the end where it will be spacer + pleat + ending fabric piece.

Your pleats should butt against each other. Sew one side down with the pleats facing all in the same direction. On the opposite side, fold the pleat in the opposite direction making the twist happen.

**CAUTION:** Please note that as you twist these up, the edge of the twist is at an angle and it will take up more space within the seam on that edge. When you go to sew this edge down, your seam will need to be sewn further in from the edge than you might expect. This must be accounted for by having a longer piece for your pleats. How much depends on your width of pleats (wider pleats will twist ‘Up’ further).

**Peek-a-Boo pleats:**

I didn't know what to call these, but it allows the spacer fabric to 'peek' out from behind the pleats. I also use the terminology of 'curtain' because when I got done, it looks like I have pulled curtains aside and can see what is outside the 'windows'. The construction method is similar to twisted pleats. But there is no need to sew 2 fabrics together to make a pleat, just use a wider fabric. Fold the curtain fabric in half WST. As was done under the twists, place an end fabric up, lay the curtain pleat on it, matching the raw edge. On top of this, place a peeking fabric RST aligning the raw edge. Pin. The edge should have 4 layers of fabric (1 layer from end fabric, 2 layers from curtain, 1 layer from peeking fabric). Sew  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam. Fold the peeking fabric out flat to lay in the next curtain followed along with the next peeking fabric. Keep sewing peeking + curtain + peeking until the end where it will be peeking + curtain + peeking end.

Instead of sewing pleats along the edge in one direction as you do with twisted pleats, you now need to take the curtain fabric and align its fold crease right on top of the stitching seam created when you sewed all 4 layers together. This is true for the opposite edge of the curtain also. You may want to pin both

edges down. The curtains will butt next to each other. Stitch the curtain flat within the seam allowances on both sides of your piece.

The next step I did was to open the curtains by taking the 2 edges together on a single curtain panel and hand-stitching (maybe add a small decorative bead) to gather those 2 edges together. These don't need to be straight down the middle. Imagine them going in a gentle wave curve.

Another consideration: It occurs to me that the instructions above for the pleated and peek-a-boo pleats are written so you can vary your fabric for your spacers. However, if you are going to have the spacers be all the same, you could use a longer piece of fabric then lay your pleat on this fabric, wrap it back over the raw edge then sew the seam which encases the seam. Then extend this fabric out (as the spacer), add the next pleat, wrap this fabric back to encase the seam. Repeat.

### **Resources:**

Here is a link to a Twisted Pleats tutorial that I found on Pinterest (this is a direct link to tutorial, you don't have to pass through Pinterest to get it:  
(the website title is page Shocking Hocking – don't let that frighten you).

[Twisted tutorial](#)

Here is Caryl Bryer Fallert's website:

[Bryerpatch Studio: Fine art quilts by Caryl Bryer Fallert-Gentry](#)

You will want to look at the Articles: Free Patterns and Instructions. She has retired and very generously put her classes online for free or see link below to go directly there. (My apology in advance because you will spend hours on her website looking at all the classes she has posted for free of her amazing work.)

### **August, 2018**

#### **[High Tech Tucks Complete Digital Workshop](#)**

Written by Caryl Bryer Fallert: I developed this three-dimensional technique in 1986 and taught it to many hundreds of students during my 30-year teaching career. I also sold the instructions on CD-ROM for many years. Now that I'm retired, I'm offering the complete workshop free of charge. This is a 26M PDF file, so please be patient as it loads. [CLICK HERE](#) to open.

You will need to scroll down quite a bit and it is a very large pdf so I recommend only viewing it online and not printing it.

On her Gallery, take a look at her Three of Diamonds quilt with the tucks for further inspiration.

Hope you are inspired to try your hand at dimensional embellishments on your quilts.

Pat Clark