

## How to choose your Wadding



Choosing wadding is always a topic that people like to discuss, whether you are new to quilting or someone with lots of experience. There are so many to choose from out there with lots of terminology that you may not always be familiar with.

I have prepared some information that will hopefully help you when coming to choose the wadding for your next projects, you may be finishing off or just about to start a new one. It is always worth experimenting with a wadding that you don't usually use as they all give a different feel to finished projects.

Wadding, or batting as it is often referred to in America, is the warmth layer between the quilt top and the backing fabric. For many quilters, the decision surrounding which wadding to choose starts with thoughts of the intended recipient of the quilt. For instance, if you are making a cot quilt for a new-born baby then your priorities may be to ensure the quilt is lightweight, not too warm and easily washable.

### Natural fibres, polyester or blends?

Natural fibre waddings are those that are available in cotton, wool, silk or bamboo.

**Cotton** is soft and breathable and a popular choice for many quilters who think, 'cotton fabric, cotton thread' then cotton wadding! Cotton wadding, if not pre-shrunk before use, gives a rather classic 'vintage' feel to projects which many quilters like. It is usually *low-loft* although various makes are now available giving you more options. It is often one of the most expensive waddings available but nevertheless, a quality product. Cotton wadding is available *with and without scrim*.

**Wool** wadding is a top choice for quilts used in damp and cool climates as it is able to absorb moisture and will still keep you warm if it becomes wet. It is usually *low-loft* but light, warm and really great at regulating body temperature and naturally flame retardant. Many quilters avoid using wool for two main reasons the cost and, the care needed when washing. Fortunately, now a days we have many more wool waddings coming on to the market that can be machine washed on a delicate cycle without the risk of shrinkage. However, you would never put a quilt with wool wadding in a tumble dryer. Wool wadding is often *needle-punched* to hold the fibres together or *thermally bonded*. No added chemicals are involved in either process, so the natural qualities of the fibre are maintained.

**Silk** wadding is a premium product and represents the ultimate in luxury for many quilters. Some silk products contain a small percentage of polyester which the manufacturer incorporates for binding of the fibres, reducing the chance of *bearding*. Silk wadding is generally very expensive and requires gentle treatment, including hand-washing and air drying.

**Bamboo** wadding is growing in popularity. It is naturally antibacterial so for sufferers of eczema or asthma this would be a top choice. Also, for the environmentally conscious quilter, bamboo is a fast growing, sustainable fibre that is relatively eco-friendly, although to make the bamboo fibres soft enough chemical processing is required. It is a lighter fibre than cotton, breathable, soft and machine washable.

**Polyester** wadding has been a popular choice of many quilters for years, as it comes in a variety of *lofts* (often graded as 3 ounce, 5 ounce or 8 ounce), is very durable and is much less costly than natural fibre wadding. It is very light, is subject to minimal shrinkage and is easily washed and dried. The downsides are; it isn't as breathable as natural fibre waddings, it doesn't *drape* particularly well and it does have the tendency to *beard*. It is one of the cheapest waddings available so a good option where cost is a factor.

**Blends** – Wadding is now available in a range of blends such as cotton/polyester, cotton/bamboo as well as eco-friendly recycled cotton/polyester. The ratio of blends can also vary from 50/50 to 70/30 or 80/20 so there is a lot to choose from. They offer the quilter the 'best of both worlds', especially if you are unsure which wadding to use. They are easy to work with and often loftier and lighter while still providing the benefits of natural fibres. They are also cheaper than 100% cotton or 100% bamboo waddings.

**The 80/20 blends are always a good choice if you are having your quilt long armed, they allow a little bit of stretch when placing on the frame for quilting.**

**Colour Choices** Waddings generally come in three colours, white, natural and black. It might not be the first thing you think of when deciding on wadding but the colour you pick can affect your finished quilt. Whilst white is the most commercially available and arguably the most popular, black is a much better choice for quilting using darker fabrics as it won't show through. So before you buy, make sure you think about which fabrics you'll be using for your quilt and which colour wadding would be most beneficial to you.

### **Amounts required**

Firstly, measure your finished quilt top and add at least 2" on all sides. Waddings come in rolls of varying widths which are available to buy by the metre. Most popular are the 90" wide and 120" wide. You can also purchase pre-measured packs in standard sizes for crib, twin, double and king. The actual measurements are noted on the packs so be sure to check that it is sufficiently large enough for your quilt. Strips of left-over wadding can be useful for all sorts of projects from bags to table runners or cushions and it is fine to join wadding with batting tape. Just lay two pieces of wadding together with edges touching (don't overlap or the resultant ridge will show) and iron on the batting tape to hold the two pieces together. Another top tip is to join the strips with a zig zag stitch on your machine. It doesn't matter if the strip is uneven as these are not noticeable once it is layered together.

Please bear in mind you will require additional wadding if I am doing your quilt for you.

## **Glossary of wadding terms**

Below is a short explanation of some of the terms used.

**Drape** – this is the way in which a quilt hangs, for example over the edge of a bed or over your lap. A good quality, natural fibre wadding will drape comfortably without being too stiff.

**Loft** – denotes the thickness and weight of the wadding. A low-loft wadding means it is thin whereas a high-loft wadding will be thicker or puffier.

**Bearding** – when fibres separate and push through the seams of the quilt top. This is more often a problem with the less expensive polyester waddings and can be largely avoided by pressing seams to one side rather than open.

**Needle-punched** – mechanically felted together by punching with hundreds of needles, causing the fibres to intertwine and bond together, making it denser.

**Thermally bonded** – heat is applied to bond the fibres together.

**Scrim** – a thin grid of polyester/synthetic stabiliser which is needle punched into the wadding to stabilise the fibres and prevent them from bearding. Also adds strength and stops the wadding from distorting and stretching.

**No scrim** – With no scrim, the stitches must be quilted closer together to keep the fibres from separating. Waddings with no scrim are a good choice for hand quilting.

Oh Sew Sweet stock a wide variety of wadding and are also very good at bringing in any waddings that you may require. [www.ohsewsweetshop.co.uk](http://www.ohsewsweetshop.co.uk)