

eBook
SERIES

Just SEW It!

The ABCs of Couching



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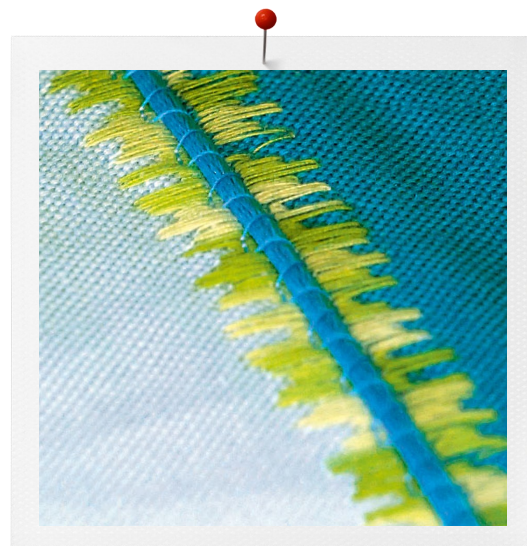
- ~ Fibers, Cords, & Yarns
- ~ Presser Foot Options
- ~ Simple Couching
- ~ Flat Couching
- ~ Narrow Cord Couching
- ~ Couched Edge
- ~ Freemotion Couching

Couching

A simple way to add color and texture to the surface of fabrics, couching started as a hand sewing technique that stitches cord and fibers to fabric. Adapted to machine sewing, it is one of the most versatile embellishment methods available because of the limitless combinations of fabric, fibers, stitches and colors.

The following stitch techniques are described in this eBook:

- Simple Couching
- Flat Couching
- Narrow Cord Couching
- Couched Edge
- Freemotion Couching



Fibers, Cords & Yarns

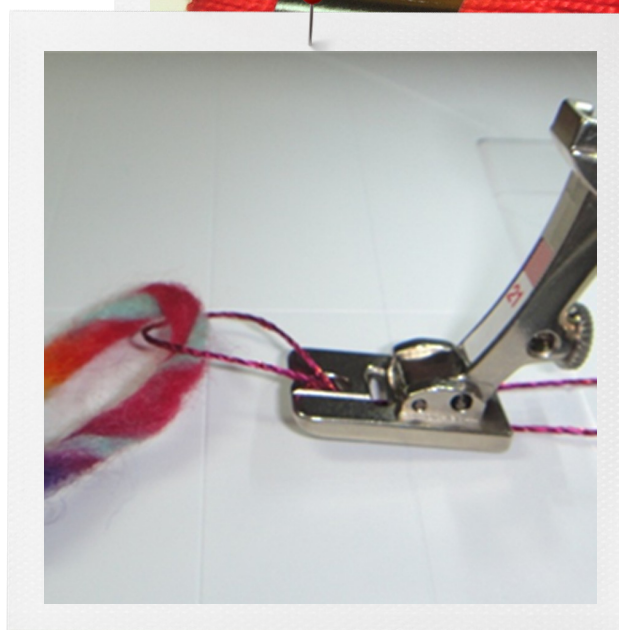
The choices of fibers to use for couching seem to be almost limitless. Looking at yarns alone offers a myriad of options, varying in color, fiber content, size, and texture. Small decorative cords such as embroidery floss, perle cotton, jute, hemp, and nylon cords add to the possibilities. All that needs to be done is to select those that work with the fabric type and color scheme for the current project.

One more issue when selecting yarns, cords, or fibers for couching is to consider the presser foot being used to hold the cord (see next page). The fiber must be able to fit into the hole, tunnel, groove, etc. of the foot and feed smoothly under the needle. Some openings such as the hole in the center of Clear Embroidery Foot #39/39C are small and the cord cannot be larger than the opening. Other openings such as the hole on Braiding Foot #21 are larger and several fibers can be fed together through the hole. At times, fibers that are larger than the opening can be used if it something such as a soft yarn that will compress as it goes through the opening. As long as it fits and can feed smoothly as the machine sews, it will work.

The fabric may need stabilization before couching fibers in place. Use interfacing, stabilizer and/or batting on the back of the fabric to form a firm foundation that will accept the fibers and stitching without tunneling or puckering. Sturdy, heavy fabric may not need to be stabilized. Always do a test on the project fabric to decide the type and amount of stabilization needed.

Tip

Easy threading method for feet with holes: Fold 8"-10" of thread in half; feed the two ends into the hole, leaving a loop at the hole. Place the fiber in the loop and pull it through the hole by tugging on the ends of the loop.



Presser Feet Options

A presser foot used for couching typically has a way to hold cord or fiber in place for stitching. A hole in the foot or some type of guide makes it easy to sew over the fiber without having to physically hold it in place. The sole of the foot usually has some type of tunnel or groove to accommodate the fiber and let the foot help feed the fabric smoothly. *Note: The BERNINA presser feet shown here are the most commonly used choices for couching but are not the only BERNINA options available.*

BULKY OVERLOCK FOOT #12/12C

Designed to sew heavy knits; also great for rounded piping, couching cord, and attaching strands of beads. Foot #12C is a hybrid of Foot #12 and Foot #21 (see below) and has a hole on top for couching.

BRAIDING FOOT #21

This foot has a beveled hole on top of the sole to hold thick yarns, decorative threads, and other fibers for couching.

CORDING FEET #22/25

Uniquely designed with 3 or 5 grooves to hold and control narrow cords side-by-side for couching.

CLEAR EMBROIDERY FOOT 39/39C

This foot has a clear sole for good visibility of the stitching area; the hole in the center front holds a narrow cord in place for couching.

FREEMOTION COUCHING FOOT #43

Designed for use with cords 2mm in diameter, this foot holds the cord under the needle so a straight stitch can sew it in place. The clear sole offers great visibility of the cord and the entire stitching area.

Couching Variables

Couching is a versatile embellishment because there are so many ways to do it and so many looks you can get. The tips listed below give you an idea of how you can combine the elements of couching to vary the look of couched fibers.

- Match the color of the stitching to the background fabric and the contrasting cord will look as if it is woven into the fabric.
- Match the color of the stitching to the cord; it will give the cord a more pronounced look, subtly adding to its thickness.
- Match the color of the stitching *and* cord to the background fabric and create subtle texture without calling attention to the cord or the stitch.
- Use invisible thread and a blindstitch to make the cord appear to be floating on the surface of the fabric.



Simple Couching

Sewing a zigzag stitch over a single cord is a good starting place because it is the simplest couching technique—perfect for the beginning sewer. Take it a step further using several fibers, twisting them together, creating a spiral effect. A third effect is using fat yarn and sewing a side-to-side decorative stitch such as a feather stitch to hold the yarn in place.

Machine Settings

- Braiding Foot #21
- Cords, yarns, and fibers as desired
- Thread the machine with monofilament or embroidery thread as desired
- Zigzag or Decorative stitch (see below)
- Needle Stop Down

Stabilize fabric as needed and follow directions below for desired technique.

Basic Couching

Thread the selected cord, yarn and/or fiber through the hole on top of the sole of Foot #21. Use a thread loop to pull it through the hole if needed.

Stabilize fabric as needed. Select the Zigzag stitch and adjust the width so it is wide enough to go over the cord. Stitch as desired, letting the cord flow freely through the hole in the foot.

Twisted Couching

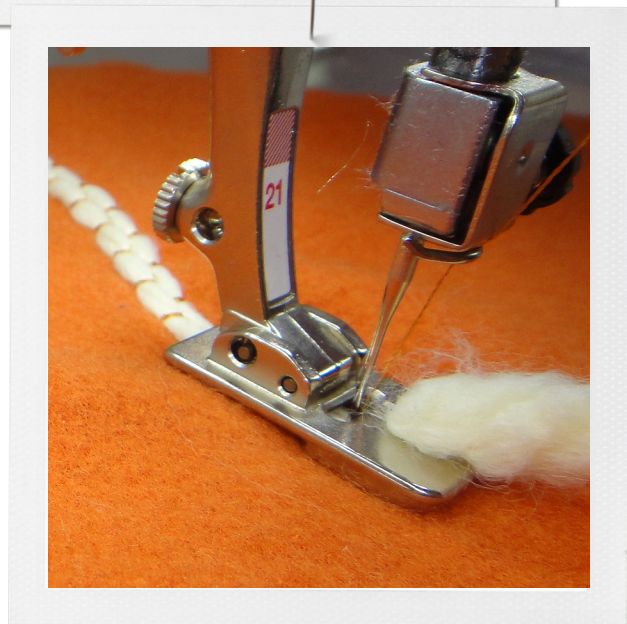
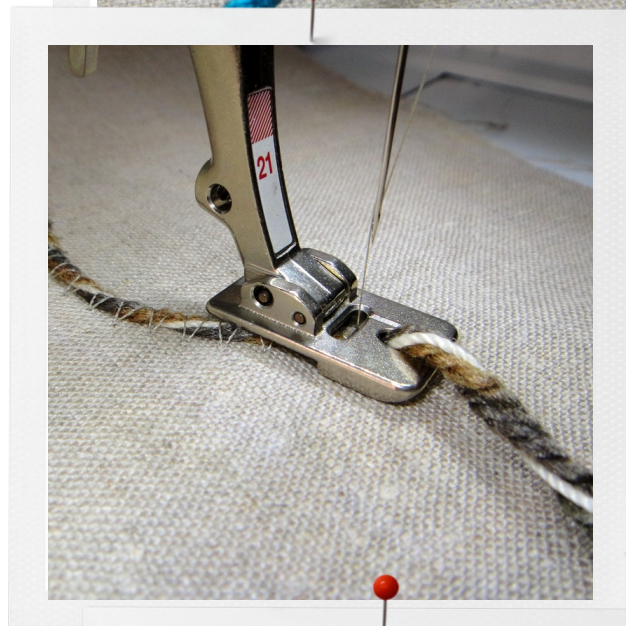
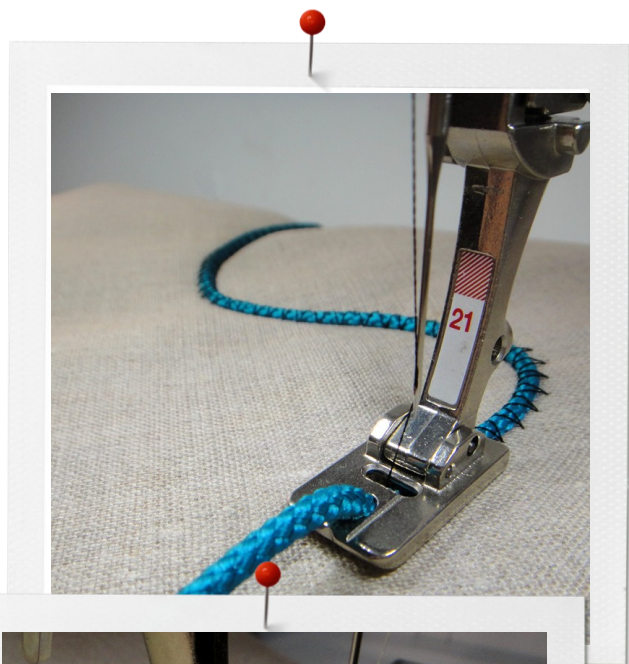
Thread several cords, yarns and/or fibers through the hole on top of the sole of Foot #21. Use a thread loop to pull them through the hole if needed.

Select the Zigzag stitch and adjust the width so it is wide enough to go over the fibers. Stitch as desired, twisting the fibers together in front of the foot, letting them flow freely through the hole in the foot.

“Double” Couching

Thread one “fat” yarn through the hole on top of the sole of Foot #21. Use a thread loop to pull it through the hole if needed. *Note: The yarn can actually be larger than the hole is if it is soft enough to be compressed to fit into the hole.*

Select the Feather stitch and adjust the width so it is wide enough to go over the fibers. Stitch as desired; the feather stitch will sew down the center of the yarn, moving out to each side as it forms the stitch, making it look as if there are two cords sewn side-by-side.



Flat Couching

Cording Feet #22 and #25 are designed to hold narrow cords side-by-side to create a flat, narrow, braid-like embellishment. This technique can be sewn in straight lines or gentle curves. Each of the two cording feet has a needle opening of 5.5 mm; Foot #22 has three grooves to hold cords & Foot #25 has five.

Step 1

Stabilize fabric as needed.

Step 2

Attach Cording Feet #22 to the machine.

Step 3

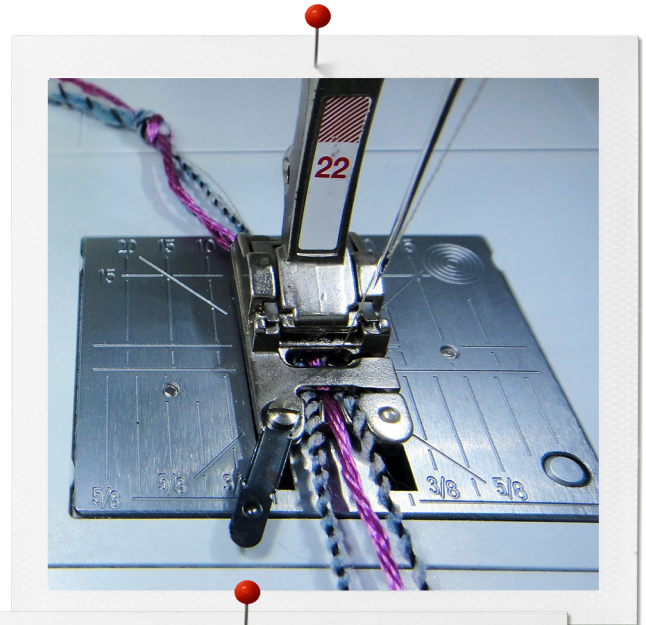
Thread the machine with embroidery thread in the needle. The same thread or coordinating bobbin thread can be used in the bobbin.

Step 4

Place narrow cords and yarns in the grooves of the foot on top of the sole, closing the black "gate" over them to hold them side-by-side as they are stitched.

Step 5

Select decorative stitches as desired; adjust width to 5.5 mm if needed and sew over the cords in straight and/or gently curving lines.



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Narrow Cord Couching

A subtle line of narrow cord adds an understated embellishment to any project. Sewing it on the lapel of a jacket in place of topstitching actually makes a stronger statement than regular stitching. Using a metallic thread may add just the right amount of sparkle to a scarf or evening shrug.

Machine Settings

- Clear Embroidery Foot #39/39C
- Narrow cord or heavy decorative thread
- Monofilament, rayon or polyester thread or as desired
- Zigzag stitch
- Needle Stop Down

Step 1

Stabilize fabric as needed. Attach Clear Embroidery Foot #39/39C and thread the cord or fiber to be couched through the hole in the center of the foot.

Step 2

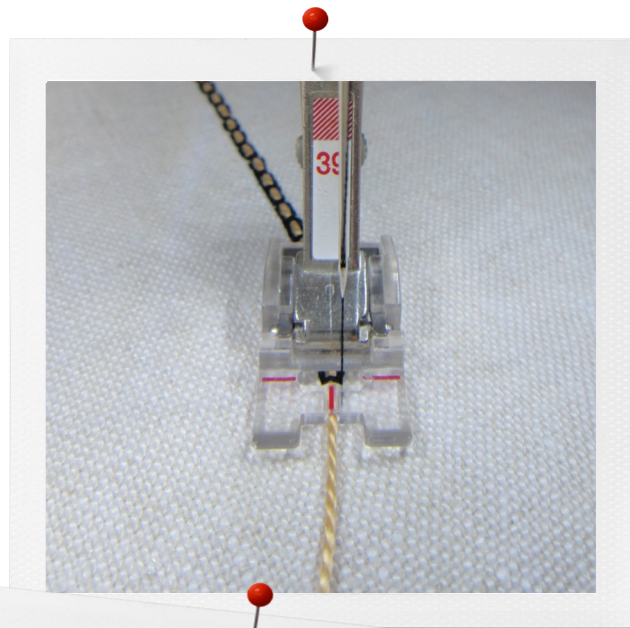
Select the zigzag stitch and adjust the width to be wide enough to go over the cord with out stitching into it.

Step 3

Stitch as desired, letting the cord flow feely into the foot.

Tip

Use a loop of thread to feed cord through the hole on there center of the foot.



Couched Edges

Put the finishing touch on edges of jackets, bags, purses, and book covers using this simple method of attaching cord with a zigzag stitch. This works on finished (faced or hemmed) or folded edges as well as raw edges. For raw edges, join the layers first by oversewing the edges with a zigzag stitch to compress and make them strong enough to support the cord.

Machine Settings

- Bulky Overlock Foot #12/12C
- Decorative cord
- Thread the machine with embroidery thread using the same thread in the needle and the bobbin
- Zigzag
- Needle Stop Down

Step 1

Stabilize fabric as needed. Attach Bulky Overlock Foot #12/12C to the machine.

Step 2

Place the cord on top of the edge or next to the edge of the project, positioning the cord under the tunnel of the foot.

Step 3

Select the Zigzag stitch and adjust the width so it is wide enough to go over the cord.

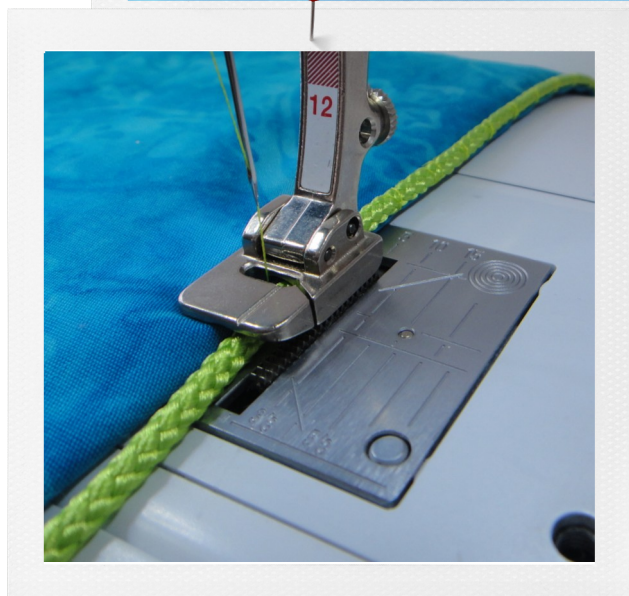
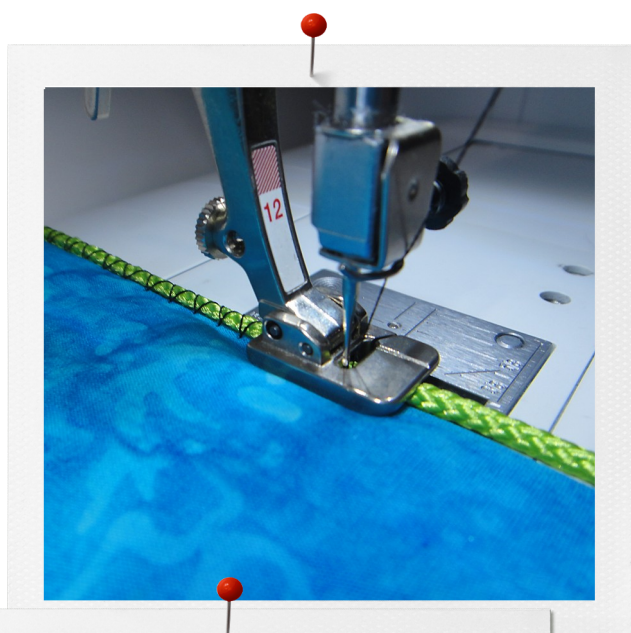
Step 4

Sew the cord to the edge; the stitch should go into the fabric on the left side and into the air on the right side.

Tip

For more inconspicuous stitching, select the Blindstitch and sew with monofilament thread or one that matches the color of the cord. Engage Left/Right Mirror Image so that the stitch sews along the edge of the fabric and reaches over the cord every few stitches.

If using the widest stitch width of the machine and the cord is pulled too tightly as the stitch forms over it, slightly lessen (lower number) the needle tension.



Freemotion Couching

Couch 2mm cording in any direction, forming your own design or motif. With the feed dog of the machine lowered, you move the fabric as desired. Use a flexible cord, 2 mm in diameter. The cord must fill the needle opening and should be uniform in diameter (no thick and thin or slubbed areas).

Machine Settings

- Freemotion Couching Foot #43
- 2mm decorative cord
- Straight Stitch
- Center Needle Position
- Needle Stop Down
- Feed Dog Lowered

Step 1

First time use only: Attach the cord guide (included with the foot) to the end of the machine (near the thread cutter) following the instructions included with the foot. This guide will remain on the sewing machine and will not interfere with other sewing tasks. *Note: Two guides are included with the presser foot; select the one appropriate for your model.*

Step 2

Stabilize fabric as needed. Using the wire loop threader included with Foot #43, thread the cord through the guide, into the hole on the side of the foot and then down through the needle opening.

Step 3

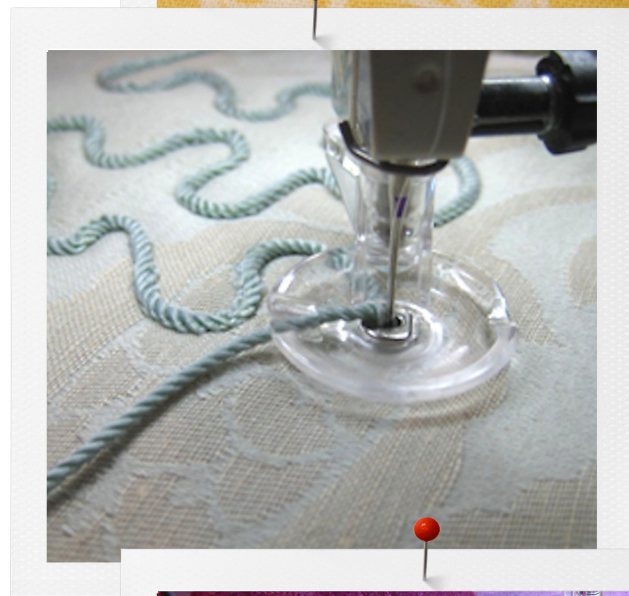
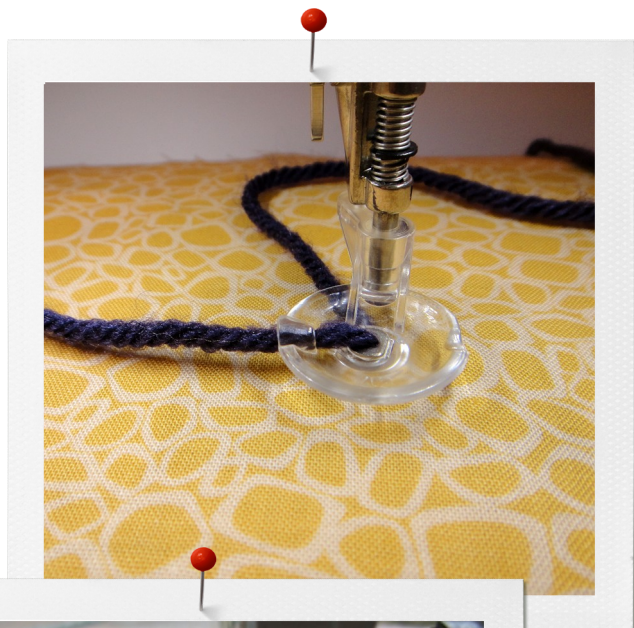
Stitch as desired, moving the fabric in any direction

Tips

Before starting to stitch, turn the machine OFF and then back ON, resetting the initial position of the needle, ensuring that it is aligned with the opening in the foot.

Use the straight stitch, center needle position only. Any other stitch or width will cause the needle to hit the foot.

Use Freemotion Couching #43 to sew straight-stitch machine embroidery designs.



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