

Precut Lecture Notes

The History of Precut Fabric -

Where do they come from? Moda Fabrics is the creator of precuts. The story as I know it is that precuts started as a way to show shop owners larger pieces of fabric and were often given as a promotional item. The first precut was the charm pack (5" squares). Eventually shops wanted more and charm packs became a standard item. There weren't many patterns available in the beginning but that soon changed!

Moda trademarked the names Jelly Roll, Layer Cake, Honeybun, etc... which is why you'll find various names among all the companies.

What are you buying when you purchase a precut?

Each company is different and most packs have 40-42 pieces. Moda always uses 42 pieces. Other companies tend to use 40 and now there are some smaller precuts with 20 pieces. For me, I always base my patterns on 36-40 pieces so that most precuts will work. That's just me! Always check the label to see what you're buying.

Generally speaking, precuts contain 1 piece of each collection. Since collections vary in size many precut bundles will have duplicates. And usually those duplicates are the smaller prints or blenders not the focus prints! Some precuts are also available in solids from companies like Robert Kaufman and Moda. But why would you want a solid bundle? Imagine making a quilt and not having to cut the background fabric? Being able to start with a jelly roll or layer cake of background will make the process much quicker and eliminate some cutting and waste.

What are the sizes available?

Up until recently most precuts were in 2 1/2" increments - jelly rolls are 2 1/2" strips, charm packs are 5" squares, layer cakes are 10" squares, etc... Below are the various sizes/names/types of precuts.

Charm Squares (the first precut) - 5" squares

The term "Charm Square" is not trademarked so it's used by many fabric vendors. They are also called Treats, Snaps, 5" Squares, Stamps and Chips. One charm pack (40 squares) is the equivalent of 3/4 yard.

Layer Cakes - 10" Squares

Also called Crackers, Short Cakes, Tiles, Stacks, Stackers and 10 Squares. One layer cake (40 squares) is the equivalent of 2 3/4 yards.

Jelly Rolls - 2 1/2" x WOF (width of fabric) Strips

Also called Roll Ups, Strips, Pops, Treat Strips and Rolie Polies. One Jelly Roll is the equivalent of 2 3/4 yards of fabric and is the same amount of fabric as a Layer Cake. In some patterns (not all) Layer Cakes and Jelly Rolls can be interchanged.

Mini Charms or Candies - 2 1/2" squares

These tiniest of precuts are sold by Moda. Most other companies use them more for promotional items so you won't see as many of these for sale as their larger cousins.

Because the above sizes all being in 2 1/2" increments they can mixed in patterns. I have a few that for instance use a Charm Pack and a Jelly Roll. Junior or Mini versions of these sizes are also becoming more popular.

Some new precuts that have emerged are listed below. They're a little newer and some are company specific.

Timeless Treasures offers Treat Packs which are 6" x WOF strips, 20 per pack. They're packed in small bricks.

Moda offers Honey Buns which are 1 1/2" x WOF strips, 42 per pack as well as Turnovers which are 6" Half Square Triangles. Honeycombs are 6" Hexies. The newest precut introduced from Moda is 3 1/2" squares, 42 per pack. The name is unclear just yet but I have heard them called Treats.

Hoffman Fabrics offers 8" Hexies, simple called Hexi, in their Indah Batik line, 40 pieces per pack.

Fat Quarter Shop has their own custom precut available exclusively on their website called Jolly Bars, after owner Kimberly Jolly. These rectangle packs are 5" x 10", 42 pieces per pack.

The most common and popular precut is of course the Fat Quarter. These are available at shops individually and as bundles from most manufacturers. They vary in quantity depending on the fabric company.

What's up with those Pinked Edges??!

Most cotton precuts, typically not Batiks, are cut with a pinked edge. But why? The pinked edge keeps them from fraying but they do make a huge fuzzy lint mess when opening the packages! You can run a lint roller over them to eliminate most of the mess.

Most Batiks do not have pinked edges because they tend to fray less than regular cottons. Did you also know that many batiks and even some cottons are cut and rolled by hand? Sometimes a "warning" label is included on the package to let you know that slight variations may occur.

How do I sew those pinked edges? Do I sew from the peak or the valley?

According to all the manufacturers you should sew from the peak or point. The 2 1/2" (or 5" or 10", etc.) is measured from point to point. HOWEVER it is my experience that precuts often run slightly larger. I have found that most of the precuts I use need a little trim and they are more often inconsistent in size than spot on. But don't be discouraged! Just check your measurements and trim when needed.



Should I prewash my Precuts?

NO! Never wash precuts. You will end up with an unusable mess. So what do you do when using precuts? My advice (this is how I treat ALL my quilts) is to use Shout Color Catchers in the wash. I have used as little as 2 and as many as 6 to protect my quilts and I personally have not had any issues. Remember that red runs the most so use precaution. Synthrapol is a special detergent that suspends dye and can also help with colors running.

What is the benefit of using precuts? Are they worth it?

I say yes! I happen to love precuts for a few reasons. First, having some of the cutting already done is a great time saver. I like to get right to making my quilt so having the ability to avoid some cutting and ironing is wonderful. Since precuts have a piece of each fabric from a collection, I can see them all together and decide which ones I like and which I don't. It's also expensive to buy 25-42 pieces of fabric. So if you love a collection but can't afford to buy it all, a precut gives you a little bit of each. Spend your money on the border, binding and backing in your favorite prints. One of the other great benefits is the fact that the fabrics have been expertly matched for you. It takes the guess work out of putting a quilt together and gives you the confidence booster you need. So how much would it be to buy a piece of each fabric vs. the cost of a precut? I did a little math for a few common sizes:

1 Jelly Roll = (40) 2 1/2" x WOF strips. You would need 1/8 yard of each to cut that many strips (if your local shop will cut 1/8 yards).
1/8 yard (4 1/2") x 40 = 5 yards fabric x \$10 yard = \$50. Jelly Rolls run on average \$32-40 so this would save you about 20%.

1 Layer Cake = (40) 10" squares. You would need 1/3 yard of each to cut that many squares.
1/3 yard (12") x 40 = 13 yards fabric x \$10 yard = \$130. Layer Cakes are also about \$32-40 on average so this would save you 70% plus you would eliminate the wasted leftover fabric. Not that any of us mind a little extra fabric, right?!