

All about Thimbles

Thimbles are essential for quilting and hand-piecing. Here, Narelle Grieve goes through all the different thimbles there are out there to help you find the one that suits you best – so, no more sore fingers!

There is a wide variety of thimbles now available in quilting stores and it really is a matter of finding the one that best suits your needs. Remember, when you are hand-quilting, every time you put the needle through the quilt sandwich, the thimble has to push it through three layers. If you are taking five stitches at a time, there are 24 layers to push it through! The thimbles shown are designed just for quilters.

1. Quilters' thimbles have a leather around the finger and a metal tip with deep indentations. If you wet the leather and stretch it over your finger, it will stretch to fit. But don't use it until the leather has dried, or the dye may come out of the fabric.

2. Leather thimbles are made from soft leather and if you push the eye of the needle through many layers of fabric, it can go through the leather and then through your finger too. If you quilt one stitch at a time, however, this may suit you. There is another type with heavier leather on the side that's used to push the needle through the fabric. A leather thimble with stretch fabric on one side could suit someone who suffers from arthritis, because the stretch fabric accommodates swollen knuckles as it is soft.

3. & 4. Leather thimbles with a reinforced top are better than plain leather. One type has stretch fabric to go around the finger and the other, a Velcro closure. These will fit fingers of varying sizes. The reinforcing extends down the inside of the thimble, so it is suitable for people who tend to push the needle through with the ball of the finger as well as those who push it with their fingertip.

5. Coin thimbles have a coin-shaped piece of metal inserted in the top of the leather thimble, also suitable for pushing through with the ball of the finger.

6. Quilters' double-sided thimbles are made of leather with metal extending right over the fingertip. These can also be used under the quilt, a feature that some quilters prefer.

7. Quilters' triple thimbles are relatively new on the market. Made of very soft leather, they have metal around the tip of the finger and another piece of metal that fits between the first and second joints. These thimbles would suit those who push the needle in with either the top or side of the finger.

8. The under guard is shaped like a long fingernail and some quilters find that using this under their work saves needle pricks.

9. Safety thimbles are metal with indentations right on the top, as well as on the side. The ridge around the edge of the thimble prevents the needle slipping.

10. ThimblePad is also a newcomer to the market. These small re-usable leather circles adhere to the fingers under the quilt. They work well for those who need to protect the tips of the fingers but prefer not to use a full thimble.

11. Plastic with guard is not shown, but it can be made to fit by dipping it in hot water and stretching it to your finger size. It has a shield to prevent the needle going under your fingernail and is also suitable for those with long fingernails.

Some quilters use another thimble under their work to prevent pricking although I don't work this way myself. However, it is important to find a thimble that you like and which works well for you. Whatever thimble you choose, just remember to enjoy your quilting. ■

