

# FABRIC ORNAMENT CHRISTMAS CARDS: A HOLIDAY TRADITION

by Gay Walker



Untie this ornament and use it to decorate a gift package, or hang it on your tree.

Making Christmas cards for relatives and friends has always been my favourite pre-holiday task. I have produced them for over 50 years, using whatever craft I was into at the time. Once quilting became my passion, I started embellishing my cards with bits of cloth, glued or heat-fused on. One year I tried making small cloth ornaments and tying them onto cards and they were so well received that they became my little annual "gift" for the special people in my life; well worth the effort and hours of work. I've always included a small label that says, "PLEASE RECYCLE! Untie this ornament and use it to decorate a gift package, or hang it on your tree." I'm pleasantly surprised that many people actually do this and save the ornaments from year to year.

If you would like to try making ornament cards yourself, here are some suggestions and guidelines to get you started. First of all, don't get too elaborate! You can achieve beautiful results with very simple designs using pretty fabrics. For mass-producing Christmas cards, I have made just one design each year, using a straightforward, strong shape. Quilt block patterns work very well, as do images from nature such as stars, trees, birds, flowers and snowflakes. Sometimes my choices have reflected world events (like a dove of peace the year the Iraq war was threatening) or events in our own family (like hearts when our children got married.)



## Materials

### CARDS AND ENVELOPES

You can buy plain cards that come with envelopes, or you can choose a standard envelope size and cut cards to fit. This is less expensive and gives you a greater choice of colours and weights of card, but they must be hand cut. Invitation envelopes from an office supply store work well. They are 4¾" x 5¾" and hold half a standard 8½" x 11" sheet of paper, cut either vertically or horizontally and folded to make a 4¼" x 5½" card. Scrapbooking and craft stores have a great selection of cardstock in varying weights and colours.

If the card is stiff, you may need to score it so it will fold neatly. It should be heavy enough to hold your cloth ornament without drooping but not so heavy that it costs extra to mail. I usually make up a complete sample with the card, ornament, ribbon, stamped envelope and anything else I want to send with it, like our family newsletter, and have the post office weigh it to be sure it qualifies for the best rate.

### FUSIBLE WEB

This is sheer webbing designed to melt with the heat of an iron to bond fabrics together. You can use almost any brand, but Wonder-Under and Steam-a-Seam are the easiest as they come with a paper backing to mark your design on. You don't need paper on both sides of the web. A lightweight fusible web is recommended if you plan to do any machine embellishing as heavier web can be sticky and gunk up your sewing machine!

### BACKGROUND AND LINING FABRICS

Once you have determined the size and shape of your ornaments, (roughly 2½" x 3½" is a good size on a 4¼" x 5½" card), calculate how much fabric will be needed to cut them all from one piece. Choose plain or subtly-patterned cotton for the background and the same or a harmonizing one for the lining. The lining should be attractive as the ornament >

may be seen from the back. When these two fabrics are bonded together with fusible web, they make a fairly stiff, but light, ornament. You can add a layer of white fusible interlining between the background fabric and the lining for extra stiffness if you wish.

### FABRIC(S) FOR YOUR IMAGE

Choose one or more fabrics that contrast strongly with the background: much lighter, darker or brighter. Tiny Christmas prints are great to use as they practically provide the design themselves. Metallic fabrics and taffeta look good but need gentle handling as they tend to fray, even with fusible web on them. I like cottons with some metallic over-printing on them – they look festive, are easy to cut and are a bit firmer than plain cottons.

### TEMPLATES

Try to choose a simple shape for your ornament so it will be easy to cut and not waste fabric. Squares, diamonds, rectangles and hexagons work well. Circles, ovals and irregular shapes are more challenging to cut.

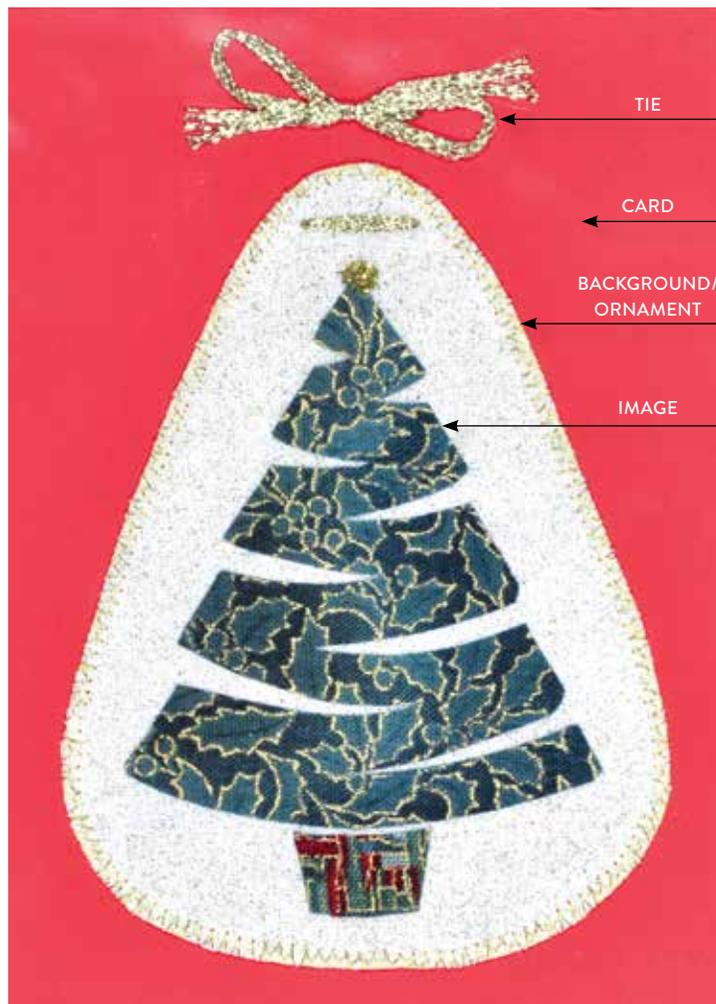
To maximize speed and accuracy in marking, make templates that you can draw around. The best template material is translucent acrylic, which you can buy at quilt shops. You can draw on it with a fine permanent marker and cut it with sturdy scissors or a craft knife. You can also make templates of heavy card stock, but this is not as durable as acrylic and may get fuzzy along the edges with repeated use.

Make a template for your overall ornament shape and one for each fabric in your decorative image. You will be cutting out each of these components separately, so don't make them too complicated.

### DECORATIVE RIBBON OR THREAD

To attach an ornament to each card, use ribbon floss, very thin satin ribbon, #3 perle cotton or decorative threads like thin metallic cord, allowing about 14" for each card.

You will also need small, sharp scissors, a fine permanent magic marker, a sharp pencil, a steam iron and a large, sharp-pointed needle with an eye large enough for your chosen ribbon or thread.



## To assemble the cards

- 1 Fuse webbing onto the back of your background fabric and leave the paper on.
- 2 Mark the outline of the finished ornament on the paper (in reverse if it's not symmetrical), using your template and a sharp pencil or extra-fine permanent marker.
- 3 Cut out the ornament shapes with sharp scissors, peel off the paper and fuse them onto the lining fabric with wrong sides together. Space them closely but be careful that none overlap.
- 4 Cut out the fused ornaments, using the pre-cut background shapes as a guide.
- 5 For the image, fuse webbing onto the back of each fabric and mark on the paper as above, using your image templates. **Remember that your image will be reversed when it is pressed onto the background!**
- 6 Cut out all the image pieces, peel off the paper and arrange an image on each background/ornament piece. Press carefully so the images do not slide but firmly enough to adhere all layers of fabric.



## Finishing

You can add machine or hand stitching to your ornament or decorate it with beads, glitter, paint or permanent marker. Zig-zagging by machine around the edge of each ornament with metallic or contrasting thread gives it a neat finish. Measure carefully just where you want to tie the ornament to the card. You can make a cardboard stencil the same size as the front of the card with a cut-out square or rectangle whose corners indicate where to punch holes to put your needle through.

Add your greeting inside, and don't forget to include a "Please Recycle" label! ✨



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This material has not appeared in English before, but Gay had a very short article about her cards published in Norwegian, adapted and translated by a friend. *Norsk Quilteblad*, the quarterly magazine of the Norwegian national quilt guild, printed it in 2010, along with a few photos. Gay and her husband had the very good fortune to live in Bergen, Norway, on several occasions and she was active in the local quilt guild, even teaching a bit. For a few years the Bergen guild and her Calgary guild, now called the Chinook Guild of Fibre Arts, became "sister guilds", exchanging quilt blocks, ideas and news, and she wrote about this international friendship in the Summer 2005 issue of *Canadian Quilter*.