

Q. What are (safe) ways to mark quilt tops?

A. After the time, effort and expense in making a quilt top, the last thing we would want to happen would be registration and design marks that could not be removed from the quilt. First, let me say that as a former chemistry teacher, all marking pens (blue spritz out, purple air fade, iron off, heat disappearing) contain chemicals that may or may not perform as expected. There can even be reactions between the chemical in the pen and the fabric sizing. Here are things that I have had happen or seen from my testing. The blue wash out pen migrated into the batting making it necessary to totally wash the quilt. Even then, some of the blue did not totally come out. The purple air fade pen can return when the humidity increases and may leave a brown area when washed. Heat disappearing pens contain a chemical “ink” that fades when exposed to heat, however, it will return when exposed to cold temperatures. It also does not totally wash out and can ghost back.

I never use any of the pens to mark quilt tops. I only use white chalk powder that comes in a plastic tube with a roller end, like used for sewing. Although these are available with colored chalk, I have found that these can leave the color dye on the fabric that does not wash out, so I do not use the colored chalk. There is a white pencil that is UV active that can be used. It works well for marking, however, I have not tested to see if it washes out. Because it is white it does not show on white fabric, but can be seen faintly on other colors.

White chalk is safe to use, easily brushes off, or often bounces off as you stitch. I recommend that markings be minimal, such as only the spine for feathers.

I am sure there may be other products available, or new products on the market, however, whatever product you decide to use, I recommend that you test it first on some of the fabric that is in the quilt. Before marking designs on any quilt, you want to make sure you can remove the marks. If you quilt for others, make sure you have permission to use any marking device other than white chalk.

If you have found other satisfactory products, please email me and let me know so that I can post the results.