



STIFFENING LACE ON THE PILLOW by Jane O'Connor

Stiffening a finished piece of lace while it is still on your pillow means pre-planning. The all-important FIRST STEP is to cover your pricking with a clear contact paper or strips of Scotch brand Magic Tape. Use only rust-proof pins such as nickel-plated steel. Place pins carefully in the proper pinholes: make no random extra pinholes when working the lace. These are the most important tricks, regardless of the method you decide to use to stiffen the lace when you have completed it.

In researching this subject, I found many different practices throughout the lacing community. Some lacemakers prefer liquid starch or a mix of glue and water: others prefer spray starch or hair spray and some go back to the old-fashioned method of flour or cornstarch and water. Please note that we have little bugs who love to eat the flour/cornstarch mixtures. Your lace may eventually have more airy spaces than the designer planned.

Overseas lacemakers have supplies we do not have in the U.S., or possibly their starches or glues are simply differently named. The starch most mentioned is a liquid called Stiffy. Another stiffener is PVA glue diluted with water. Also cited are a Hi Tack Fabric Stiffener and even Fray Check. The overseas Fray Check must be made from a different formula than the USA product: theirs is said to not yellow the fabric, whereas our Fray Check does cause yellowing. In addition, one person reported the teacher at an OIDFA conference used an artist's fixative (spray) to stiffen the lace.

For us, good old Elmer's glue diluted with water has been used successfully for a long time. Spray starch purchased at

STARCHING ON THE PILLOW **QUICK LIST.**

Supplies required prior to setting in to lace your motif.

- Laminate your pattern prior to pricking.
- Protect your pillow according to paragraph 5 or 6 according to your preferred starching method.

Supplies needed for dabbing starch solution onto the lace directly on the pillow:

- Brush
- Solution – usually thinned with water by 50%.
- Extra protection around the pillow, such as plastic wrap, paper towels, aluminum foil, or cloth towels to lay around the pricking.
- Blotting material – paper towel is excellent for this.
- Hair dryer.

Supplies needed for spraying the lace on the pillow.

- Same list as above except a spray bottle of solution and a wider distribution of your protective coverings.

the grocery store works for light stiffening. Personally, once I discovered Moravia starch, developed by Jana Novak, I have used nothing else. This is a liquid starch whose degree of stiffening depends on how much water is added to it. At one time, vendor Lacy Susan carried it, but now Maria Provencher (Provolace.com) is the only U.S. vendor who lists it.



The lace is finished, you are ready to stiffen the lace. Once you know which starch you are going to use, more preparation must be done. If you use a spray, the whole surface area of your pillow surrounding the lace must be covered. Protect any other area that the spray may drift over. The list of covering possibilities includes paper towels,

plastic wrap, wax paper, aluminum foil, bath towels, but NOT newspaper since the ink will rub off on hands and pillow. If paper towel is your choice, do not spray heavily, do not soak the towels. Spraying lightly several times to reach the desired level of stiffness is better than one soaking spray. One lacemaker puts her pricking onto a piece of craft foam, then fastens all onto the pillow before working the lace and reports no difficulties of starch reaching the pillow.

Using a liquid starch requires a small brush to get the starch onto the lace. I picked up a small nylon basting brush that I keep with my lace tools. You can cut the brush hairs on an angle if you feel that would serve you better. Now, some lacemakers cover their pillows with plastic wrap prior to putting the pricking on the pillow and getting ready to work the lace. I found that does not work for me, as I use divider pins and all the plastic wrap surrounding the pricking would be full of holes that would cause starch to leak onto the pillow, unless I use another layer of plastic wrap over the first layer after working the lace. Why do 2-3 steps more when you don't have to? You can push plastic wrap, wax paper, foil or paper towels up under the edge of the pricking after the lace is done or use bath towels to cover the surrounding area.



The next step is to determine what pins can be taken out of the lace prior to starching. Most motifs only need a few outside edge pins to maintain its shape and all other pins can be removed. Now you must decide whether to push the pins all the way down or pull them up as far as you can and still keep the lace in its shape. I prefer pushing the pins farther down vs. trying to brush around the pins 'in the air' but it also depends on the thread used, the particular lace and how stiff you want it to be. The finer laces such as point ground require a delicate touch and pins 'in the air', in my opinion. [Note that the pins should be washed once they are removed after starching no matter which stiffening method you use.] Use a light touch with the brush of starch onto the main threads. Have paper towels ready to dab the lace to remove all excess liquid. If you have starched over point ground or other small spaces, be diligent on the dabbing as a layer of starch between the threads will show up when dry. This can also happen when using spray starch so be sure to dab, dab, dab, blot, blot, blot.



You can let your lace air dry or speed the process by using a hair dryer. Don't put the hair dryer too close to the pillow! The foam pillow may get soft with the heat of the dryer. Once dry, carefully remove any remaining pins. If you pushed your pins all the way in, they may be 'starched' to the lace and tugging the pins out could distort the lace. Holding the surrounding lace down with the other hand would be necessary.



Voila! You are now done and can enjoy your completed project.

Written for L.A.C.E. November, 2011.

(Note: Jane O'Connor of New Lenox, IL USA, is a former President of L.A.C.E., having joined in 1997 and a member of I.O.L.I. Jane has been lacing for several years. She started learning in 1984 and took a couple years off in the 90's but got into it again - thanks to Doris O'Neill - in '97. Jane always starches her lace on the pillow. Inquiries can be emailed to jjoeo@sbcglobal.net)