

Ruching and ruffles

From the earliest soft shades through the 1950s, ruching and ruffles were used on all kinds of lampshades. Nowadays, they're more often found on country-style shades, usually done in gingham prints, and used strictly with very casual lamps. When you notice the lampshades adorning the sets of old movies and television shows, though, you'll see lots of beautiful ruching- and (some) ruffle-trimmed shades atop elegant lamps, in very sophisticated settings.

Ruching has been used to decorate clothing for hundreds of years (I found 16th-century examples in a fashion history book). Ruche (pronounced roosh) is a French word meaning "to frill or gather." There are four types of ruching (that I know of)—single, shell, and two-layer ruching are most often used as trim. Double ruching can be used either as trim or, in some cases, as part of your cover. There are wonderful examples of ruching on this shade (single along the struts, double covering the gallery, and shell ruching for rest).



A Michelle Costa Lampshade

Ruching and ruffles can be created by hand or sewing machine. If basting by machine, use a very-closely matching color of cotton-covered or plain polyester thread on the top, and cotton quilting thread in the bobbin (it doesn't need to match quite as closely). Having this stronger bobbin thread makes gathering a *whole* lot easier. When hand sewing, use doubled polyester or cotton-covered polyester thread, or single quilting or upholstery thread. The more loosely gathered the ruching, the more likely the stitches will show, and you may want to use a decorative silk or rayon thread as the top thread in your machine, or for hand basting, for which embroidery floss can also be used (the strands can be separated for a more delicate thread).

Set the stitch length on your machine to the longest basting stitch, and do some test stitching (on the material you'll be using) to check your tension (but don't worry if you can't get perfectly formed stitches on the bottom: they don't show; see the *Sewing Primer - Setting the tension*). It's very important that your row of stitches be straight (the same distance from the edge from one end of the material to the other). You might be able to use the stitching guides on your machine for this, but I *highly* recommend drawing a stitching line on your material with a straight edge and sharp tailor's chalk (I prefer the flat kind; draw lightly or the fabric is likely to drag). For single, double, and two-layer ruching, you can instead use a tracing wheel and chalk tracing paper (see the *Stretch Shade Supply List*), especially useful when tailor's chalk doesn't show up well enough. Measure and trace on the backside, so the stitch line shows up on the side you'll see when you're sewing. Although hand basting is more time consuming, the benefit is that you can gather as you go, and you can work on it anyplace. Make your basting stitches small and close together (see *Rosettes in Making "Victorian" Panel Shades* for hand-basting how-tos). And while you may have no problem eye-balling your stitch line, again, I recommend drawing one.

Both ruching and ruffles can be made from fabric, ribbon, lace, felt—anything you can stitch through and gather up attractively. Softer fabrics result in fuller, puffier gathers (the *Two-layer ruching* example is silk crepe de chine); firmer materials offer firmer, more erect gathers (such as the ribbon ruching on the shade below). You can get a pretty good idea of how a material will gather by bunching it up. Spray starch or sizing can be used (on appropriate fabrics) to increase firmness, and for a crisper edge. Practice the ruching techniques on a variety of materials to discover the different effects, as well as to build a collection to use as a reminder of the possibilities and/or to use as examples to show customers.

The grain of your fabric also affects the look of the gathers. Bias-cut fabrics are most often recommended; the next (and perfectly good) choice is fabric cut on the weft (from selvage to selvage—see the *Sewing Primer - The Fabric Comes First*). Gathers are rarely satisfactory when cut on the warp (length) of the fabric. Regardless of which gathering technique you use, you'll need 2 to 4 (or more) times the required finished length, depending on how tight the gathers are and the weight of the fabric. If necessary, pieces can be sewn together for added length (seam straight-grain strips, press open, and trim to 1/4" [6 mm], or see the *Sewing Primer - Making Bias Binding and Trim*). Or shorter strips can be gathered and pieced together when attached to the frame, if the gathers are tight enough to hide the joins.

Single ruching The difference between single ruching and ruffles is where the stitches are placed. For ruffles, they're at the top edge; for single ruching, the stitches run down the center of the material for gathers the same width, or a little above or below the center for different width gathers. The stitch line on some plaids, stripes, and prints can be placed in a way that the top gathers are different from the bottom gathers. If you're using ribbon, or anything with an already finished edge, it should be the desired width of the trim. Fabric is cut into strips and either folded or used in a single layer with the edges finished.

For the folded version, you need fabric strips twice the width of the finished trim, plus 1/2" (1.3 cm). (See the *Sewing Primer - Ripping it straight* and *Making Bias Binding and Trim*). Then fold each long side 1/4" (6 mm) past the center and press well; the edges should overlap (see *Making a basic band trim* for pressing how-tos). If necessary, use pins to hold the folds in place, placed across the stitch line, but on the front, not the overlapped side.



To use a single layer of fabric, hemming is one possible way to finish the edges, if you have the skill and patience for this (cut strips to the finished width, plus twice your hem). Tightly woven materials that don't fray (such as taffeta, and some silks and cottons) can have the edges pinked for a nice effect (cut strips to the finished width with *sharp* pinking shears; and line up the first zig-zag of each cut on top of the last one). And the edges of certain fabrics can be slightly frayed and still work (cut on the straight grain to the finished width). Fabrics that are too bulky when doubled, can (possibly) be folded, pressed, then trimmed to (at least) 1/4" (6 mm).

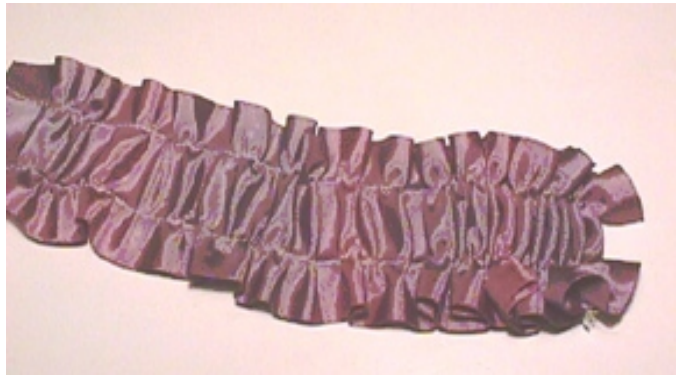


Two-layer ruching This is exactly the same as single ruching, with a second, slightly-to-much-narrower layer on top. And it's possible to make three-layer ruching. The layers can be of different materials, colors, or patterns, or the same. Pin the narrower layer centered on top of the wider layer (with the pins running across the stitch line), and baste through all layers.

Double ruching Double ruching is created by making two rows of stitches, with the gathers forming between them. You can use the fabric flat or folded; it depends on the desired look and what you'll be doing with the finished product. If the ruching is to be part of your cover, use a single layer (although some fabrics can be doubled for added fullness, it's not necessary for blocking out light, which can be controlled by the lining). For trim, the same thing applies as for single ruching, or it can be used in the same way as cover ruching, with the raw edges and stitches covered by another trim (either before or after attaching to the shade).

When making trim, how close together the rows of stitches can be is affected by the materials used; the stitches must be at least far enough apart to allow nice-looking gathers to form. This can (possibly) be anywhere from 1/4" (6 mm) apart to 1/4" (6 mm) from the edge. The fabric can be very tightly gathered forming very narrow pleats, or as

loose as you like. The distance between the rows also affects how much ruffling you'll have along the edges. Cover ruching can also be tightly or loosely gathered. Baste your piece of fabric 1/4" (6 mm) in from the raw edge. Keep in mind that, although called double ruching, you can make multiple rows of gathers, just as long as the result doesn't look overcrowded.



Ready-made fabric strips

The double ruching above was made out of 2"-wide (5 cm), bias-cut hem facing, which has handy little pressed-in 1/4" (6 mm) hems, and works quite well for this purpose. I have lots of vintage hem facing (in cotton, rayon, and acetate, what's in the picture above), and discovered this new use for it when looking for something purple to use for this picture. The only purple piece I had was faded at the folds, but I gave it a try, and eureka! Not only does hem facing make nice ruching (it works for all types), but the discoloration became swell variegation (which should be the case with many unevenly faded materials). Hem facing only comes in this width, but can be made narrower by folding and pressing one edge, then trimming the excess to 1/4" (6 mm). See *Fun With Hem Facing* (under *How-tos & Tips* on the club site) for more.

Shell ruching This serpentine-like trim, reminiscent of flower petals (and used to make fabric flowers), requires materials soft enough to mold into nicely formed shells or scallops. The basic technique is to draw and then baste a zigzag pattern along the length of your material. When the material is gathered, the points pull to the center, creating the scalloped edge. This style of ruching can draw up to as much as half the un-gathered width. To make the ruching shown here, I used a 2"-wide (5 cm) strip, with the points of the zigzag 2" (5 cm) apart, resulting in slightly wider than 1" (2.5 cm) trim. A 1 1/4" (3.2 cm) strip results in (approx.) 5/8"-wide (1.6 cm) trim, and I don't recommend going any narrower than this, at least not until you get some experience.



Ribbon and other finished-edge materials should be twice the finished width. Cut fabric strips for the folded method to 4 times the width, plus 1/2" (1.3 cm). Pressed-in hems (on appropriate fabrics) can also work. However, pinked or frayed edges aren't appropriate, and sewn hems are a waste of time (in my opinion).

The distance between the points along the same edge, as well as from one edge to the other, affects the angle of the lines, which, in turn, affects the look of the finished product. Experiment drawing zigzags with the points 1" (2.5 cm) and 2" (5 cm) apart along the same edge, and 1" (2.5 cm) and 2" (5 cm) apart from the top to the bottom edge. The points at one edge must be at the *exact center* of every two points at the other edge. You'll see that the difference between your zigzags will be the angle of the lines away from each point. In fact, the ruching templates on the market only include the tip (about 1/2" [1.3 cm] or less) of each point, because that's all you really need. (See photo on next page.)

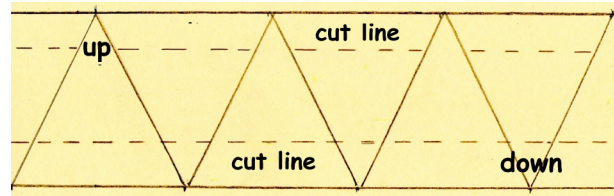
You must remember this. . .

When making shell ruching that will be used to trim top and bottom rings, or if you'd like to work with shorter pieces, or anytime one end will be meeting up with another end, you *must* draw the zigzag pattern on your material so that there's one complete triangle pointing up at one end and one complete triangle pointing down at the other. If the first angled line begins at the bottom edge, then the last angled line must end at the top edge. This way the trim has a complete scallop at the top edge, at one end, and a complete scallop at the bottom edge, at the other. Tuck the little leftover half-triangles of fabric behind these scallops, and the trim will look continuous (or darn close to it). Done the other way, with the first and last triangles pointing the same direction, you wind up with the end scallops at the same edge, which doesn't work.

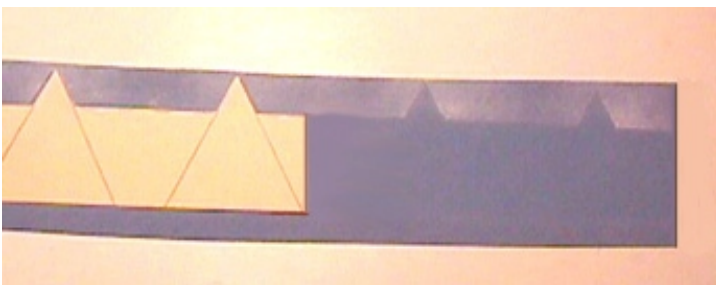
And another point! The instructions I learned how to do this from said that the points of the zigzag should be at the edge of the strip, and to take one stitch past the edge at each point, which is supposed to make gathering easier. I, however, ran into a big problem with these stitches locking up, making it impossible to gather past them. Since this is just the kind of thing that could cause one never to ruche again, I decided to see what would happen if the points were just (1/16" [2 mm]) inside the edge, and it gathered right up with nary a problem, and *I* saw no difference in the results. I suggest you try it both ways; maybe you can figure out what I'm doing wrong. Taking a stitch around the edge when *hand* basting, though, does work well.

There are two ways to mark the pattern, but whichever you choose, remember you want the first and last triangles pointing in opposite directions at the ends.

Option A There are ruching templates available (about \$10.00—check fabric and quilting supply stores, or see *Embellishment Supplies*), but you can easily make one yourself. Draw the zigzag pattern on a piece of cardboard. Cut the angled lines about 1/2" (1.3 cm) or so down from each point, then cut straight across between every two points (cut these sections away in pieces starting from the center and working toward the angled line to avoid bending the point). You can then cut off most of the rest of the pattern, so the template ends up (at least) 1 1/2" (2.5 cm) wide from the points to the other edge. The store-bought version has points along each edge, one right after the other, which are then marked by skipping the points in between to get the right spacing. There are different sized points at each side (small, medium, and large), which means you only need one template to create shells of various sizes and shapes (I haven't tried making one like this yet, but it sounds doable).



The points can be marked with a sharp chalk pencil, or with some (but not all) materials you can use a pounce bag (recommended by the folks who make the abovementioned template). Although this is a quick and easy way to do this, it doesn't show up on all fabrics, brushes off some fabrics too easily, and is too hard to brush completely off of others. Actually, I'm still not sure if I like this method, but thought I'd include it, anyway.



Line up the end of the template with the end of the material 1/16" (2 mm) away from the edge (or right at the edge, if using that method), and mark the points. Then line up the first point

of your template (exactly) on top of the last point marked, and so on down the whole edge of the strip. Then do the other edge starting with the first point of the template exactly centered between the first two points marked at the first edge.

Making and using a pounce bag

A pounce bag is a little cloth bag filled with pounce (powdered chalk or other powdered materials), most often used to transfer designs through pin-pricked holes (once the only thing available for transferring embroidery patterns). You can buy them at (many) art supply stores, or make your own from a 6" x 6" (15 x 15 cm) square of muslin (or other thin cotton) and a twist tie. The fabric must allow some of the powder to seep through the bag when pouncing, but not too much; you don't want it all over the place. Regardless, you will still get some stray powder around the area where you're pouncing, which should be considered when deciding where this will be.



Use white or colored powdered chalk, depending on what shows up on the fabric (available at hardware stores, and used for making snap lines), or talcum powder will work (but, of course, it only comes in white). Put a big spoonful of chalk in the center of the square, draw the edges together, twist until you have a little chalk-filled bulge, and tie with a twist tie (easy to get off when you need to refill). To use a pounce bag, just bump it a few times onto whatever you're marking (or as much as necessary to make the mark). It takes a little pouncing to prime the bag. If you make a mistake, or after stitching the zigzag, the powder can be brushed away. If the powder is stubborn, try a tooth- or suede brush (or any stiff-bristled brush) or, if that doesn't do it, try a slightly dampened cloth. Store your pounce bag in a baggie (or something) to keep the chalk from getting on other stuff.

Connect the points as discussed below, except with pounced points you don't need to draw the lines all the way to the top (the point of the point) but, rather, just up to where the outline begins (although you can draw the lines to the point, *if* you can do it accurately, and this may be necessary with fabrics that the pounce brushes off of too easily). If any pounced marks get brushed off accidentally, replace them before stitching.

Option B Mark your points by holding a ruler firmly 1/6" (2 mm) away from one (long) edge, and then measure and mark the points (with a sharp tailor's chalk pencil) in the space between the edge of the ruler and the edge of the strip. Then do the same along the other edge, again, making your first point halfway between the first two points above. Be sure your first and last triangles point in opposite directions. Use a ruler to draw the angled lines to the inner edge of each dot. Be sure to press down on the ruler firmly when you're drawing the lines, or the fabric will move around. Also, draw with a light touch, or the fabric will drag (and chances are it'll drag anyway).



Can this be done without drawing the angled lines? That depends on your sewing skills. If you're good at sewing straight, try it and see what happens. The narrower the strip, the easier this is.

Stitching the zigzag When machine basting, stitch along the first angled line to the pivot point, then with the needle inserted in the material (and down inside the machine), lift the presser foot, pivot the fabric, lower the presser foot, and stitch down the next angled line, and sew on, and sew forth. If you've made your points at the edge of the fabric, stitch to the point, and take one stitch beyond the edge; then, with the needle in the fabric, repeat as above. Be careful not to move the fabric around (keep the needle in touch with the fabric at all times) or you won't be lined up with the next angled line. If hand basting, come around the edge and then up from the bottom to start the next angled line.

Ruffles For a fuller ruffle, cut the strip to twice the finished width, plus 1" (2.5 cm) for a 1/2" (1.3 cm) seam allowance; fold and press it in half. For a single layer ruffle, cut the strip to the finished width, plus 1 1/4" (3.2 cm), and finish one edge with a 1/4" hem (cut the strip wider for a wider hem). Or you can finish the edge by pinking or fraying (appropriate fabrics), in which case, cut the strip, plus 1/2" (1.3 cm). Or you can use ribbon or another finished edge material, which should be the finished width, plus 1/2" (1.3 cm). Hem facing also works fine for ruffles, but I'd consider machine-stitching a narrow hem at one (already-folded and pressed) edge, and press open the fold at the other edge (or not). Baste along the unfinished edge 1/2" (1.3 cm) in from the edge, then trim the seam allowance to 1/4" (6 mm). (Or stitch 1/4" from the edge, if you can, and reduce the width accordingly). The stitched edge can be covered with trim before or after attaching the ruffle to the shade.

Other basting and gathering how-tos

When hand basting, tie a big-enough knot that it can't pull through the fabric, but don't make a knot by taking stitches, just in case you need to gather from that end (or, better yet, don't tie a knot, but rather wrap the thread around a pin in a figure 8). Start sewing at the folded-under end, if there is one, and take your first stitch 1/16" (2 mm) in from the end, so the knot is at the backside. Gather as you baste. For trim that will be joined, baste to 1/2" (1.3 cm) from the end, leaving the rest for an underlap. Do this at both ends when making cover ruching. Temporarily tie the thread off with a figure 8 around a pin. Be sure to leave a plentiful tail of thread (at both ends) to allow for adjustments in the gathers. If you run out of thread in mid gather, end at the backside, and figure 8 around a pin inserted at the last stitch made. Start your new thread (from the back) as you did at the beginning, about 1/16" (2 mm) from the last stitch made. After fitting to the shade and adjusting the gathers, tightly tie off the tails.

When machine basting, begin at the folded-under end, if there is one, leave generous tails of thread, and stitch to 1/2" (1.3 cm) from the end to allow for an underlap. Do this at both ends if making cover ruching. Before gathering, put a pin at one end of the strip and wrap the thread around it in a figure 8, just in case you need to gather from that end. To anchor your strip while gathering, after wrapping the threads around the pin, knot the ends together so they can be looped around something immovable. To gather, hold onto the bobbin (bottom) thread at the unanchored end (hold onto both threads, if doing narrow double ruching; work one thread, then the other, if doing wider ruching), and gently stroke the fabric along the thread. Take your time, and keep your gathers well spread out; don't let them bunch, which can cause stitches to (mysteriously) lock up. After adjusting for fit, bring the top threads to the backside by pulling on the bobbin threads, and tie a tight knot right at the fabric.

What to do when things go wrong

When (notice I don't say if) you do run into one of the damnable abovementioned "knots," you may be able to work it loose by *gently* un-gathering several inches around it and *gently* stretching the fabric a bit to ever-so-slightly loosen the stitches (*much* easier to do with the heavier bobbin thread; I used to pop stitches all the time trying this with polyester thread). If you have no option but to use poly thread in your bobbin, you're also likely to run into another incredibly frustrating problem; having your thread break in mid gather. My only advice is to try thinking of the thread as made of glass, and never, ever try this when already stressed out.

If you can't get a locked-up stitch to unlock, or your thread breaks, when you get done cussing, you'll have no choice but to re-stitch that section (unless you're working with pieces short enough to make starting over realistic, which is not a bad idea, especially when trimming large shades). Cut the thread at the "knot" (or starting from wherever the thread is broken), and use a stitch ripper, needle, or pin to (carefully) pull out 4" to 5" (10 to 12 cm) of stitches in both directions. Be really careful not to cut the thread as you're pulling it out! If you do, you'll just have to remove more stitches. You need tails of thread long enough to tie off, and, at the already-gathered side, enough to remove about 1/2" (1.3 cm) or so of gathers (and still have enough left to tie off) so you can start the first stitch of your new section at the last stitch of the gathered section (you'll see what I mean when you try this). Then baste up to the first stitch of the un-gathered section.

Pull the top thread at the start of the new section (closest to the gathered end) down through the fabric to the backside by pulling on the bottom thread, and tie the threads in a tight knot right up against the fabric. Do the same thing at the start of the other un-gathered section. Adjust the gathers in the first section, pull the thread to the backside, and temporarily tie off with a figure 8 around a pin. Gather the newly stitched section, and tie off the same way. Then continue gathering the rest of the strip. Adjust your gathers as required to fit the shade, then permanently tie off all the ends with tight knots.

Attaching ruching and ruffles

When it comes to ruching and ruffled trim, as usual, I think sewing it on is vastly preferable to gluing, but, if you must, it can be glued (held in place by pins, until the glue sets up). The exception to this is single and two-layer ruching that may look too flat when glued on and requires sewing to make the ruffles poof out appropriately (as was the case with the ribbon ruching example). Make your stitches between the basting and the edge of the frame (use closely matching thread, and try not to let your stitches show). Snug the gathers at the finished end right up to where the gathers start at the unfinished end, covering up the underlap. With shell ruching, tuck the little triangular-shaped pieces at the ends behind the last scallop (take a hidden stitch or two, if necessary, to keep them in place). Cover ruching is sewn onto the frame just the same as any other cover material, or two pieces used to cover a gallery can be seamed at the sides and the seams pressed open (being careful not to press the gathers flat), and trimmed to 1/4" (6 mm).