Bower of Beauty

an ImproVines design by Brenda Gael Smith

Sample by: Brenda Gael Smith
Brenda Gael Smith lives and creates in the “other” Copacabana in Australia. Abstraction is a persistent and insistent force in her creative practice. Working with freeform piecing techniques and a rich palette of hand-dyed fabrics, she captures the essence of her subjects to impart a sense of wonder of the natural world and a strong affinity to place. The spine or vine is a recurring structural element in her artwork. It’s a highly versatile motif that plays with perceptions of positive and negative space as she varies orientation, spacing, amplitude and scale.

Parallel with her studio practice, Brenda is also an independent curator, judge, mentor and teacher on Zoom. She is a co-author of the book *Twelve by Twelve: The International Art Quilt Challenge* and is an advocate for exploring designs and techniques in small scale works as a springboard for larger compositions.

Follow Brenda at:

**Blog:** www.serendipitypatchwork.com.au

**Website:** www.brendagaelsmith.com

**Facebook:** www.facebook.com/SerendipityPatchworkQuilting

**Instagram:** www.instagram.com/brendagaelsmith

**YouTube:** https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB_63ckJQYFnlZxF1y4Jmkw
Quilt Inspiration

Brenda Gael Smith is a member of the Ozquilt Network, Australia’s Organisation for Art Quilters with the mission to raise the profile and status of art quilters, art quilts and art quilt making in Australia. Her work has featured in their traveling members’ exhibitions since 2012, including Australia Wide Seven, a juried exhibition showcasing 37 works by Ozquilt Network Members. It will be on exhibit at the National Quilt Museum from March 4 - July 19, 2022.

For March, she has designed an “ImproVines” block inspired by the flowering vine *Pandorea Jasminoides*, that is endemic to eastern Australia. This plant is also known by the common names bower of beauty and bower vine.

These instructions are a guide to make the block shown here. Depending on the angles and widths that you cut your vine fabrics, your block may appear slightly different. That’s the appeal of improvisational piecing!
Sample Block

Sample by: Brenda Gael Smith
This design is most suitable for fabrics that read as a single colour such as solids, hand-dyes, batiks, tone-on-tone prints, and small-scale prints. Value contrast is important.

You will need approximately:
- 18x14in rectangle of background fabric. (Brenda used dark magenta)
- 7x14in rectangle of contrasting fabric #1 for the central vine (Brenda used pink)
- 8x14in rectangle of contrasting fabric #2 for the upper and lower vines (Brenda used chartreuse) (Photo 1)
- Ruler (for the straight edge)
- Chalk pencil for optional marking (Brenda likes the Clover Chaco liner)

**Cutting**
From the background fabric, cut:
- one 5x11in rectangle
- one 5x12in rectangle
- two 1 ½ x 14in strips

You will have a piece left over that will be used for strips to complete the block at the end.

From the contrasting fabric #1, cut:
- one 5x11in rectangle
- one 2x14in strip

From the contrasting fabric #2, cut:
- one 5x12in rectangle
- two 1 ½ x 14in strips
Instructions

Central Vine
From your cut fabrics, you will need:
- two 5x11in rectangles. One from the background fabric and one from contrasting fabric #1 (Photo 2).
- one 2x14in strip of contrasting fabric #1

Optional Pre-marking
Using a chalk pencil and a ruler for the straight edge, mark your cutting lines at slight angles:
- 8 lines on the background fabric rectangle to make 9 pieces; and
- 7 lines on the contrasting fabric #1 to make 8 pieces.

Mark 2 lines on your background fabric that are at least 1 ¾ in apart. These pieces (shown with a star) will be placed at the start and end of the vertical strip set. Your other cutting lines should be at least 1in apart (Photo 3).

Cutting
Using a ruler for the straight edge:
- cross-cut the 5x11in background rectangle 8 times to make 9 pieces. Make sure 2 pieces (shown with a star) are at least 1 ¾ in wide. Other pieces should be at least 1in wide.
- cross-cut the 5x11in background contrasting rectangle 7 times to make 8 pieces. All pieces should be at least 1in wide (Photo 4).
Instructions

Vertical Strip Set
1. Reserve 1 of the 1 ¾ wide pieces of the background fabric.

2. Make pairs of pieces with 1 background fabric and 1 contrasting fabric in each pair (Photo 5).

3. Sew the pairs together with a ¼ in seam. Press towards the dark side.

4. Arrange the 8 sewn pairs and the reserved piece in a row starting and ending with the 1 ¾ in wide pieces (Photo 6).

5. When you are happy with the order, sew the pieces together with a ¼ in seam. Press all the seams in the same direction and check that your strip set is at least 12 ½ in wide (Photos 7).
Instructions

**Horizontal Line**

6. Using a ruler or freehand, cut your vertical strip set in half across the widest part with a straight cut (not curved).

7. Rotate the top half by 180 degrees so that the cut edge is at the top (Photo 8).

8. Sew the top edge of the bottom half of the strip set to the 2x14in strip of contrasting fabric #1. The seams should be facing in the same direction as you are sewing (Photo 9). Press towards the horizontal strip.

9. Lay the top half of the vertical strip set on the horizontal strip (right side facing up) so that the edges slightly overlap. Using the lower edge of the strip set as a guide, cut along the lower edge of the strip set and through the horizontal strip also. This may be a slight curve. You can also neaten the edge of the strip set as you go.

10. Check that the top half of the strip set fits the horizontal strip and mark a registration mark for the beginning of the seam (Photo 10).
11. Sew the top strip set to the horizontal strip with a 1/4in seam. If you have a gentle curve, focus on the righthand side of your sewing machine foot as you are sewing to check that the raw edges are feeding through evenly (Photo 11).

**Small Vines**
The small vines are constructed in the same manner as the central vine except the pieces are slightly narrower and the strip set is cut into four sections rather than two.

From your cut fabrics, you will need:
- Two 5x12in rectangles. One from the background fabric and one from contrasting fabric #2 (Photo 12).
- Two 1 ¼ x14in strips of contrasting fabric #2

**Optional Pre-marking:** Using a chalk pencil and a ruler for the straight edge, mark your cutting lines at slight angles:
- 10 lines on the background fabric rectangle to make 11 pieces; and
- 9 lines on the contrasting fabric #1 to make 10 pieces

Mark 2 lines on your background fabric that are at least 1 ¾ in apart. These pieces (shown with a star) will be placed at the start and end of your vertical strip set. Your other cutting lines should be at least ¾ in apart (Photo 13).
Instructions

Cutting: Using a ruler for the straight edge:
- Cross-cut the 5x13in background rectangle 10 times to make 11 pieces. Make sure 2 pieces (shown with a star) are at least 1 ¾ in wide. Other pieces should be at least ¾ in wide.
- Cross-cut the 5x13in background contrasting rectangle 9 times to make 10 pieces. All pieces should be at least ¾ in wide (Photo 14).

Vertical Strip Set
12. Reserve 1 of the 1 ¾ wide pieces of the background fabric.


15. Arrange the 10 sewn pairs and the reserved piece in a row starting and ending with the 1 ¾ in wide pieces (Photo 16).

16. When you are happy with the order, sew the pieces together with a ¼ in seam. Press all the seams in the same direction and check that your strip set is at least 12 ½ in wide (Photo 17).
Horizontal Lines

17. Using a ruler or freehand, make three straight cuts to your strip set to make four strip sets approximately the same size (Photo 18).

18. Rotate parts 1 and 3 by 180 degrees so that the cut edge is at the top (Photo 19).

19. Sew the top edge of parts 2 and 4 to a 2x14in strip of contrasting fabric #2. The seams should be facing in the same direction as you are sewing. Press towards the horizontal strip.

20. Lay parts 1 and 3 on the horizontal strips (right sides facing up) so that the edges slightly overlap. Using the lower edge of the strip set as a guide, cut along the lower edge of the strip sets and through the horizontal strips also. This may be a slight curve. You can also neaten the edge of the strip sets as you go (Photo 20).
21. Check that Parts 1 and 3 fit the horizontal strips and mark a registration mark for the beginning of the seams (Photo 21).

22. Sew the top strip set to the horizontal strip with a ¼ in seam. If you have a gentle curve, focus on the righthand side of your sewing machine foot as you are sewing to check that the raw edges are feeding through evenly.
Instructions

Assembly

23. Arrange your vine sets on a 12 ½ in square ruler or cutting mat to check that they fit within the space with some gaps in between (Photo 22).

24. For ease of sewing, you may choose to use a ruler trim a straight edge along upper and lower edges of each vine set.

25. Sew a 1 ½ x 14in strip of background fabric on either side of the Central Vine. Then sew the other vines on either side.

26. Cut two 14in strips of the background fabric and attach to the upper and lower edges of the block to bring the block up to size (at least 12 ½ in deep) (Photo 23).

27. Trim the block to 12 ½ in square.

Finished?
Fantastic!