Pins

Most pins come in a box of 500. For beginner lessons this should be enough to last you for years. How can this be? Our grounds lesson called for almost 450 pins, after all!

As you know, at the end of a project, all the pins are removed anyway, and the lace doesn’t fall apart. We can start removing pins long before we finish, and reuse them; that’s how it is that 500 pins are enough.

I think my pincushions hold about 200 to 250 pins comfortably. A smaller pincushion might not hold enough pins to comfortably finish a project.

In a piece something like a bookmark, I leave all the edge pins (top and sides) in place right up to the end. But I can remove interior pins at any time. Common sense says you need to leave in place about an inch worth of pins near where you are working; some people say you need an entire repeat of the pattern to stay pinned.

The other reason to remove pins as you go is because, frankly, it takes a long time to pull pins, and you might as well get part of the job done early.

When I remove pins, whether midway through the work or after the project is done, I try to pull just one pin at a time (not several) and to pull in the direction that it went in (no bending or deforming of the pin or of the lace). I also sometimes hold the lace against the pillow with one finger or with a tool as I pull the pin.

Some lacemakers recommend that you leave at least the “outline” pins in place for 24 hours after you’ve completed your lace. They say this allows the thread to kind of get set in its new position. I don’t know if this is true or not, but I usually do try to follow this advice.

When don’t you want to remove pins? In the not-too-distant future, you will be learning a technique called sewings, where you join new rows onto rows that you worked earlier in the piece, or when you need to join the end of a piece to its beginning. The mere act of doing sewings creates a bit of extra tension on the threads you have already worked, so any pins that could be affected by a future sewing need to be left in place.

Another time not to remove pins if you can avoid it is when working in a very loose stitch such as large segments of half stitch or of rose ground. The pins help hold the shape from being distorted in case you accidentally pull too hard while tensioning.

Last, after all the interior pins have been removed and just the edges are left, I like to keep the tension as even as I can by pulling only every second pin out, going around and around the edge until all the pins are out.