Software review

Charting editor Sarah Heys takes a look at cross stitch software programs, and tests out what they have to offer. Which one’s for you?

Cross Stitch Professional Platinum
DPSoftware

Of the programs tested, this has the best features to create a professional-looking printout of your designs. I’ve used the Standard version and the Plus version (£125). I do find the Standard version slightly basic and, although I do like its layout and how user-friendly it is, there are some functions that are only included in the more advanced Plus version. For example, I find the placement of different facing fractionals easy, and swapping backstitch colours without having to delete and re-draw in another colour is very useful, but these aren’t available in the Standard version. Likewise you can only have full backstitch lines (not backstitch part-across a grid square). For other backstitch tools like thickness, freehand draw and part-grid backstitch you need the Plus edition.

The smoothing tool included is useful though, so any motif can be smoothed out when you click – it automatically adds fractional stitches on the appropriate side.

This package also comes with a 200-page manual so it’s easy to find something if you’re stuck!

iStitch2
Jane Greenoff

This is a good starter package… you’ll be able to create charts in colour, or black-and-white or a mix, either design from scratch or use the motif library. Use the shade cards to pick from a range of thread brands – conversions between them are easy and automatically applied to the whole design.

The motifs are by renowned designer Jane Greenoff… there’s a good variety, including blackwork repeats. You can also upload your own template motifs, all of which you can then edit.

Is it easy to use? Take special care when drawing backstitch, if you don’t want to cut across squares. (An auto-backstitch exists, but I found it didn’t always outline what I wanted!) And I found that deleting backstitch lines is time-consuming, as you have to draw over each section of the line from start-to-end with another line. Also, when adding fractionals you have to select between the different tools rather than just clicking in the top left or bottom right corner of the square, for example.

Easy Cross De Luxe
Easy Software

This program has a lot of useful tools that some of the other software programs are missing, for example, half backstitch. Although I didn’t think it had the best layout of the programs I used, I did like the handy auto-shading option – once you’ve drawn a motif, just select a number of colours (as many as you wish) and it’ll automatically shade the shape, though the colours can look slightly sectioned.

I also didn’t really like the way you add different colours or alter colours in the design. Usefully, there is a spray size function, which allows you to fill varying sized areas without having to draw each stitch. Another good feature is the draw function, where you can draw varying shapes such as squares and triangles to different sizes in cross stitch by pulling and dragging to the size you require. A great idea for making patterns quickly.

I like the backstitch, as it can be added not only in anchored lines, but you can also draw it freehand anywhere – it doesn’t have to be anchored at any points – although this might be trickier to actually stitch! It’s easy too to add notes and info to your final charts.

A hardanger/blackwork and needlepoint module is available, £10.
WinStitch 2014
Ursa Software*

This program is a really good-value, basic option for getting started with computer charting. It has lots of standard functions that a stitcher would need to get going. A library of motifs and alphabets is available and it’s easy to import your own scanned images too, for these to be converted into charts.

I liked how easily you can see how your finished stitching will look, as a simulation on a fabric-effect background.

Then, if you grow in confidence and like doing things like creating designs with embellishments, this program can do some clever tricks with that. Choose different sizes of bead or button... even nifty things like adding a circle of beads is easy.

A downside, however, is to do a half cross stitch you have to select between different tools rather than just clicking in either the top or bottom corner of the square – I thought this could be quite time consuming.

Only one backstitch tool means you’ll need to take extra care when drawing across half a grid square, but it was good to see squashed fractional squares are possible too, with care. You can use auto-backstitch for outlining groups of colours – although it sometimes selected odd sections! I did like being able to add a text box to my chart for stitching information.

Which one is best for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kit name</th>
<th>Photo conversion</th>
<th>Windows version?</th>
<th>Motif library</th>
<th>Printable key</th>
<th>Text tool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cross Stitch Pro Platinum</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>7, 8 &amp; XP</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<td>iStitch2</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>7, 8-2000</td>
<td>Over 2,000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>98-2000</td>
<td>439</td>
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<td>All (Also Mac)</td>
<td>–380</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<td>✅</td>
<td>Most versions</td>
<td>12 ABCs</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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