

Inkjet Printing on Fabric
Bits n Pieces Demonstration
January, 2025

Printing on fabric using an inkjet printer is not hard – one needs cotton fabric, a backer to help the fabric go through the printer and an inkjet printer.

Having said this, there are a number of variables in play. These include the fabric (I have only used cotton fabric), the ink (or “dye”, which can vary by types of printers), how much is applied through the inkjet and the color fastness of the product after the printing.

This demonstration will use three approaches to printing on cotton fabric using a Canon inkjet printer.

The first demo will use EQ printable fabric for inkjet. Several fabric types are available – cotton, satin, lawn and is readily available from places like Amazon. This backer is very thick and I find the “cotton” to be a bit thick. To use this material, you run it through the printer, allow the ink to dry (a minimum of 15 minutes), soak to remove excess ink (10 minutes) and lay flat to dry. Here is a link to the EQ website – <https://electricquilt.com/online-shop/category/printable-fabric-paper/>

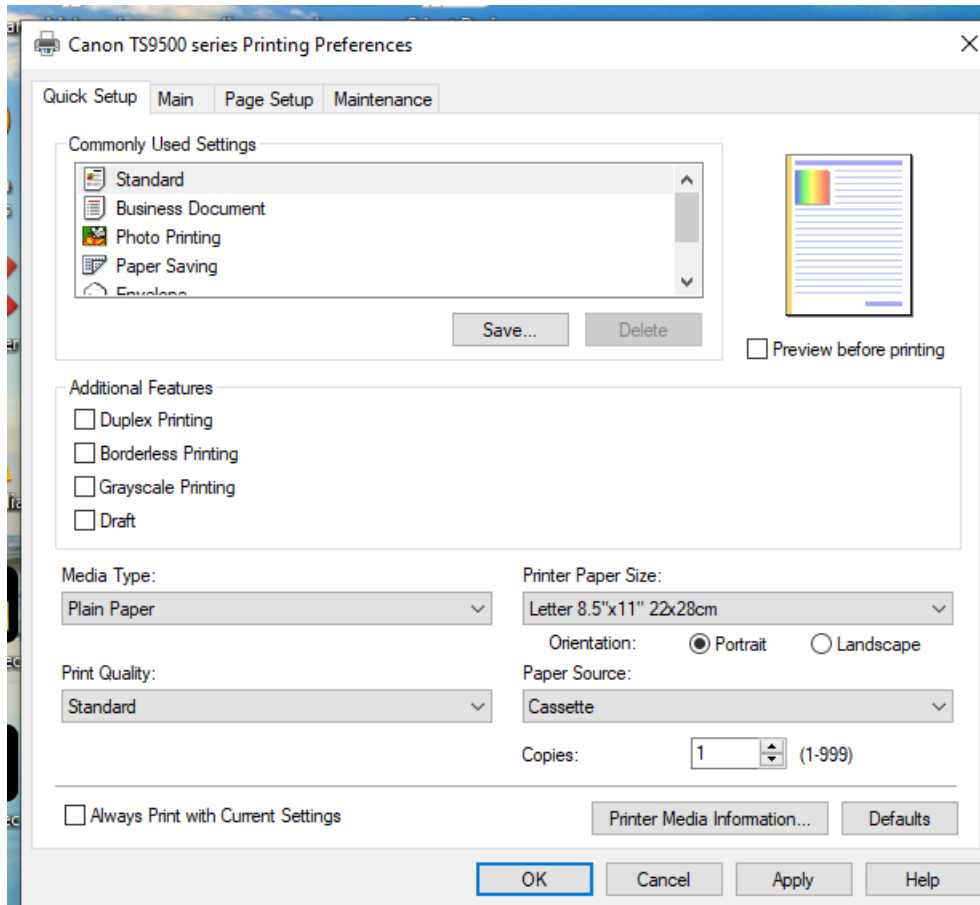
The second demo will use freezer paper affixed to the back of the fabric. I used a basic white fabric for this sample. It is helpful to cut both the freezer paper and the fabric larger than the dimension that you plan to print. For most people this would be 8.5 x 11 – I started off with 9 x 12 pieces of fabric and freezer paper. Iron the shiny side of freezer paper to the wrong side of the fabric using a cotton setting. Make sure that the edges and corners are attached so they don’t come up during the printing process. Once the freezer paper was ironed on and cooled, I trimmed the product to 8.5 x 11. Then I ran through the printer. It was left to dry completely (overnight) and then ironed with as hot an iron the fabric could handle first the back and then the front. I found that this provided a fabric drape I would expect for a quilt piece.

The third demo again uses freezer paper affixed to the back of the fabric as outlined above. However, the fabric was pretreated with Bubble Jet 2000 (actually manufactured here in St. Louis). The fabric is pretreated with this solution, allowed to dried. Then the process outlined above was used to print on the fabric. Once printed, the fabric needs to dry for 30 minutes. Then hand wash with Bubble Jet Rinse, Dawn detergent, Retayne or Synthrapol (the latter three are often used in fabric dyeing). Here is more information on Bubble Jet 2000 (https://www.cjenkinscompany.com/Understanding_Bubble_Jet_Set_2000_s/19.htm)

Using the Inkjet Printer

I have a Canon inkjet printer – each printer and computer will have different settings. Basically, you need to make sure you have full inkjet cartridges. I would recommend making sure your printer heads and roller bars are clean (I found out my roller bars were dirty while working on one of the demos).

To set up for printing, you will need to access the printer configuration on your computer and set up your printer for manual feed. In theory since my printer can handle up to 11x17 paper I could print on 11x17 fabric backed by freezer paper – something I will need to try sometime.



These are some of the printer preferences with my printer. I typically leave my media type to plain paper and experiment with print quality as either standard or high. One has to be careful to not apply too much ink as it will just wash away. However, sometimes standard does not lay down enough ink. It may take a couple of samples to get the desired product. In researching this topic, some printers have a thick paper option which may be appropriate for this print job. However, I don't find the fabric/freezer paper option to be very thick. A couple of other comments – I have done this enough to know how to load my manual tray – but in the beginning I would put an F on the paper, put through the manual tray to determine which side I needed up on in that tray. I also double check the paper size – the system selected photo and it reduced my paper size to 4 x 6.

Color Fastness

Much of the discussion about using an inkjet to print on fabric revolves around colorfastness. Most sources say to wash only when necessary, cold water, hand wash or gentle cycle. And exposure to UV light will accelerate fading.

In preparing for this presentation, I washed the final product in cold water and mild soap with the following results:

1. EQ kept their color the best
2. Bubble jet treated fabric was second best in retaining color. But one needs to be careful with the first after wash as I did have some bleeding because part of the fabric was folded over the print
3. The fabric with just freezer paper did not hold the color well at all.

I did do a black sample and it held fairly well except for the just freezer paper with a high-quality application – the excess ink came off which turned the black to a sepia.

Like any new project, testing is needed but it is a fun way to add something special to a wall hanging or art quilt. The black could easily be used for making quilt labels.

If anyone has questions, please contact me.

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