

chapter

1

Hooks and Yarn

Before you start crocheting, take some time to familiarize yourself with the tools that will help you along the way. Starting a project with the right tools on hand saves time. In this chapter you'll find information to help you choose an appropriate hook for a project as well as suggestions for choosing, caring for, and winding yarn.



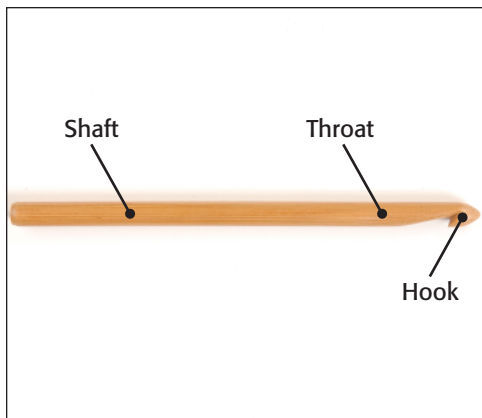
Hooks	4
Hook Sizes	6
Compare Hook-Size Labels.	8
Other Tools and Notions	10
Yarn Fibers	12
Yarn Construction.	13
How to Read Yarn Labels	14
Yarn Weight	16
Estimate Yarn Requirements.	17
Substitute Different Yarn.	18
How to Handle Store-Bought Yarn.	19
Yarn Care and Storage.	24

Hooks

SHAPE

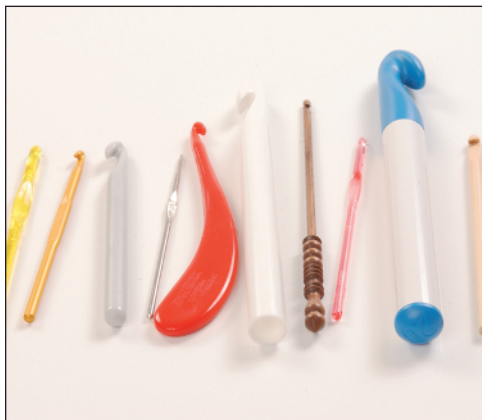
Crochet hooks are generally 5 to 7 inches long. There is a hook at one end, which you use to grab yarn or thread and pull it through the stitches of your work. You hold the hook along its shaft.

Manufacturers shape their hooks differently. The sharpness or bluntness of the hook's point varies, as does the hook's depth. Try out a few brands until you find the shape you think works best.



HOOK COMPOSITION

Plastic hooks are usually hollow and lightweight. Most very large hooks are made of plastic. Metal hooks can be very smooth, enabling the yarn to slide with little resistance. Wood or bamboo hooks provide a bit of friction, which comes in handy when you're crocheting with slippery yarns.



When using a wood or bamboo hook, rub the hook with a piece of wax paper to make the yarn slide more smoothly.

Some hooks are designed with a thick rubber handle to be easier to grip. Some hooks feature embellishments on the handle, but these are purely decorative.



OTHER KINDS OF HOOKS

Tunisian crochet hooks are longer than standard crochet hooks. This extra length allows the hook to hold many stitches, much like a knitting needle does. (See page 92 for more on Tunisian crochet.)

There are also double-ended crochet hooks made for a technique called *double-ended crochet* or *crochet on the double*.



Hook Sizes

Hook size is determined by the diameter of the hook's shaft. Hook size is marked differently in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the rest of the world.

Hook sizes in the United States and United Kingdom are marked by an arbitrary letter or number, respectively. Manufacturers often use slightly different labels for the same size hook, however. Hooks are most consistently labeled by the metric measurement of their diameter, which is an objective label. There is a growing effort to standardize sizes by using metric measurements only.



TIP

Small hooks make small stitches; large hooks make large stitches. Switching hooks will change the look and feel of the fabric you crochet.

DECIDING WHICH HOOK SIZE TO USE

Most yarn labels suggest a hook size to use; most patterns also list a recommended hook size. You may need to change hook size in order to match the gauge listed in a pattern or to achieve a pleasing drape and feel. Matching the gauge of a pattern is more important than using the exact hook size listed. In some instances, a yarn label provides only a recommendation for a knitting needle size. In this case, use a hook that matches or is slightly larger than the metric size.



DETERMINING A HOOK'S SIZE

If you're unsure of a hook's size because it is old or the label has worn off, you can use a hook gauge to measure it. The size indicated beside the smallest hole that the shaft of the hook fits into is the size of your hook.



Compare Hook-Size Labels

HOOK SIZES

This chart lists equivalent crochet-hook sizes.

Hook Sizes		
<i>Metric Size (in mm)</i>	<i>U.S. Size</i>	<i>U.S. Knitting-Needle Size</i>
2	A	0
2.25	B	1
2.75	C	2
3.25	D	3
3.5	E	4
3.75	F	5
4	G	6
4.5		7
5	H	8
5.5	I	9
6	J	10
6.5	K	10½
8	L	11
9	M/N	13
10	N/P	15
15	P/Q	19
19	S	35

STEEL-HOOK SIZES

Steel hooks have a narrow shaft and tiny hooks intended for use with thin crochet threads to make finer lace and doilies. This chart lists equivalent sizes of steel hooks.

Steel-Hook Sizes	
<i>Metric Size (in mm)</i>	<i>U.S. Size</i>
0.75	#14
0.85	#13
1.0	#12
1.1	#11
1.3	#10
1.4	#9
1.5	#8
1.65	#7
1.8	#6
1.9	#5
2.0	#4
2.1	#3
2.25	#2
2.75	#1
3.25	#0
3.5	#00

Other Tools and Notions

Besides these tools, a sharp pair of scissors or a yarn cutter is useful. Keep these notions in a small case or kit so you always have them handy.

MEASURING TAPE

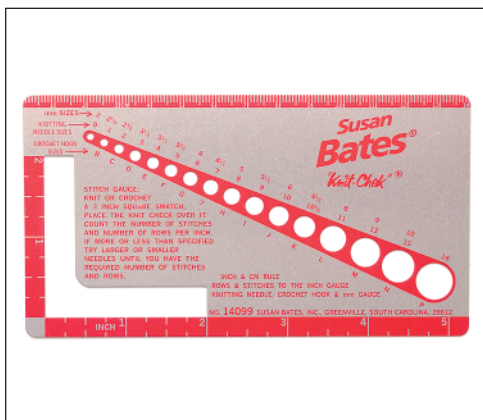
Use a measuring tape to take body measurements before you begin to crochet a garment. A measuring tape also comes in handy when checking gauge (see Chapter 7) and to keep track of your progress on a project. Measure your work frequently to make sure everything is going as planned.



HOOK GAUGE

The hook-gauge holes help you to determine the size of an unmarked hook. (See the section “Compare Hook-Size Labels” on page 8.)

Note: Using the L-shaped window of hook gauges such as this one doesn't work well with certain textured stitches like bobbles and shells. To measure your gauge in these stitches, use a ruler or tape measure.



STITCH MARKERS

Stitch markers are useful in many situations. For example, when working in the round (see Chapter 3), you can mark the beginning of the round by placing a marker in the first stitch. You can buy stitch markers designed for this purpose or improvise with scraps of yarn or even earrings. When crocheting a garment, use stitch markers to indicate the placement of increases and decreases for shaping (see Chapter 3). Stitch markers are like a breadcrumb trail: Use them whenever you need to keep track of what you're doing.

TAPESTRY NEEDLE

A tapestry needle (or yarn needle) has a blunt tip and a large eye to accommodate thick yarns. Use your needle to sew together pieces (see Chapter 6) or to weave in yarn ends after you have completed your project (see Chapter 3).



Yarn Fibers

Fiber and construction define a yarn and whether it will be a good match for the project you have in mind. Different types of fibers include natural fibers and synthetic fibers.

NATURAL FIBERS

Natural fibers come from plants or animals. The most common are cotton and wool, but there are many others.

Plant fibers are usually light-weight, can be machine washable, have little stretch, and breathe well. They include cotton, linen, soy, hemp, bamboo, and jute.

Animal fibers are very warm (even when wet), have some natural stretch, and breathe well. They include wool, mohair, cashmere, silk, angora, and alpaca, and generally must be washed by hand, unless they have been treated to be machine-washable (labeled *superwash*).

SYNTHETIC FIBERS

Synthetic fibers are man-made. They include acrylic, nylon, rayon, and polyester. Some synthetics are less expensive than natural fibers, and they tend not to breathe as well. However, as technology advances, synthetic fibers have an increasing number of desirable qualities, including durability, softness, and vibrancy of color.

Note: *Natural and synthetic fibers are often blended so that the resulting yarn benefits from the qualities of each.*



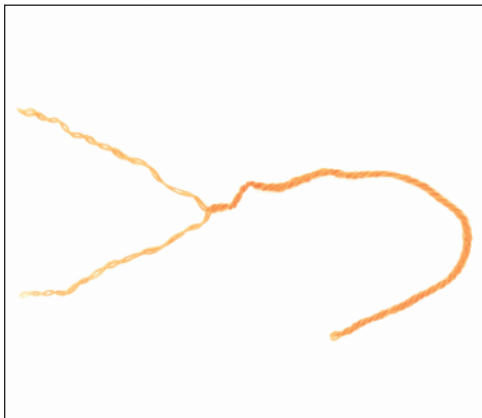
Yarn Construction

Fibers are spun or otherwise constructed into the yarns with which you crochet.

TRADITIONAL YARNS

Traditional yarn is spun by hand or machine and is often plied. Individual strands of spun yarn are called *singles* or a *single ply*. Plying involves taking two or more singles and twisting them together to create a thicker, stronger yarn. Traditional yarns have excellent stitch definition: They show stitches very clearly.

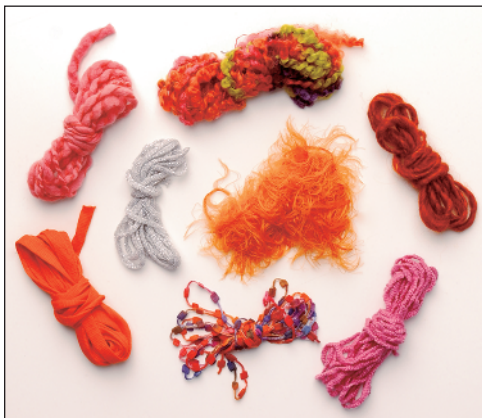
Two-ply yarn consists of two singles twisted together (see photo), and *three-ply* consists of three singles. The twist can be tight or loose; the tightness of the twist helps determine the character of the yarn.



NOVELTY YARNS

Frequently made from synthetic fibers, novelty yarns come in a wide variety of textures and shapes, including eyelash, faux fur, bouclé, ladder, and beaded. Novelty yarns can be used on their own or combined with other yarns to create unique crocheted items.

Note: Working loosely with a larger hook often makes manipulating a novelty yarn easier. Also, finding stitches made of heavily textured novelty yarns can be confusing. Try working into the spaces between the stitches instead of working into the stitches themselves.



How to Read Yarn Labels

Each skein or hank of store-bought yarn has a label on which you can find useful information about recommended hook size (see pages 6–9), fiber content (see page 12), care instructions, length, color, and dye lot.

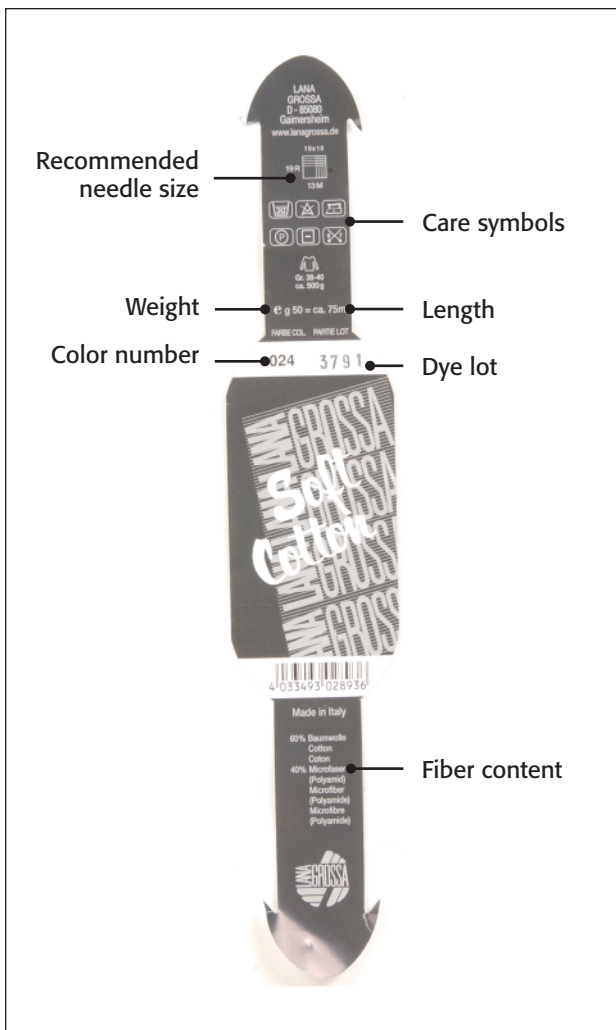
LENGTH

Length is listed in meters (m) or yards (yds.). Use this information to decide how many skeins you need to meet the requirements for a pattern. (See the section “Substitute Different Yarn” on page 18 for more on converting meters and yards.)

Buy yarn according to length, not weight. A 4-ounce skein of lace-weight yarn might contain 1,200 yards, while 4 ounces of bulky-weight yarn might contain just 45 yards.

COLOR NAME/ NUMBER AND DYE LOT





















Yarns are dyed in limited quantities, called *dye lots*. Minor variations can occur between lots of the



same color. Yarn manufacturers stamp each label with the code for the dye lot of the yarn, often near where the label lists the color name. When working with multiple skeins of the same color of yarn, make sure that you purchase all skeins from the same dye lot.

CARE SYMBOLS


Although some yarn labels spell out how to wash and dry items made from a particular yarn (see Chapter 6 for more on caring for your crocheted items), universal yarn-care symbols are also frequently used. To avoid accidentally ruining a crocheted item you spent hours creating, refer to the following chart to interpret yarn-care symbols.

 MACHINE WASH	 BLEACH	 IRON	 DRY CLEAN
TEMPERATURE		TEMPERATURE	TEMPERATURE
 Do Not Wash	 Do Not Bleach	(Dry or Steam)	 Do Not Dry Clean
 Hand Wash	 Any Bleach (when needed)	 Low	 Dryclean, Petroleum Solvent Only
 Normal			
 Delicate/Gentle		 Medium	 Dryclean, Any Solvent Except Trichloroethylene
 Cool/Cold		 High	 Dryclean, Any Solvent
 Warm			
 Hot			

Yarn Weight

STANDARD CATEGORIES

Although we do consider the weight of a ball of yarn, *weight* is also a type of quality a yarn possesses. *Yarn weight* refers to the thickness, or bulkiness, of a strand of yarn. The Craft Yarn Council of America has established the following general, industry-accepted standard categories of yarn weight. Use this chart along with the information on a yarn's label to get an even better idea of how best to use the yarn.

Yarn Weight Symbol	Types of Yarn in Category	Crochet Gauge Range (in SC = 4")	Rec. Hook in Metric	Rec Hook in U.S. Size Range
 SUPER FINE	Sock, Fingering, Baby	21–32 sts	2.25–3.5 mm	B-1 to E-4
 FINE	Sport, Baby	16–20 sts	3.5–4.5 mm	E-4 to 7
 LIGHT	DK, Light Worsted	12–17 sts	4.5–5.5 mm	7 to I-9
 MEDIUM	Worsted, Afghan, Aran	11–14 sts	5.5–6.5 mm	I-9 to K-10½
 BULKY	Chunky, Craft, Rug	8–11 sts	6.5–9 mm	K-10½ to M-13
 SUPER BULKY	Bulky, Roving	5–9 sts	9 mm and larger	M-13 and larger

* **Note:** This chart reflects the most commonly used gauges and needle or hook sizes for specific yarn categories. These are only guidelines. Used with permission of yarnstandards.com

Estimate Yarn Requirements

There is such a large variety of crochet stitches that figuring yardage for a project can be intimidating. The unravel method works well for planning a simple project like a scarf, bag, or blanket.

UNRAVEL METHOD

- 1 Make a swatch using the yarn and stitch or stitch pattern you have chosen for your project. Note how many rows and stitches fit in an inch. Decide what dimensions your project will have.

Example: A scarf to measure 5 feet long and 6 inches wide using single crochet. The swatch gauge = 4 stitches in 1 inch and 3 rows in 1 inch. Each row will take 24 stitches; there will be 180 rows.

- 2 Unravel the number of stitches equal to an inch. Measure the length of the unraveled yarn.

Example: Unravel 4 stitches = 4 inches of yarn.

- 3 Multiply this yarn length by the number of inches in the desired finished width of your project. This number is the length of yarn required to make 1 row.

Example: For a 6-inch-wide scarf: 4 inches of yarn \times 6 inches = 24 inches of yarn needed for 1 row.

- 4 Multiply the number of rows needed by the number of inches of yarn in a row.

Example: For a 5-foot-long scarf: 180 rows \times 24 inches = 4,320 inches.

- 5 Convert the inches to yards (36 inches = 1 yard). That's how much yarn you need.

Example: 4,320 inches = 120 yards

TIP

When in doubt, purchase too much yarn. Keep in mind that your gauge may vary slightly throughout a project. Also remember to account for the yarn tails you leave at the beginning and end of your work and every time you change colors or add a new ball of yarn.

Substitute Different Yarn

Crochet patterns specify the yarn that the designer used to create the project. The pattern is based on the gauge she attained. However, you might want to use a different yarn to make the same pattern. The most important thing to do is to use a yarn of the same weight as the one used in the pattern (see the section “Yarn Weight” on page 16). However, even yarns of the same weight can crochet up at a different gauge, and each yarn comes in balls or skeins that might contain a different amount of yarn, so you’ll need to do some math to figure out how many balls of the substitute yarn to buy.

Example: Pattern calls for 5 skeins of a worsted-weight yarn; each skein has 114 yds. To substitute a worsted-weight yarn that comes in skeins of 200 yds., do the following:

$$5 \text{ skeins} \times 114 \text{ yds.} = 570 \text{ yds.}$$

$$570 \text{ yds.} \div 200 \text{ yds.} = 2.85$$

In this scenario, you need 3 skeins of yarn.

Note: Be sure to keep track of yards and meters—they aren’t interchangeable. 1 meter = 1.1 yards.

TIP

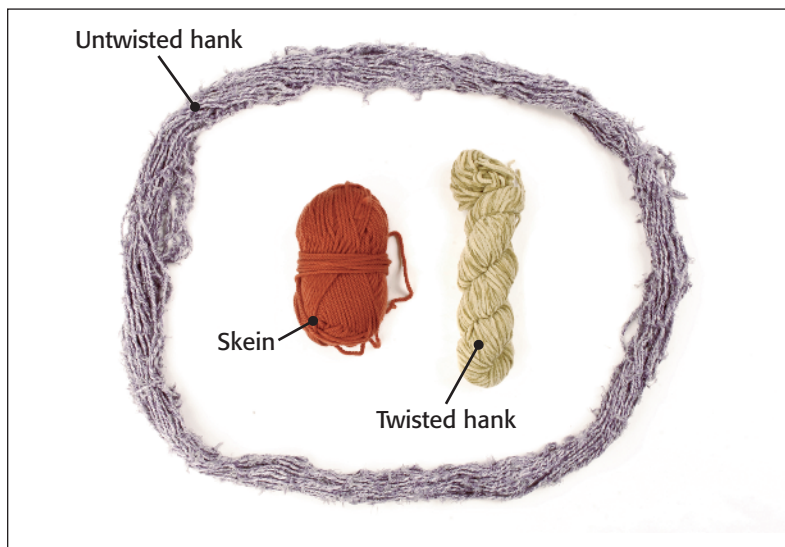
Changing fibers can also affect the outcome of your project. To attain the same effect as the sample in the pattern, it’s a good idea to use a yarn with fiber content similar to that of the yarn in the pattern.

How to Handle Store-Bought Yarn

YARN PACKAGING

Store-bought yarn is packaged in one of two ways.

- **Center-pull skein:** The yarn is wound into a ball or cylinder shape. Unwind the yarn from the outside or pull the end out from the inside. Pulling from the inside results in fewer tangles and prevents the skein from rolling around as you pull yarn from it.
- **Hank:** The yarn is wound loosely into a circle and is secured by pieces of string or yarn and then twisted onto itself, creating an attractive, compact skein. You'll need to wind the hank into a ball in order to work with it; otherwise it will tangle almost immediately and become virtually unusable. Handle hanks carefully. Once you remove the ties and start to unwind a hank, it may tangle. Secure the hank before you start to wind the yarn by using one of the following methods:

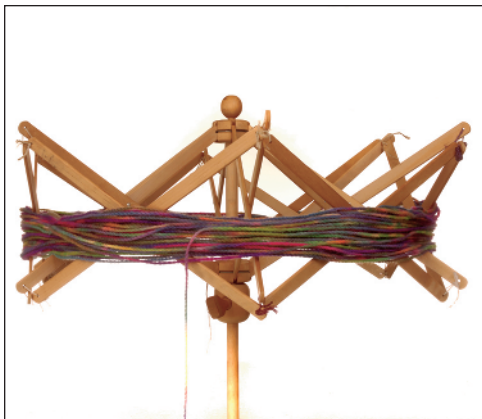


CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

How to Handle Store-Bought Yarn (continued)

WIND USING A SWIFT

A swift resembles an umbrella; the hank is wrapped around it and the swift spins freely to enable you to wind the yarn easily by hand or with a ball winder.



WIND WITH A CHAIR

- 1 Wrap the hank around the chair back or, Turn the chair upside down and use the legs to hold the hank. (Be aware that most chairs will sit at an awkward angle this way, however.)
- 2 Wind the yarn by hand.

Note: These methods won't work if you wind the yarn with a ball winder (see "Wind with a Ball Winder"). You'll need to walk around the chair as you wind the yarn by hand.



WIND WITH A FRIEND

Slip the untwisted hank onto a friend's outstretched forearms. Cut or untie the strings holding the yarn bundled. Starting with an end of yarn, wind it into a ball.



WIND WITH A BALL WINDER

Attach the tail to the ball winder according to the winder's manual. If you're using a swift, wind the yarn, making sure that the swift is spinning freely and the yarn is winding nicely onto the spool. If you're using a friend, use one hand to wind the yarn and the other to help feed the yarn to the winder.



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

How to Handle Store-Bought Yarn *(continued)*

WIND A CENTER-PULL SKEIN USING A TOILET-PAPER ROLL

Cut a slit in one end of an empty cardboard toilet-paper roll. Catch the yarn in the slit, leaving a 6-inch tail. Tuck the tail into the tube.



Wind the yarn around the center of the tube in an x pattern.

Tuck the end of the yarn through a few layers to secure it. Gently slide the skein off the tube, holding the beginning tail to keep it from getting lost inside the center of the skein. To use the yarn, start with the beginning tail.



TO AVOID TANGLING AFTER WINDING

Some yarns tangle easily regardless of how well wound they are. To help avoid this problem, keep your wound yarn in a plastic sandwich bag, with the yarn fed through a small opening at the top.



TIP

Some yarns, especially some wools, are very delicate and can break easily. Avoid tugging on yarn during winding and after, while you are working with it, to prevent breakage.

Yarn Care and Storage

You probably already have a growing collection of yarn intended for crochet projects. To prevent current or future frustration, it's important to store and care for your yarn stash properly.

KEEP YARN CLEAN AND DRY

Unused yarn should be stored in a clean dry place to protect it from pests (moths and mice), dirt, and mildew. Although keeping yarn in an airtight bag is a good idea for a limited time, it is important to let natural fibers breathe. Keep wools safe from moths by storing them with cedar chips, lavender sachets, or mothballs, refreshing these moth repellants as needed.



KEEP YARN ORGANIZED

As your yarn collection grows, you will thank yourself for keeping it organized. You may want to organize your yarn by project, by fiber, by weight, or by color. It doesn't matter how you organize it as long as you can easily find the yarn you want! Keep all balls from the same dye lot together so that you know how much you have to work with when a potential project comes up.

The number of storage devices you can use to house your yarn is infinite, but here are a few suggestions:

- Baskets are attractive and can be used as decorations in your home.
- Clear plastic drawers keep your yarn clean and easy to find.
- A bookshelf looks lovely filled with neatly stacked skeins of yarn.

