

# Chapter 1

## Hooking into a Life of Crochet

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Beginning with the basics of crochet
- ▶ Surveying fundamental techniques
- ▶ Expanding your selection of stitches and techniques
- ▶ Wrapping up your projects and sharing tips for a lifetime of happy crocheting

**C**rochet has numerous beneficial qualities. Here are just a few of them:

- ✓ The soothing rhythm of creating stitches can calm even the most frazzled nerves. If you're one of those people who can't stand to be idle, crochet is a wonderful way to let your body get a bit of rest and not feel like you're wasting time. If your family is always clamoring for you to sit down and watch a TV show or a special movie at night, go ahead, but bring along your hook and yarn.
- ✓ Crochet is also a wonderful take-along project. You can crochet on family road trips as well as on trains and planes (although you'll have to use plastic hooks when crocheting on public transportation these days).
- ✓ According to psychological studies that have been done on the benefits of crochet, the focus needed to create something takes your mind off the bazillion little things hollering for your attention and gives your brain some much-needed downtime.
- ✓ Crochet also serves as an outlet for your creativity and provides a sense of satisfaction when you complete your design and can look at it and say, "I created this myself."
- ✓ Crochet has physical benefits as well. People suffering from various forms of arthritis have used it as a form of physical therapy. The constant movement required helps keep the hands limber and the joints from stiffening up.

We hope that at least one of these reasons is enough to set you on the path to practicing this enjoyable craft. To find out more about crochet, take a look at the basics we present in this chapter.

## *Starting with Crochet Fundamentals*

If you're like most people these days, finding the time to figure out something new can be a challenge. With crochet, you can pick it up when you have some time, put it down when you don't, or take it with you on the run. There's no mess to clean up and nothing to babysit. And you can easily find hooks and yarn at your local discount or craft store, as well as at the many specialty yarn stores that have cropped up in many towns. Basically, you don't need to wait to start crocheting while you special order some obscure item.

In the following sections, we introduce you to the fundamentals of crochet: the tools you need, how to measure gauge, and how to decipher crochet patterns. These fundamentals are what you need to know to successfully start your new crochet hobby.

### *Gathering all of your tools*

One of the greatest things about crochet is that you don't need to invest in tons of fancy materials or create a new room in your house to store a bunch of equipment. All you need to get started are a couple hooks, preferably from different manufacturers so you can find a style you're comfortable with, and a skein of yarn. You probably have the other stuff that you need, such as a pair of scissors, a bag to keep all of your supplies in, and a comfy place to sit, at home already.

Chapter 2 gives you the skinny on the various types of hooks and yarns, as well as some of the other crochet gadgets available. As with any new undertaking, understanding the basics about the materials that you're working with is essential.



If you bought this book ten minutes ago and are already at the yarn shop, you probably just want to get a cheap hook and some yarn so you can start practicing stitches right away. Here's what you need to get started (for less than \$5):

- ✓ **A size H-8 U.S. (5 mm) crochet hook:** This size hook is comfortable to work with, and the size of stitch it creates is easy to see.
- ✓ **A light, solid-colored, worsted-weight yarn, preferably made of acrylic or wool fibers:** Acrylic and wool yarns are great for practicing with because they're inexpensive, and light-colored yarn is best initially because you may have a hard time seeing your stitches if the yarn you're working with is too dark or multicolored.

## Gibberish anyone?

A while back, we had an experience that shows just how funny crochet instructions can look when you're not familiar with the terminology. A young girl was leafing through a crochet magazine looking at the pictures, or so we thought. When we started paying attention to the noises she was making, we laughed so hard our sides split. The girl was reading the

instructions phonetically (*ch 3, dc in next sc, sc in next dc*, see what we mean?). Try this with one of the patterns at the ends of the chapters, and you'll see what we mean. Crochet abbreviations really can look like a bunch of gibberish. Don't worry, though; they're actually pretty simple to decipher, as you find out in Chapter 4.

## Adjusting tension

Making sure that your finished projects end up being the correct size is important. After all, who needs a doily the size of a coaster or an afghan that can double as a slipcover for a sectional couch?



By using some simple math and working a gauge swatch (see Chapter 3), you ensure that your stitches are the right size and tension for your design. So don't skip over the stuff at the beginning of the pattern directions; checking your materials and gauge keeps you out of trouble.

## Crocheting from a pattern

Even crocheters with years of experience work from patterns, so knowing how to read them is important. Chapter 4 tells you what the abbreviations and symbols in patterns mean and how to decipher the instructions. To ease you into the language of crochet, we provide an explanation immediately after each line of instruction, although we urge you to take a stab at reading the "normal" instructions because that's how all crochet publications present them.

To help you get used to all the abbreviations and symbols, we include them in parentheses every time we introduce a new stitch or technique (which we fully explain in plain English, by the way). The first project patterns at the ends of the chapters either partially or completely explain the directions in plain English, but by Chapter 8 we provide the directions solely in Crochetese. (Never fear; you can always flip back to Chapter 4 if you don't remember something.)

## *Mastering Basic Crochet Techniques*

Aside from figuring out the basic stitches, you need to understand a few fundamental techniques: adding and subtracting stitches, changing colors, and working in a circle. All of these techniques are really quite easy, and mastering them can help you create fabulous designs. We give you a brief introduction to these basic techniques, as well as the importance of practicing them, in the next sections.

### *Practice makes perfect*

You don't learn to walk or ride a bike in a day, so don't expect to become a crochet pro in just 24 hours. Getting good at crochet takes practice, but probably not as much as you may think. Start with the basic chain stitch (described in Chapter 5) and practice until you're comfortable with the motions your hands must make. Then move on to another stitch. Each successive stitch, which we walk you through step-by-step in Chapters 5 and 6, builds on another, so try not to skip any of them, at least in the beginning. We don't want you to get frustrated and throw your work down. Believe us, in no time at all, you'll be moving right along.

The majority of *Crocheting For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, presents techniques from a right-hander's point of view, but we don't forget you lefties. All the information contained in this book (and there's plenty of it!) applies to you as well. In Chapter 5, we get you started on the basics by illustrating steps from both the left- and right-handed perspectives. There we also give you a few tips to help you work your way through the rest of the book from a left-handed perspective.

### *Shape up*

After you have the basic stitches down, it's time to break away from the straight lines and give your projects some curves. Check out Chapter 7 to see just how easy it is to shape your projects by adding and subtracting stitches. Don't worry; the math is simple, and so are the techniques.

### *Round and round you go*

Because crochet stitches are so easily manipulated, you can go where other forms of needlework can't, such as in circles. Although the first few chapters have you going back and forth in rows, Chapter 8 throws open the door to the world of crocheting in the round. All sorts of great projects — think doilies, afghans, and sweaters — are worked in rounds. This basic variation is easy, so don't be afraid to try the projects in this book that are worked in rounds.

## *Color it in*

Crochet is by no means monochromatic. Yes, you've seen homes with white doilies scattered on every surface or the hat and scarf sets made in a single, dull color. But just wait until you walk into your local craft store or yarn shop. Your senses may just be assaulted by the multitude of colors and textures now available.



Changing colors and carrying colors are variables you can take into consideration to turn a ho-hum design into a work of art (and Chapter 9 shows you how to do just that).

## *Adding New Stitches and Techniques to Your Crochet Repertoire*

When you've mastered the basics, then you're ready to move on to even more fun stuff — new techniques and stitch combinations that add up to some creative works of art, as explained in the following sections.



Many so-called specialty stitches (see Chapter 10) are nothing more than the combination of a couple different basic stitches, just with a new name. So don't be intimidated if a new technique or stitch seems too complex. Broken down, it's nothing more than the basics you already know.

## *Having fun with new stitches*

You can do many amazing things with your crochet hook. Who says you have to work stitches in only one place? Because crochet is just a bunch of interlocking loops, you can stick your hook in myriad places to create stitches that are flat or textured, square or round — the variety is nearly endless. Chapter 11 has more on working your yarn in different spots. It also includes a fun technique called felting, which takes your project from loose and flimsy to solid and durable.

## *Creating funky fabrics*

Two types of crochet that create unique fabrics are Tunisian crochet (see Chapter 12) and filet crochet (see Chapter 13). You work them by using very specific stitch placements and by following a chart. Both of these techniques are easy to master, and the designs you create with them make you look like you've been crocheting for years.

## *Being square (and other shapes too)*

Crochet doesn't need to just go back and forth; you can create lots of cool shapes with your hook. The granny square is one of the most popular motifs in the crochet stitch library, but many more motifs exist in all shapes and sizes. Make just one for a decoration or join them together for a blanket, wrap, or pillow. The possibilities are endless! Head to Chapter 14 for all the details.

## *Finishing Your Work: Taking Pride in What You've Made*

More goes into finishing your work than simply weaving in that last end of yarn. You may need to sew pieces together, add a pretty border, or tack on a tassel. After all that handling, often your new creations look a bit misshapen, so you need to do some blocking or shaping to pretty 'em up. And although you may not have spent a fortune on materials, we bet you probably don't want to ruin that new sweater on the first wash. The next sections give you a preview of what all can go into finishing your masterpieces.

## *Putting the pieces together*

Many crochet designs are composed of several pieces that you need to put together to form the whole. Chapter 15 walks you through the various methods for joining fabric, whether you sew pieces together with a yarn needle and yarn or you use your hook and crochet the separate pieces together. And because sweaters are such popular items to crochet, Chapter 16 deconstructs the specific pieces that make up a sweater.

## *Tending to the final details*

When you're finished crocheting, you want to make sure your piece looks its best. Does it need any special finishing touches? What about some pockets? Or maybe a fringe? Chapters 17 and 18 give you the scoop on adding these and more.



You may need to block or starch (refer to Chapter 19) your work to get it into shape. Blocking is a simple process that requires water, a little heat, or some starch to help coax your design into place. Don't leave out this step! The pattern's instructions may not mention blocking, but if your piece looks a little off, it could probably use a little blocking to whip it into shape.

## *Taking care of your crochet masterpieces*

Now that you have this wonderful new creation, whether it's wearable or a home décor item, you want to take certain measures to ensure it stands the test of time. If you care for it properly (as explained in Chapter 19), you can pass down your crocheted work for generations to come.

## *Making Your Crochet Experience a Good One Overall*



You'll inevitably experience highs and lows while you work to master crochet. Because we want your highs to be more plentiful than your lows, we're sharing a few tips that will help make your journey to crochet mastery a happier one:

- ✓ **Hold the hook and yarn the way that feels the most natural and comfortable to you.** We illustrate the most common ways in Chapter 5, but you may feel better using a different method.
- ✓ **Always read the stitch descriptions at the beginning of each pattern.** Different publications may use different names for stitches. Crochet isn't standardized, so you may encounter names you don't recognize. The pattern's stitch descriptions should clear up any confusion.
- ✓ **Check to see whether you're working from a British or an American pattern before you begin.** Patterns published in Great Britain and Australia, as well as some patterns published in Canada, use different terminology for even the basic stitches. For example, they call the American single crochet a *double crochet* and the American double crochet a *treble crochet*. You can end up crocheting something completely different from what you intended if you don't know what type of terminology you're working with. (Flip to Chapter 4 for a list of U.S. to UK conversions.)
- ✓ **Pick a place to work where you have few distractions.** As when mastering any new skill, being able to focus is important.
- ✓ **Practice each new stitch or technique by working a swatch.** Crochet stitches often build on each other, so make sure you're comfortable with one stitch before moving on to the next one. And don't throw away your swatches — they can come in handy when you need something on which to practice making borders or buttonholes.
- ✓ **Put your hook and yarn down and come back later if you start to feel frustrated with a new stitch.** Sometimes a little distance can clear up a previously difficult section.

- ✓ **Find an experienced crocheter to help explain a new technique that you're having a hard time with.** If you don't know anyone who crochets, try your local yarn shop. You can usually find someone there who's well versed in the craft and more than happy to help you.
- ✓ **Mark the pages of the books that you feel are most important or helpful to you.** This way you can easily find the references you're looking for.