

chapter

1

Introduction to Knitting

Are you ready to learn how to knit? Before you put any stitches on a needle, you need to do some initial preparation. There are so many choices in terms of knitting yarns and tools that it's a good idea to get to know what's available and what you need before you start.



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Getting Started

Get yourself some yarn and needles and let this book walk you through the basics of knitting. By the end of the first few chapters, you will be proficient enough to create a beautiful scarf, a bag, or even a hat.



Once you begin to get into a knitting rhythm, you'll discover one of the most relaxing and satisfying of hobbies. Sitting down and taking up your knitting—the feel of soft, warm wool running through your fingers, the look of vivid color against color, the excitement of watching your fabric grow—will become one of the highlights of your day.

Grandmothers are not the only ones who have discovered the joy of knitting. Knitting has grown so much in popularity over the past decade that there are knitting groups, knitting Web sites, and pattern books geared toward knitters of all ages and sensibilities. Children and teens are knitting in after-school groups, twenty-somethings are holding knitting circles in cafes, and new mothers are celebrating the births of their babies by knitting for them.

As more people have taken up knitting, the selection of yarns and tools has grown by leaps and bounds. Walk into any yarn shop, and the riot of texture and color will overwhelm and entice you. You'll discover what seasoned knitters mean when they talk about the tremendous "stashes" of yarn hidden under their beds and in their closets.



What's also wonderful about knitting is that you can take it with you everywhere. You may even begin to look forward to time spent in the doctor's waiting room, or at your daughter's violin lesson, or on a long train ride. You won't be able to leave for vacation until you have packed a selection of knitting projects.

A hand-knit gift has extra meaning for both the person giving and the one receiving. When you knit a special hat, scarf, or baby sweater for someone, you weave your love into the fabric, and the person receiving your gift will know it and appreciate it.

It's no wonder that people have been knitting for centuries. Even now, when sweaters can be mass-produced by machine, people are still choosing to create by hand. Hand knitting is a creative outlet that satisfies the senses and soothes the nerves. It's good for you. Did you know that the rhythmic repetition of hand knitting can induce brain waves similar to those achieved through meditation? Once you learn the basic techniques that follow—and they're easy—you, too, can let your needles fly and your mind wander.



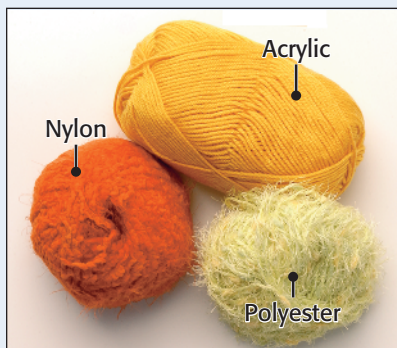
Yarn Types

Knitting yarns come in so many fibers, weights, and textures that you may be overwhelmed when you first walk into a yarn shop. You can use the guide that follows to help choose yarns.



NATURAL FIBERS

Many knitters choose yarns spun from animal fibers, like wool, alpaca, mohair, cashmere, and angora, because they are generally the warmest to wear and hold their shape well. *Wool* comes in a range of textures, from sometimes scratchy Shetlands to softer merinos. *Alpaca* is a luxuriously soft fiber that has a lot of drape. *Mohair* is hairier than wool, and mohair-only garments have a fuzzy halo. *Cashmere* comes from goats and is the softest and most expensive fiber. *Angora*, which is spun from rabbits, is also extremely soft and fuzzy. *Silk* is also warm, but it's not as elastic as wool. Garments made from *cotton* and *linen* yarns are generally lighter and good for warm weather wear. These yarns, however, are heavier and less elastic than wool. Large sweaters knit in heavy cotton tend to lose their shape over time.



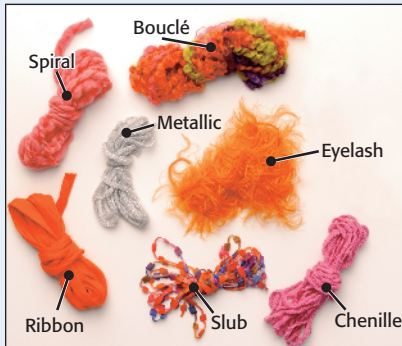
SYNTHETIC FIBERS

Synthetics include *acrylic*, *nylon*, and *polyester*. These yarns are human-made and often less expensive than natural fibers. Many are machine-washable.



BLENDS

Two or more fibers can be combined and spun into one yarn; these yarns are called *blends*. The combinations are limitless, and certain characteristics of a fiber can be altered by combining it with another fiber. For example, cotton can be improved in body and elasticity by being combined with acrylic; combining wool with alpaca or cashmere can soften it.



NOVELTY YARNS

Furry, metallic, and bumpy yarns are called *novelty yarns*. These yarns work well for trims and dressy garments, and they can be doubled with another yarn for added texture and color. Novelty yarns are not recommended for beginners, as it is difficult to see stitches and mistakes in a fabric knit in novelty yarn.



YARN WEIGHTS

Yarn weight refers to the thickness of a yarn. There are essentially five weights: fingering or baby, sport, double knitting (DK), worsted weight, and bulky. You will probably come across variations within these categories as well, such as lace weight, light worsted, Aran weight, heavy worsted, and super bulky.



BALLS, SKEINS, AND HANKS

Yarn comes packaged in many shapes. Yarn can come in a *ball*, with a label in the center, or as a *skein*, with the label wrapped around the middle. Both balls and skeins can be knit from directly. Some yarns come in *hanks*, which look like twisted braids. You must wind a hank into a ball before using it, or it will become tangled.

How to Read Yarn Labels

Most yarns come packaged with a label, also called a *ball band*. Always save your ball band with your yarn, as it contains useful information regarding the yarn.

The largest print on the ball band is the yarn manufacturer's name and/or logo, and then the name of that particular yarn. Also included is the fiber content of the yarn.

The ball band also lists the weight of the ball and the yardage, or the length of yarn contained in the ball. Yarn companies assign numbers to indicate color. These numbers are not the same from one manufacturer to the next. Also listed is a *dye lot* number. Yarns are dyed in large batches, or lots, and the dye lot number refers to a particular batch of a particular color. It's important to buy enough yarn from the same dye lot for a project because color differs from one dye lot to the next.

The yarn label also lists what size knitting needles to use with the yarn and what the desired gauge is for that yarn when knit with those needles. Care instructions are usually shown in the form of symbols like those found on clothing labels.

Weight 100g/220 yards

Needle size:
7 = 5 st per 1"
8 = 4½ st per 1"

Col. no. 32
Lot no. 1077

fine wool yarns

Soft & Thick

Made in the U.S.A.

90% Merino Wool
5% Alpaca
5% Cashmere

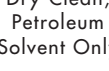


It is a good idea to become familiar with the symbols used to indicate care instructions for a particular yarn. You need to know this information when it comes time to clean your hand-knit item.

Symbols using the image of a tub or washing machine indicate whether a fiber is machine- or hand-washable. Note that the symbol of the tub with an X over it means the fiber is neither machine- nor hand-washable. The triangular symbols indicate bleaching instructions.

Symbols using the image of an iron indicate whether a fiber can be pressed. The symbol of the iron with dots in it illustrates what temperature should be used when pressing.

Circular symbols illustrate dry-cleaning instructions. If the circle has an X through it, the fiber should not be dry-cleaned. Circles with letters in them indicate what chemicals should be used to dry-clean the fiber. The people at your dry-cleaner should be able to tell you what solvents they use.

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

Needles and Accessories

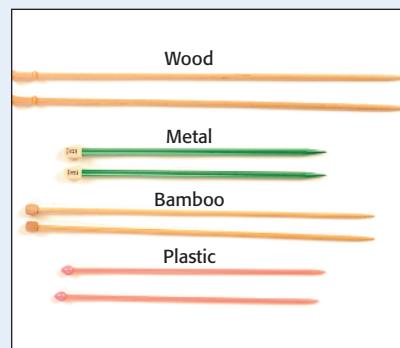
Knitting needles come in many shapes and sizes, and they are made from several different materials. Try out various types to see which ones work best for you. There are also a number of accessories on the market, but you will only need a few to start. As you complete more and more projects, your collection of needles and accessories will gradually expand.

TYPES OF NEEDLES

Knitting needles come in metal, plastic, wood, and bamboo. Yarn slides easily along metal. Plastic needles are lightweight but can bend. Wood needles are beautiful and can be more expensive than metal or plastic. Bamboo needles are lighter and less expensive than wood needles. Some teachers recommend bamboo for beginners because the surface slows yarn from slipping off the needle.

SIZES OF NEEDLES

Needle sizing can be confusing because one needle has three numbers indicating the size. Most important is the diameter of the needle shaft, measured in millimeters (mm). A U.S. numbering system ranging from 0 for the thinnest needle to 50 for the thickest needle also labels size. Also listed on a needle is a UK/Canadian number ranging from 14 for the thinnest needle to 000 for the thickest needle. A needle's shaft length is measured in inches, and this number also generally appears on a needle or needle package. The UK/Canadian numbering system differs from the U.S. system, so it's better to buy needles based on diameter than on numbering system. The chart below shows needle size in metric as well as both U.S. and UK/Canadian numbering.

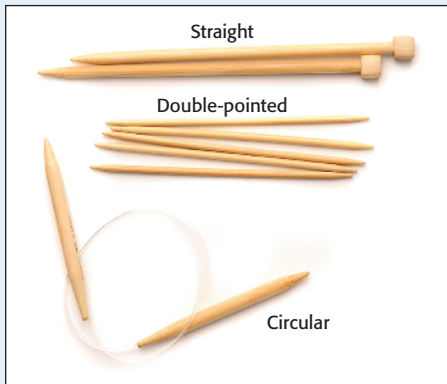


Needle Sizes		
<i>Metric (mm)</i>	<i>U.S.</i>	<i>UK/Canadian</i>
2.0	0	14
2.25–2.5	1	13
2.75	2	12
3.0	—	11
3.25	3	10
3.5	4	—
3.75	5	9
4.0	6	8
4.5	7	7
5.0	8	6
5.5	9	5
6.0	10	4

<i>Metric (mm)</i>	<i>U.S.</i>	<i>UK/Canadian</i>
6.5	10½	3
7.0	10¾	2
7.5	—	1
8.0	11	0
9.0	13	00
10.0	15	000
12.0–12.75	17	—
16.0	19	—
19.0	35	—
20.0	36	—
25.0	50	—

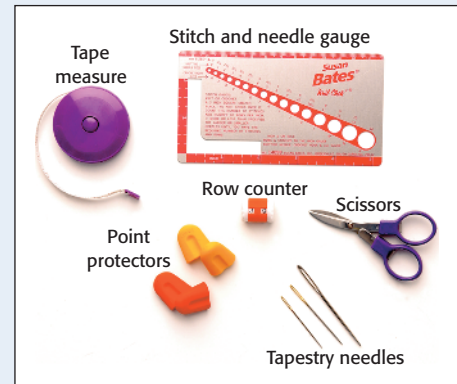
SHAPES OF NEEDLES

Knitting needles come in three shapes. *Straight needles*, also called single-point needles, come in various lengths and have a point on one end and a knob on the other. *Double-pointed needles*, pointed on both ends, are sold in sets of four or five. *Circular needles*, which have two points connected by a nylon cord, come in a variety of lengths and materials.



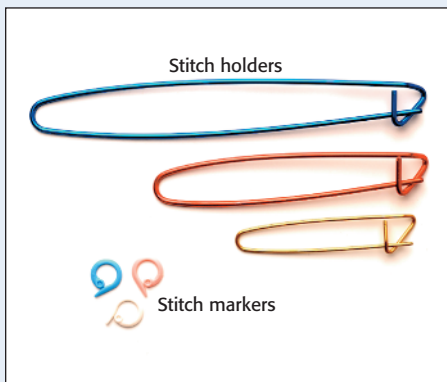
ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

You need to equip yourself with a small pair of *scissors* and a *tape measure*. *Row counters* record rows knit. *Tapestry needles* are used for sewing knit pieces together and darning in loose ends. *Point protectors* prevent work from slipping off the needles. A *stitch and needle gauge* measures not only stitch and row gauge but also needle diameter.



OTHER ACCESSORIES

Stitch holders hold stitches to be worked later. Plastic-headed *knitting pins* fasten knit pieces together before sewing. *Stitch markers* are small plastic rings used to mark a point in knitting where an increase, a decrease, or a pattern change occurs. *Cable needles* come in several styles and are used to hold stitches when making knit cables.



HANDY EXTRAS

You may want to get a *knitting bag*: Choose one that stands open, has a smooth interior, and has some pockets for accessories. Small amounts of yarn are wound on plastic *bobbins*, useful for some types of color knitting. *Crochet hooks* come in handy for making edgings and ties. *Pompom makers* are great for making thick, round pompoms.

