

| Our Ultimate |

Knitting Guide

Ready to try knitting? In this guide, we will teach you the fundamentals including tools, supplies, and step-by-step instructions you need to cast on, knit, purl, pick up a dropped stitch, and cast off. When you're ready to take on that first project, browse our ideas for beginners.



martha stewart

What You Need

To start knitting, you will need a few basic tools, some yarn, and a pattern. Always consult your pattern **before** purchasing tools and yarn. This is important because the instructions will recommend the ideal yarn weight and amount, size of needles, and any additional notions such as buttons or trims.

Your knitting stash should include a pair of needles and a skein or two of yarn (as dictated by your pattern), small scissors, and a yarn needle for finishing. As you progress in skill, you will have the opportunity to equip your knitting box with additional supplies such as row counters, stitch markers, a ball winder, and specialty needles.

How to Read a Knitting Pattern

As a novice knitter, it will take time and experience to decode pattern language with confidence. Read the pattern thoroughly before you begin knitting, marking sizes and measurements needed.

Knitting patterns may have a series of steps that are repeated several times across a row. Rather than writing out these steps time after time, symbols such as asterisks (*) and abbreviations are used to save space when indicating repeats or specific stitches. (Refer to our glossary at the back of this guide for common abbreviations and terminology.)

When you pause in your knitting project, always make a note of where you are in the pattern so that you don't lose track of your stitches.



Knitting Needles

There are three basic types: straight, circular, and double-pointed. Your first pair of needles will likely be straight – these have stoppers at the ends and are used in flat knitting. (This is the most fundamental technique that you will learn in this guide: Flat knitting is done by turning your work at the end of each row, so that the right side and wrong side rows are worked alternatively.) Needles are available in different materials: metal, plastic, wood, and bamboo. If you are a beginner, we recommend bamboo needles as they are less slippery, making them easier to grasp and stitches won't slide off as easily.

Needles are sized by thickness and length. The choice of length is ultimately your preference and choice of pattern – you will find it easier to handle needles that are not too long or too short for the number of stitches required. Needles are sized by thickness according to the U.S. sizing system or metric system. Refer to the chart below for a comparison of both.

Needle Size Conversions

U.S. SIZE RANGE	MILLIMETER RANGE
000	1.5 mm
00	1.75
0	2 mm
1	2.25 mm
2	2.75 mm
3	3.25 mm
4	3.5 mm
5	3.75 mm
6	4 mm
7	4.5 mm
8	5 mm
9	5.5 mm
10	6 mm
10 1/2	6.5 mm
11	8 mm
13	9 mm
15	10 mm
17	12.75 mm



Knitting Yarn

Skeins of yarn come in all colors, shapes, and sizes. So how do you decide which one is perfect for your next project? First, refer to the label: this states everything you need to know including the yarn's fiber content, weight, amount, care instructions, suggested needle size, gauge, and dye-lot number.

Yarn is made of interlocked fibers (animal, plant, or synthetic), and these fibers (referred to as plies) are spun together into thicker strands. The number of plies will affect the drape, stitch definition, and general feel of the yarn.

Fiber content: This is the material of yarn, often in percentages. (For example, 90% merino wool, 5% alpaca, and 5% cashmere.)

Weight: This is the total thickness of yarn, often measured in wraps per inch (WPI). The ply count also factors into this and ranges from the finest to the heaviest weights (usually between 1-ply and 14-ply).

Amount: This is the total length of yarn, measured in yards and ounces.

Care instructions: This provides the necessary information on how to wash and dry your knitted garment.

Suggested needle size and gauge: Yarn gauge is specified by the number of stitches and rows.

Dye-lot number: This refers to the color of yarn. When buying in multiples, be sure that the numbers match. Even when two balls of yarn appear to be the same shade, the subtle difference can become clear in the results.

Gauge Swatches

What is a gauge swatch? This step ensures that the dimensions of your finished project will be correct. A gauge is the number of stitches to be worked over 1 inch of knitting using a particular stitch, weight of yarn, and needle size. Follow our instructions to knit a square swatch that measures 6 by 6 inches. To determine the number of stitches you need to cast on for 6 inches of knitting length, multiply the number of stitches in 1 inch of knitting (specified by your instructions) by 6. Bind off loosely, and lay the swatch flat.

Check your gauge by measuring the swatch. Since stitches at the edges tend to curl inward or become misshapen, measure just the inner 4 inches of the swatch. Place a tape measure parallel to a row of stitches, and count how many stitches (how many Vs) fall within these inner 4 inches, including half stitches. Divide this number by 4, and compare it with the specified gauge (4 stitches to 1 inch). If there are fewer than 4 stitches per inch, your knitting is too loose; use needles a size smaller. If there are more than 4 stitches per inch, you are knitting too tightly; use needles a size larger.



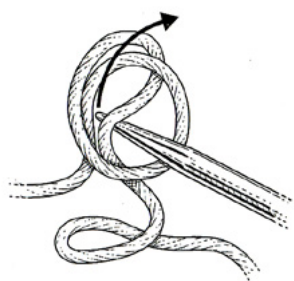
Needles and Yarn Weight

The size of knitting needles used will depend on yarn weight. This is because fine yarns require smaller stitches while bulky yarns require larger stitches. An oversized needle for sock weight, for example, will produce a loose stitch and make the fabric appear transparent. In any knitting project, the stitches should form a solid yet malleable fabric (this is referred to as "stitch fill").

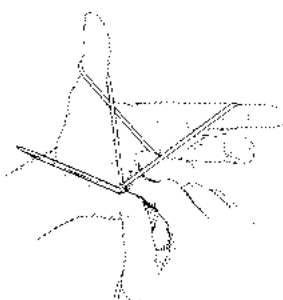
YARN CATEGORY (COMMON TYPES)	U.S. NEEDLE SIZE	METRIC NEEDLE SIZE
Lace	000-1	1.5 - 2.25 mm
Super fine (sock, fingering, baby)	1-3	2.25 - 3.25 mm
Fine (sport, baby)	3-5	3.25 - 3.75 mm
Light (double-knitting / light worsted)	5-7	3.75 - 4.5 mm
Medium (worsted / afghan / aran)	7-9	4.5 - 5.5 mm
Bulky (chunky, craft, rug)	9-11	5.5 - 8 mm
Super-bulky (super bulky, roving)	11-17	8 - 12.75 mm
Jumbo (jumbo, roving)	17+	12.75 mm +

How to Cast On

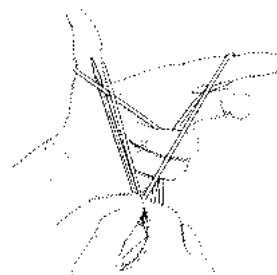
To begin knitting, you will need to create a foundation row of stitches on your needle by casting on.



- 1 Make a slipknot by looping yarn into a pretzel shape, leaving a tail end at least three times the width of what you are knitting. Slip knitting needle through pretzel shape as shown, and pull yarn ends to tighten.



- 2 Drape tail of yarn over left thumb and working yarn (ball end) over left index finger. Use your other fingers to catch yarn lengths in left palm. Insert needle upward through loop on thumb.

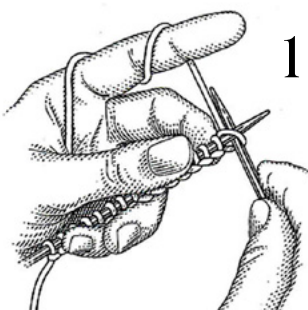


- 3 With needle, catch the working yarn that's on your index finger, and pull it through the loop on your thumb. Remove thumb from loop. Keeping yarn ends secured in palm, reposition thumb, and tighten new stitch on right-hand needle. Repeat these steps until you've cast on the required number of stitches.

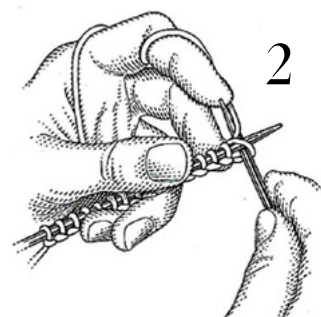
How to Knit a Stitch

To make your first stitch, hold the needle with cast-on stitches in your left hand. Wrap the working yarn around your left index finger, and hold it in back of the left-hand needle.

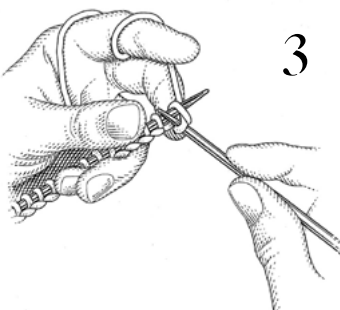
- 1 Insert point of right-hand needle from front to back into the first cast-on stitch on the left-hand needle, opening up a stitch.



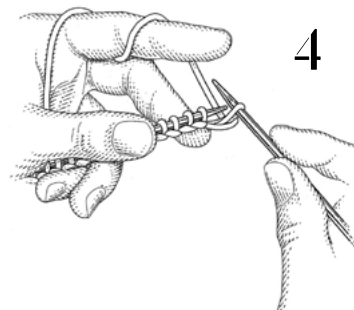
- 2 Catch working yarn with right-hand needle.



- 3 Pull yarn through opened stitch.

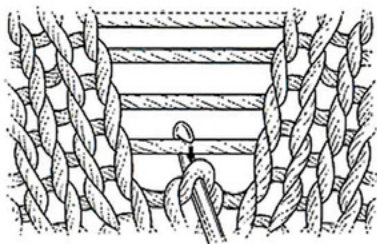


- 4 Slip cast-on stitch off left-hand needle while holding middle finger against second cast-on stitch to ensure it does not also slip off. The stitch on the right-hand needle is the newly formed knit stitch. Continue knitting across the cast-on row. When you have emptied the last stitch from the left-hand needle (completing a row), exchange needles, returning the needle with stitching to your left hand.

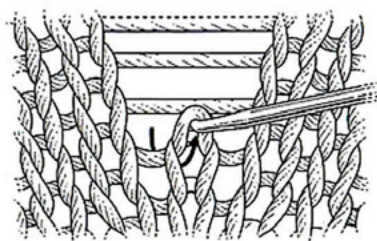


How to Pick up a Dropped Stitch

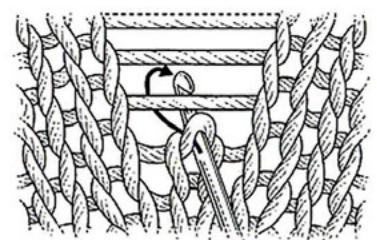
If you drop a stitch while knitting, don't panic! This is a common mistake. It's simple to retrieve it with a crochet hook.



- 1 With the knit side facing you, insert crochet hook, front to back, into loop of dropped stitch.



- 2 Use hook to catch the first horizontal "ladder," and pull it through loop to the front.



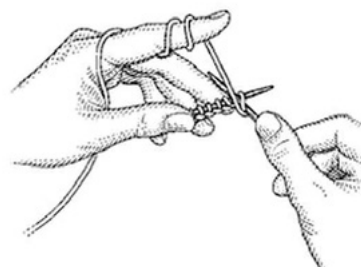
- 3 Repeat until all ladders have been pulled through loop. Place the stitch back onto left-hand needle, with the right side of the loop on the front of the needle.

To pick up a stitch dropped on a purl row, turn your work around, and follow the directions for picking up a dropped knit stitch.

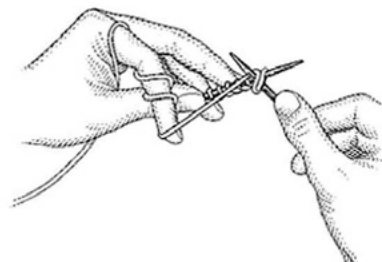
How to Purl

The purl stitch differs from the knit stitch in two fundamental ways: The working yarn is held in the front of the project instead of the back, and the needle is inserted from the back to the front instead of from front to back. Hold the needle with cast-on stitches in your left hand. Wrap the working yarn (ball end) around your left index finger, and hold it in front of the work.

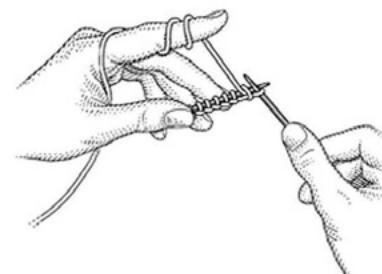
- 1 Insert point of right-hand needle, from back to front, into the first cast-on stitch on the left-hand needle, opening up a stitch.



- 2 Lay working yarn over needle from front to back by moving left index finger downward.

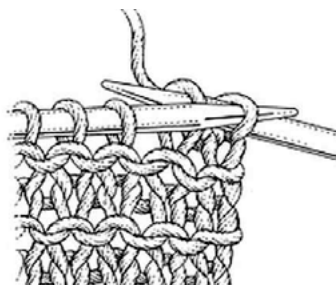


- 3 Push working yarn from front to back through cast-on stitch. Slip cast-on stitch off left-hand needle while holding middle finger against second cast-on stitch to ensure it does not also slip off. The stitch on right-hand needle is the newly formed purl stitch. As a purl stitch faces you, it looks like a grain of rice; its reverse side looks like a V.

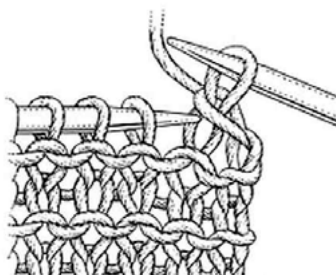


How to Cast Off

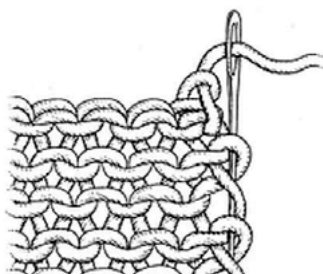
Also referred to as “binding off,” these necessary steps keep stitches from unraveling once they’re removed from the needle.



- 1** Knit two stitches. Insert left-hand needle into first stitch; lift stitch up over second stitch and...



- 2** Off the needle. Continue knitting stitches in this manner until all stitches have been cast off. Cut working yarn, leaving a 6-inch-long tail. Pull tail through last stitch to secure.



- 3** Use a yarn needle to weave tail ends of yarn through backs of several stitches, picking up only surface loops.



Projects

You have everything you need to take on a new knitting project: a pair of needles, several skeins of yarn, and the techniques to pull it off. Now all you need is a brilliant idea! Start with our favorite projects and patterns for beginners:

[MITTENS](#)

[HEADBAND](#)

[NECK SCARF](#)

[POUCHES](#)

[BLANKET](#)

Stitch Visual Dictionary



Glossary of Terms

* indicates that you repeat directions following and between asterisks as many times as instructed

() or [] indicates a group of stitches that are repeated as many times as instructed

<ul style="list-style-type: none">— alt an abbreviation for alternate— approx is an abbreviation for approximately— beg is an abbreviation for begin or beginning— bet is an abbreviation for between— BO is an abbreviation for bind off— CC is an abbreviation for contrast color— cm is an abbreviation for centimeter(s)— cn is an abbreviation for cable needle— CO is an abbreviation for cast on— cont is an abbreviation for continue— dec is an abbreviation for decrease(s)— DK double knit— dpn & dpns are abbreviations for double point(ed) needle or needles— fl is an abbreviation for front loop or front loops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— foll is an abbreviation for follow(s) (ing)— frogging is the act of unraveling or tearing out knitting— g st is an abbreviation for garter stitch (<i>created from knitting every single row, resulting in a ridged surface</i>)— inc is an for increase(s)(ing)— K or k is an abbreviation for knit— k2tog is an abbreviation for knit two together— ktbl is an abbreviation for knit through back loop— kwise is an abbreviation for knitwise (<i>which indicates the side from which you will hold your needle</i>)— LH is an abbreviation for left hand or lefthand— lp or lps are abbreviations for loop(s)— m is an abbreviation for meter— M1 & m1 are abbreviations for make one stitch— MC is an abbreviation for main color	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— ndl or ndl(s) are abbreviations for needle(s)— P up is an abbreviation for pick up and purl— P and p are abbreviations for purl— p2tog is an abbreviation for purl two together (<i>which indicates purling two stitches together as though they were one stitch</i>)pat & patt are abbreviations for pattern— pm is an abbreviation for place marker— pr is an abbreviation for previous row or previous roundprev is an abbreviation for previous— psso is an abbreviation for pass slipped stitch over (<i>which indicates that you slipped a stitch and then worked one or more stitches following that slipped stitch</i>)— ptbl is an abbreviation for purl through back loop (<i>which indicates that you pass your right needle through the back side of the next stitch from left to right</i>)— pwise is an abbreviation for purlwise— R & r are abbreviations for row
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Glossary of Terms

* indicates that you repeat directions following and between asterisks as many times as instructed

() or [] indicates a group of stitches that are repeated as many times as instructed

— rem

is an abbreviation for remain(ing)

— rep

is an abbreviation for repeat

— Rev st st

is an abbreviation for reverse stockinette stitch (which is created by beginning with a purl row and then alternating knit and purl rows)

— RH

is an abbreviation for right hand or righthand

— rnd & rnds

are abbreviations for round(s)

— RS

is an abbreviation for right side

— sk

is an abbreviation for skip

— sk2p

is an abbreviation for skip next two stitches

— skp

is an abbreviation for slip, knit, pass slipped stitch over

— sl

is an abbreviation for slip

— sl st

is an abbreviation for slip(ped) stitch (which means to move it from the left needle to the right without working it)

— sl1k

is an abbreviation for slip one knitwise

— sl1p

is an abbreviation for slip one purlwise

— ssk

is an abbreviation for slip, slip, knit

— sssk

is an abbreviation for slip, slip, slip, knit

— St st

is shorthand for Stockinette stitch

— st & sts

are abbreviations for stitch(es)

— tbl

is an abbreviation for through back loop

— tfl

is an abbreviation for through front loop

— tog

is an abbreviation for together

— WS

is an abbreviation for wrong side (which indicates the side of the project that will face inward or may not be seen)

— wyib

is an abbreviation for with yarn in back (which indicates that working yarn should hang down the backside of your knitting)

— wyif

is an abbreviation for with yarn in front

— ybk

is an abbreviation for **yarn back** (which indicates that working yarn should be brought from the front of the work to the back, passing under needle tips)

— yfwd

is an abbreviation for **yarn forward** (which indicates that working yarn should be brought from the back of the work to the front, passing under the needle tips)

— yo

is an abbreviation for **yarn over** (which indicates to bring your yarn from back to front — if it was initially in the back — or from front to back — if it was initially in the front — under needle tips. After doing so, continue to knit as the pattern indicates)

— yo2

is an abbreviation for yarn over twice

— yon

is an abbreviation for yarn over needle (which indicates to pass the yarn from the back of the work to the front — or from the front to the back — and laying it across the top of the needle as opposed to between/under needle tips as in a yarn forward.)

— yrn

is an abbreviation for yarn round needle (which indicates the same instruction as yarn over)