



A brief introduction to knitting and crochet

A bit of history ...

Unlike felting and weaving, which can claim to have been around for several millennia, knitting is only around 1,000 years old.

- The first knitting was more like netting in that it was done by looping the thread, using a needle. However, both knitting and crochet can only be dated by knitted and crocheted items found, and the stunning expertise of some early pieces suggests a longer history.
- Knitting arrived in Europe from the 13th century, starting to move north from Spain, possibly reaching there from the Middle and Far East. It arrived in the UK in the 14th and 15th centuries, greatly helped by the advent of wire needles.
- It became as ubiquitous as spinning and weaving, particularly for hose and caps. Interestingly, the earliest knitting machines pre-date powered looms or spinning machines.
- The origins of crochet appear to be from the early 19th century, although lace, for which both knitting and crochet can also be used, has been around for longer.

An excellent, if opinionated, book on knitting is Richard Rutt's 'History of Hand Knitting'. You may need to search for this as the UK Batsford edition is out of print, though there is a US version published by Interweave Press. Interweave also publish Crochet, History and Technique by Lis Paludin. Wikipedia, of course, provides a pretty comprehensive introduction to both skills.

Things to knit? Or better not?

Knitting stretches, in both directions, which is why it's particularly good for socks, stockings (the hose of earlier days) and caps. It will make a dense or lacy fabric, draping or bulky, depending on the yarn and the stitches used. It can be textured with stitches, cables and bobbles, and ridged or flat.

You can easily make textured geometric patterns – provided you work on 45 degree slopes. Other angles are harder to achieve, though you can make quite good curves as well.

Unlike crochet, knitting tends to have a 'right side' and a 'wrong side', but designs can be made to work as both sided, such as ribs, and even either as a double cloth or as a reversed image on either side.

However, knitting the wrong fabric in the wrong direction in the wrong yarn can lead to unflattering results!





Crochet is much more sculptural and less elastic than knitting, is more portable and can be made in smaller modules, easily linked together later. It is more solid and not as stretchy so is better for accessories, jackets and structured garments. It is also often used to provide edgings or decorations for other work. Crochet tends to use more yarn for the area covered. So like knitting, using the wrong yarn, in the wrong design will also probably go wrong!

How to knit and crochet

Sorry! We cannot teach you in so small a space, but we can make some suggestions:

- One excellent way is to learn from others, friends or family, or possibly by joining a knitting group many of which are run by wool shops. You can also find your nearest group via magazines or the Ravelry on-line community.
- The next option is Youtube, which has some excellent tutorials as well as some hilarious mock demonstrations. Some of these short films will also show you how to improve your technique or try different styles, such as continental knitting. Youtube is particularly helpful for individual techniques, such as casting on, different styles of knitting or learning left-handed and is rather more flexible than discs, though for repeat viewings discs have some benefits.
- There are plenty of books, too. A good starting point is 'The Knitter's Bible' by Claire Crompton, published by David and Charles (ISBN 0 780715 317990).
- Most local news agents stock magazines and most of these also have websites.
- There is a fuller booklist in Sue's book, 'Pure Wool', published by Bloomsbury.
- If you wish to get really technical, you can buy a book dedicated only to the possible variations for casting on your work, finishing it or particular glorious books on Lace, Guernseys or Fair Isle designs
- We have also produced a list (which will expand!) of the abbreviations and terminology we have used in our knitting and crochet patterns and you can download from our Advice & Information page.

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