

Knitting: Socks!, by Kathe Loeffler
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I know I've mentioned several friends in this column, but yet another one came to me recently to tell me that adding knitting to her life has lowered her blood pressure. She was asked by her doctor what she was doing differently - and only knitting came to mind. Nothing else in her life has changed in the last year. In fact, she happens to be a law school student - so you can imagine the stress levels. But she is knitting now, baby booty after baby booty. My friend has an affinity for knitting socks, you see, since her first project was a Christmas stocking.

Socks are traditionally knit on double pointed needles. This is so the sock can be knit 'in the round' much like climbing a winding staircase without the need for a seam. There are patterns for knitting socks on circular needles, but the DPNs are actually faster! The secret is knowing where to put the needles that aren't being worked so you don't get poked too much. It sounds dangerous, I know, but it really isn't.

There's nothing like wearing your own handmade socks. You might not be able to imagine putting all that work into something you'll wear on your feet - but handmade socks fit better and last longer than their store bought cousins! What follows is a pattern I wrote for a basic sock requiring approximately 200 yards of worsted weight yarn and size 4 - 6 double pointed needles. I've found it is easier to learn on larger yarn and needles than the toothpicks required for sock-weight yarn.

First cast on 52 sts, and distribute them evenly onto three (or four) of your double pointed needles. Join the stitches in the round, taking care not to twist. This means that the first stitch you cast on will be the first stitch you knit - so that you'll be knitting in a circle. Then work 14 rounds of ribbing as follows: knit 2, purl 2. When you're done with the ribbing, start knitting every round until the sock is about 5 inches long.

The heel flap is the next part and it really is something of a leap of faith. Trust me, it does work. Divide stitches for the heel as follows:

Row 1 - slip 1 stitch purlwise, knit enough stitches onto one needle so that you'll be working with exactly half of the total. In our case, 26.

Row 2 - slip 1, purl across

Row 3 - * slip 1, knit 1, repeat from * across

Row 4 - slip 1, purl across

Repeat rows 3 and 4 ten more times - or until heel flap reaches 2 to 2.5 inches.

Now you must turn the heel so that the sock will cup your heel when you put it on. The heel turn involves two different decreases. The decrease on the right - or out - side of the sock is the SSK. For this stitch, slip two stitches one at a time as if you're going to knit them onto your right needle. Then put the left needle through both of them toward the front. Knit them together. The other decrease is the P2tog. For this stitch, you will purl two stitches together. Let's turn that heel:

Row 1 - slip 1, knit to middle of heel flap, knit 2, SSK, knit 1, turn.

There will be unworked stitches left, but turn anyway.

Row 2 - slip 1, purl 5, P2tog, purl 1, turn

Row 3 - slip 1, knit 6, SSK, knit 1, turn

Row 4 - slip 1, purl 7, P2tog, purl 1, turn

Row 5 - slip 1, knit 8, SSK, knit 1, turn

Row 6 - slip 1, purl 9, P2tog, purl 1, turn

Continue in this manner, adding one stitch to the middle bit each row until all heel stitches are

worked. The last two rows of the heel turn will end with an SSK and then a P2tog. Your heel should now be turned.

We'll finish up this sock in next month's column. Until then, keep those toes covered!

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