

Free Pattern of the Month - August 2003

Caterpillar Socks

This month's free pattern is called Caterpillar Socks. The pictures really don't do this pattern justice - the oranges are brighter than they seem. Tell me what you think...



This sock pattern was inspired by some Koigu yarn that I bought for another project that really didn't work out. The more I looked at it, the more it reminded me of those fuzzy orange caterpillars that I see all over the place in the Spring. I decided to see what it would look like on a pair of socks, and here is the result.

This is more a design concept than a pattern in that you can use any variegated yarn that you wish that will knit to the gauge specified.

The socks in the cover photo were knit by Tanya in Minneapolis and she also took the photos. Thanks so much for doing such a great job, Tanya!

Okay, let's get started.

Yarn: KPM variegated (2 skeins) and one skein of solid Navy for heels and toes (if you choose).

With this yarn the socks will fit in all but your tightest shoes. It seems a shame to hide all of that work in a pair of shoes, so I tend to wear sandals in all but the wettest weather.

Gauge: 8 stitches and 11 rows per inch with a US #1 bamboo needle (or whatever size you need to get gauge).

These instructions assume that you are familiar with DPN needles and that you know how to knit and purl. I place the stitches on four needles and knit with the fifth.

Cast 61 stitches onto one needle with the variegated yarn. I like to use a circular needle several sizes bigger than my DPNs for the cast on it makes that cuff edge looser but the stitches will still look neat.

Start the first row of ribbing: Knit 2, Purl 2 until there are 16 stitches on your first DPN needle (needle 1). Start the 2nd needle Purl 2, Knit two until there are 16 stitches on the second DPN needle. Start the third needle Purl 2, Knit 2 until there are 12 stitches on the needle. Start the 4th needle Purl 2, Knit 2 until there are 16 stitches on the needle. There will be one stitch left on the 5th needle. Put this last stitch on the beginning of the 1st needle so that when you join in the round you will Knit 2 together for the first stitch, **onto needle 4** (i.e. needle 4 will end with 2 knit stitches, and all needles will start with 2 purl stitches). If you are familiar with DPN's you will be able to visualize this when you get there.

Join in the round, being careful not to twist. I like the number of stitches on the needles to be different on the ribbing of this sock because the beginning of each needle starts with a Purl stitch. Having a Purl stitch at the beginning helps eliminate the ladders that can form where the needles come together. (So you will have 16 stitches on needle 1, 16 on needle 2, 12 on needle 3, and 16 on needle 4)

Knit 20 - 30 rounds of Knit 2, Purl 2 ribbing, or however much you like at the top of your socks, or until you're tired of it. Some people like to knit the whole leg in ribbing, but I find this boring and tedious, so I prefer only a little ribbing at the top, and then stockinette for the rest of the leg. Add a stripe or two in a solid yarn in the ribbing for variety if you like.

While working in stockinette for the leg, purl the brightest orange color (it may only be 3 or 4 stitches, or it may be more). This will make the stitches stand up above the fabric of the sock just like caterpillars. Note: when knitting a sock from the cuff down you may not notice the purled stitches standing out until you turn the sock right-side-up - the way you will wear it. If it looks dull to you, turn it around and see if you like the results.

Knit about 40 rounds with the variegated yarn, or as many rounds as you like. Rearrange the stitches on the needles so that there are 15 stitches on each needle. Each variegated yarn will produce a different pattern so yours may not look exactly the same. Some will produce stripes or patches of color surrounded by stripes. Half the fun is discovering how it will turn out.

When the leg is as long as you like, there are a couple of options.

I like a tighter ankle on my socks, so I work 15 rounds like this: Round one: * Slip 1 stitch, Knit 1 stitch * around. This means that you will knit only half of the stitches and slip the rest. Round two: Knit even around. Repeat these two rounds, ending with a knit round, for about an inch. This makes the ankle a little more snug. If you don't find your socks bagging down into your shoes, just knit a few more rounds, or not, if you choose. Note: if you have a high instep you may find that adding these rounds to the ankle area makes it hard to get the sock over your heel. You can choose to continue to purl the bright sections or not – knitter's choice.

Heel Flap:

I like the feel of a Dutch heel. In order to get to the heel, we have to knit a flap. I like to use a heel stitch for the heel flap because it makes a firmer fabric, and it pulls in, making the heel flap narrower. I have a narrow heel, so this fits me just right. If you have no problems with a narrow heel, you can work stockinette stitch for the same number of rows, instead.

The heel flap is knit on half of the foot stitches 30. To knit the heel stitch -

Row one - Slip 1 stitch, Knit 1 stitch all the way across - 30 stitches.

Row 2 - Slip the first stitch and Purl all the way back - 30 stitches.

You can work the heel flap and heel turn in the contrasting color if you choose, just start the first row of the heel flap with the new color and knit on.

By slipping the first stitch of each row, you will have a series of loops on each side of the heel flap, which makes it easier to pick up stitches for the gusset.

Repeat these two rows 16 times, or about 2.5 - 3. It will depend on how deep you need your heel flap. Measure from your anklebone to the floor to get a rough idea. The only sure way to know is to knit a sock and try it on.

Heel Turn: It sounds scary at first, and confusing, and illogical, but if you follow the instructions blindly, without letting your brain argue, and have faith that everything will turn out fine, you'll be able to do it with little or no hair pulling. You will be working with the stitches of the heel flap - 30 stitches.

It goes like this -

Row one - Slip the first stitch, Knit 19, Knit 2 together, turn.

Row two - Slip the first stitch, Purl 10, Purl 2 together, turn.

Row three - Slip the first stitch, Knit 10, Knit 2 together, turn.

Repeat rows two and three until there are 10 stitches left on the needle. You will not be knitting every stitch on each row - you will be creating short rows that will form a cup that will follow the shape of your heel.

End on a RS row, which means you will have to Purl across to finish where you need to be.

Gusset:

Knit these 10 stitches. With a crochet hook, pick up one stitch in each of the slipped stitches on the sides of the heel flap. The number will vary, and that's okay. It's always good to fake it and pick up a couple of extra stitches at the beginning and end of the heel flap - this will help eliminate any holes.

If you chose to do a contrasting heel, pick up the gusset stitches with the variegated yarn and continue as before. You may find it easier, if you've used a

contrasting yarn for the heel and heel flap, to pick up the gusset stitches beginning on needle 4 where the tail of the variegated yarn was left behind. This will make one less tail that you have to darn in later.

With this yarn I generally pick up 22 stitches on the first side of the heel flap, knit across the stitches previously neglected on the third needle (the instep stitches), then picked up another 22 stitches on the other side of the heel flap, and knit across the heel stitches to the beginning. Tanya picked up only 18.

Your total stitch count may vary, so don't be too worried about it. The important things are these:

1. It's always better to pick up more stitches than less - this way your socks won't have gaps at the sides.
2. Be sure that you pick up the same number of stitches on each side of the heel flap. If you can't, it's not a big deal, just make sure that you decrease on the side with more stitches in the first round, so that they are even.

Now for the gusset decreases: Knit one round even - this will even out the picked-up stitches and make the decreases easier to perform - picked-up stitches sometimes are tight and don't like to be knit together.

Put the stitches on four needles again: The picked-up stitches on the left side of the gusset on needle 1, the instep stitches on needle 2, the picked-up stitches on the right side of the gusset on needle 3, and the heel stitches on needle 4.

Next round:

Knit to the 3rd stitch from the end, Knit 2 together, Knit the last stitch on needle 1. Knit the instep stitches even.

Knit 1, Knit 2 together, knit to the end of needle 3.

Knit even across needle 4 to the end.

Next round: Knit even.

Remember to keep purling the orange bits as you go, but only on the top of the foot after the heel turn you don't want to be walking on those bumps. Don't purl the orange bits on the gussets, either.

You can repeat these two rounds until you reach 60 stitches, alternating a decrease round with an even round. This works for most feet. If you have a narrow heel or foot, you may want to alternate the rounds above with two decrease rounds, followed by one even round until you reach the number of stitches you need. Knitter's choice. If your socks are regularly loose around the ankle, you may want to try this way, if not, consider yourself lucky and continue on to the foot. Rearrange the needles so that there are an equal number of stitches on each one.

After the gusset decreases are done, it's time for the foot. This is just endless rounds of stockinette stitch, around, and around. It helps to make a mark on a

scrap of paper or use a row counter if you are as anal as I am about making the socks identical. That way you only have to measure one sock, and the second becomes very meditative - just stockinette stitch (with purl bumps on the top of the foot) and marks on the paper.

Anyway, stop knitting when the sock measures 2 ¼" less than the length of your foot from the back of the heel to the tip of your longest toe. Measure the sock from the back of the heel flap to the bottom of the current round of stitches.

Once you reach this point, it's time for the toe decreases.

Switch colors if you choose and knit one round even.

Knit until 3 stitches from the end of needle 1, Knit 2 together, Knit 1.
Knit 1, Knit 2 together, Knit to the end of needle 2.
Knit until 3 stitches from the end of needle 3, Knit 2 together, Knit 1.
Knit 1, Knit 2 together, Knit to the end of needle 4.

Next round - Knit even around.

Repeat these two rounds 8 times, then decrease every round 4 times. The number remaining will vary.

Knit across needle 1. Put the stitches from needle 1 and 4 onto one needle, and the stitches from needles 2 and 3 onto another needle. Graft the two together, run in all the loose ends on the inside of the sock, and you're done!

There are many sites on the web for the Kitchner stitch, and every good knitting reference has instruction and pictures, so I won't include them here.

Put the sock on and see if it fits. If it's a little off, that's okay - make the appropriate changes on the second one.

Put your foot up on a coffee table or low stool, and admire your work. While the heady feeling of making your own sock is still with you - and before you get up to do anything else (some arcane superstition, but I still do this <G>) cast-on for the second sock.

Send me a picture, and I may post it on my web site - with credit to you, of course.

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Karma is a circular thing – stealing is wrong. This pattern is intended for your personal use, not for resale or profit. Any questions? E-mail me.

