

Easy Thin Socks

After you've knit a few pairs of worsted weight socks, it's time for some simple, thin socks. This is a generic pattern that will work with sock or fingering weight yarn. Even if you've never knit socks before, give these a try - it's really not difficult, I promise <G>

As always, e-mail me with any questions or comments that you might have.



My very first knitted project was a pair of short socks. Out of my own handspun, no less. I struggled with my first "turned" heel, but the socks came out looking like socks, they fit, and it was all downhill into an addiction that lives to this day.

Warning!

Once you wear a pair of hand-knit socks, you may not ever want to wear a pair of store-bought socks again. Once you knit a pair of socks, you may find infinite satisfaction in creating these small, portable works of art for friends and family. Or just for yourself!

After I had knit over 40 pairs of socks (yes, I do keep track - its all part of the sock addiction) I was told that knitting socks was hard. Whew! Im glad no one told me sooner, or I might have never tried them.

I hear so many people say that they knit sweaters or baby blankets, or whatever, but they havent tried socks, because they heard that they are "hard". Let me dispel that myth right now - socks are Not Hard! Knitting a sock does require that you work on double pointed needles (DPN), and that you can Knit, Purl, and Knit 2 together. Mostly, you will be Knitting around, and around, and around. Its very soothing, really.

After you have learned the basics, you can add color and texture to create your own fancy socks.

I like to have a pair of socks on the needles for taking on car or bus trips and for standing in line at annoying places like the DMV or Post Office. We all spend way too many wasted hours in lines, whether we are in our cars or not. It takes me about a week to knit a sock in worsted weight yarn while commuting on the bus. If I knit for others, this would be 25 pairs of socks a year - holiday gifts done in no time! Or quite a box to send off to a charity.

Okay, lets get started.

Yarn: For these socks, I used Silja sock yarn, one skein in variegated "fall" shades and one skein in charcoal gray. Its a fingering weight wool/nylon blend. I chose this yarn because socks get a lot of wear on the bottom if you wear them with no shoes, and if you wear them with shoes they may show wear at any points that touch the inside of your shoes or sandals. After a little wear youll soon be able to identify where you need to add some reinforcing thread.

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: I got 7 stitches and 11 rows per inch with a US #1 bamboo needle. I know, it does seem like they will go on forever, but there are only 72 stitches per round for the leg, and depending on how wide your feet are, there are only 64 stitches per round for the foot. It will go faster than you think, I promise.

Needles: I prefer a wood or bamboo needle to knit socks. They are warmer to my always-cold hands, and they "give" a little as I knit, making them more comfortable. For these socks I used a US #1 needle.

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-on 73 stitches onto one needle with the dark gray (or color of your choice). Put a point protector on the end away from the last cast-on stitch to keep them from sliding off. Start the first row of ribbing: Knit 2, Purl 2 until there are 22 stitches on another 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 20 stitches on the needle. Start the 4th needle Purl 2, Knit 2 until there are 16 stitches on the needle. There will still 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. If you are familiar with DPNs 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 seems to help eliminate the "ladders" that can form where the needles come together. (So you will have 20 stitches on needle 1, 16 on needle 2, 20 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.

Knit one round with the ribbing yarn and switch to the new yarn. I do this by knitting just one stitch with both yarns held together. Remember not to knit both loops on the next round, but to knit them together as one.

Knit about 60 rounds with the variegated yarn, or as many rounds as you like. Rearrange the stitches on the needles so that there are 18 stitches on each needle. Each variegated yarn will produce a different pattern, so yours may not swirl like mine did. 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.

Switch to the first color, and knit one round.

My feet are rather narrow, so I decreased evenly around (Knit 7, Knit 2 together) to end up with 64 stitches. To tell if the sock will be snug enough to suit you, slip the ball of your foot into the leg of the sock. If it feels good, continue with 72 stitches. If your foot is narrower, decrease to 64, or 68 stitches. These instructions will continue with 3 sets of numbers - the first number will be for a 64 stitch foot, and the numbers in parentheses will be for 68 and 72 stitch feet, respectively.

Here we go -

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 32 (34, 36). To knit the heel stitch -

Row one - Slip 1 stitch, Knit 1 stitch all the way across - 32 (34, 36) stitches.

Row 2 - Slip the first stitch and Purl all the way back - 32 (34, 36) stitches.

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.

Now to turn the heel: 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 will little or no hair pulling. You will be working with the stitches of the heel flap - 32 (34, 36) stitches.

It goes like this -

Row one - Slip the first stitch, Knit 19 (20, 25), Knit 2 together, turn.

Row two - Slip the first stitch, Purl 10 (11, 14), Purl 2 together, turn.

Row three - Slip the first stitch, Knit 10 (11, 14), Knit 2 together, turn.

Repeat rows two and three until there are 12 (14, 16) 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.

Knit these 12 (14, 16) 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. Its 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.

I picked up 24 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 24 stitches on the other side of the heel flap, and knit across the heel stitches to the beginning.

This brought my total stitch count to 92 stitches. This 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. Try to 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.

You can repeat these two rounds until you reach 64 (68, 72) stitches, alternating a decrease round with an even round. This works for most feet. If you have a narrow heel or foot, you may need to do 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 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 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 its 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 to post in my Customer Gallery!

Enjoy!

Mary in South Beach, Oregon

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