

Machine Knit? Hand Knit? A Cautionary Tale

Most of my time I knit with a knitting machine. But occasionally I see a hand knit pattern that is irresistible. I learned to handknit from my mother when I was about 8 or 9. I began a garter stitch scarf—but never finished it. I was too impatient, and it didn't grow very fast. But when I got older I took on more interesting projects with some success.

Now that I have grandchildren I have taken on projects that are for them. 2 years ago it was bobble hats with small animal heads instead of bobbles. It came as a kit, and I used a circular needle to knit 3 of the hats. Unfortunately, I had neglected to measure my grandson's head in advance, so had to re-knit his hat over again. (He is rather big-headed in both senses.)

Last year I fell in love with the watermelon-design cardigan, which I knitted for my nephew's baby daughter. I needed to use the circular needle again, and even learned how to use the magic loop technique. I sent it off to South Africa in plenty of time for the baby's arrival. I sent it air mail special delivery because I was advised that was the safest way to send it. 6 weeks later it arrived—so much for special delivery to South Africa! There was a pattern for a hat to go with the cardigan. But I decided that was too much of a good thing.

WATERMELON BABY CARDIGAN



This year I saw a pattern for mittens with a unicorn design in sizes from toddlers to adults. The unicorn is a horse with a horn coming out of its forehead. In the mittens the horn is where a thumb goes. I purchased the pattern, downloaded, and printed it. Oh dear, it called for using 4 needles (as you would for socks). Not to be defeated, I got out my tin of needles that I had inherited from my mother. Great! I had the right sizes. I had the multicoloured yarn for the cuffs and the unicorn's mane, but no pink yarn in double knit weight. I went off to the store (luckily I still have one nearby), bought the yarn, and started the project. It was the middle of November when I started the project. I hoped to have 2 pairs finished for Christmas for my granddaughters, aged 3 and 6. I decided to begin with the smaller size. The ribbing in the round went well, though I wasn't so keen on the feel of the yarn. Then it came time to change to the pink yarn and larger needles. Knit 3 rounds and start the thumb gusset. I tried doing the increases as directed, but just couldn't get the hang of the directions. A practiced hand-knitter would not have had any trouble, but I struggled. I tried to knit that section three separate times, each time ripping out the increases and starting again. The result just didn't look right or neat enough.



Finally, in desperation I decided to try a different way of knitting the mittens. I got out my LK150 knitting machine and proceeded to re-familiarise myself with it. Normally I use a Brother machine. The LK150 is a Silver machine, which has different levers for hold and knit. I knitted the ribbed cuffs by hand adding an extra 2 stitches for the seams. I did the increases as directed, except that half of each increase had to go on each side of the mitten because I was knitting it flat, not in the round. Of course, I was a bit stuck when the hand knit directions said knit until the mitten measures xx cm from the thumb. The hand knit pattern did not give a gauge or tension measurement. So guess work was involved. (Darn, I should have made a tension swatch before embarking on the first mitten!) I got the first mitten finished and then asked my daughter to measure my granddaughter's hand from wrist to the tip of her longest finger. You guessed it! The mitten was too short.

I used the first mitten as a tension swatch to determine how many rows to knit, and started again. All went well with the thumb gusset, and then I removed the thumb stitches on to my circular needle—I didn't want to bother with waste yarn for so few stitches. I completed the rest of the mitten in pink, and then went back to knitting the thumb. It was only going to be knitted for a few rows. So why bother rewinding the multicoloured yarn? Another mistake, because each row I knitted now required the yarn to be pulled out from the centre of the ball!

I finished the first set of mittens on December 24th at 11.30 pm. The finishing touches, the unicorn's mane, the eyes and eyebrows, had taken longer than the knitting itself. The next day, my granddaughter opened the parcel, tried on the mittens, and then went back to riding her new scooter around the house.

And the moral of the story? The moral of the story is this: beware of thinking you can machine knit directly from a hand knitting pattern if you don't follow a few rules.

1. Before starting your project, measure the person you are intending to knit for.
2. If using balled yarn, rewind and wax it before starting to knit.

3. Knit a tension swatch as you would for any garment you plan to knit on the knitting machine.
4. Do not try to measure your knitting while it is on the machine. Use the tension swatch to calculate how many rows to knit for the desired length.

© Elaine Cater 2020