

## **MINIMALIST KNITTER'S HANDBOOK:**

*Knitting More While Owning Less*



*by Robyn Devine*

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# Introduction

One of the most widely recognized crafts around the world today, knitting has moved from your grandmother's work to something both men and women of all generations have fallen in love with. Knitters are seen working away on subways and park benches, gathered in book shops, even knitting at sporting events, movies, and at parties! People of all ages and walks of life now proudly sport handmade items ranging from hats to sweaters to socks, and just about everything in between!

The benefits of knitting are many, ranging from the pleasure in wearing something made with your own hands to drastically reduced stress levels and even help in healing PTSD, there are a few unfortunate side effects. One of these tends to be a large yarn and notions stash. We knitters are like magpies – drawn in by shiny things, always looking for the new pretty to satisfy us.

From my first hours with needles in hand, it was clear I, like many knitters before me, would fall prey to the wonders of the yarn shop. I began collecting every skein of yarn I possibly could that was within my price range, and even a few that weren't. It didn't take long for my yarn stash to begin taking over all available living space, piled up in bags and bins in closets, stacked up next to the couch, and even hiding out in corners of the car and cupboards.

I continued on like this for several years, until I looked around one afternoon to discover I was surrounded by yarn I didn't knit with and needles I never used. Before I knew it I was sorting through these piles, amazed at the yarn I didn't remember purchasing, that I no longer wanted to use, or that I knew I'd never get to at my current knitting rate, and I took a stand, declaring myself a minimalist knitter.

I did not use or need much of what I had accumulated in the many years of my knitting hobby – in fact, I found the greatest joy from the simplest of tools, the most basic of yarn, and the same patterns used repeatedly to make items for charity and others. So why did I think I needed seventeen skeins of novelty yarn, a bag of bulky wool, and enough sock

yarn to keep my feet covered in handmade goodness for a month straight? I was already making and donating hats on repeat, so the rest was just taking up space.

As I pared down my stash (either knitting with what I had or giving yarn away in mass quantities), I began to notice other knitters doing the same thing. Knitters who knew what they liked to make, knew what they liked to make it with, and chose to only keep those things on-hand. Knitters who were committing to going "cold sheep", not buying any new yarn for a set period of time in an effort to work with and come to better appreciate what they had already in their vast stashes.

I now believe that any knitter can join my ranks, knit through their stashes, and become minimalist knitters. While not an easy journey, the process is well worth the final product – and isn't that what we all love most about knitting, after all?!

# **Part One: Why Minimalist Knitting?**

## Portrait Of A Minimalist Knitter

I have not always been a minimalist knitter. In fact, like most knitters I have been known to squirrel away yarn in closets and cabinets faster than I can knit, hoarding knitting needles and patterns like the end of days was coming.

When I decided in May 2010 to pare down my stash and take on the role of a Minimalist Knitter, those who knew me best responded with fits of giggling. My stash and yarn shopping habits had become well known – infamous really – and the thought of my not only NOT buying yarn but also knitting my stash down to nothing seemed an unattainable goal.

Undaunted, I attacked my yarn stash. I began cataloging it, organizing it, and taking the first steps to paring it down. My goal was lofty but ultimately attainable - in six months or less, get my entire knitting stash down to just one container, yarn and notions combined. And as crazy as it seems, I managed to meet my goal, with my one bag of knitting holding right around just 40 skeins of yarn, my knitting needles and notions.

Moving from busting at the seams to 40 skeins in less than six months was a huge undertaking! Now that I'm here I know three things for certain:

1. I had to give up all yarn purchases until my stash was completely depleted.
2. I had to learn to knit from my stash and only my stash, and be willing to donate yarn I wasn't going to use.
3. I had to be willing to look at knitting a different way – it is not about the acquisition of new yarn, after all, but the process of knitting and the finished product that is knit.



If I had faltered on any one of these three things before cementing the new habit of minimalist knitting, I would have failed miserably. To be a minimalist knitter is a life-altering choice for a knitter to be sure, but one worth making!

## Why Minimalist Knitting?

The question most knitters ask me is *why?* Why give up so much of your stash, forgo the fun of heading to the yarn store simply to look around and see what's new? Why keep yourself from one of the foundational truths we knitters have come to accept – to knit is to stash.

It's true – to knit is to stash has been the prevailing methodology of knitters for decades. Not long after picking up my first pair of needles I began to stash yarn in closets and bins, on shelves and flat surfaces, believing I was saving up yarn for all the amazing future projects I would make.

In reality, I kept knitting the same projects all the time, and would buy yarn for new projects as I decided to knit them. This meant, like most knitters I know, I ended up with a full stash of yarn I had no real intention of using, and all of the guilt-ridden buyer's remorse to go with it.

As blog after blog cropped up around me espousing the benefits of minimalism, a series of questions kept nagging at me. Would I perhaps be a happier knitter if I was not surrounded by the ghosts of so many projects unrealized? Would I find more joy in my knitting time if I was using yarn I loved rather than yarn I felt I had to use because it was in my stash? Could I make it out of a yarn store with only the yarn I needed for the NEXT project I was going to knit?

And most importantly, was it possible to be a knitter, loving every aspect of both the process and the finished product of knitting, while not also having all the stuff that always seemed to come alongside?

Can we, as knitters, learn to love our craft while choosing to live with less?

## **A Growing Movement**

I am by no means the only knitter practicing a minimalist knitting lifestyle. Knitters around the globe are being affected by the changing economies in their home countries, and are remembering how to knit more with less, tackling their WIP bins and their overgrown stashes of yarn.

I have found dozens of like-minded knitters on Ravelry who have decided to go "cold sheep" and knit from their stash for a pre-determined period of time. Those in my hometown knitting circles have shared their desires to pare down their yarn stashes and get back to knitting with what they love, one project at a time.

While many knitters continue to store away yarn for a rainy day, more and more knitters are jumping on board with the idea of minimalist knitting to one degree or another.

## Letting Go

For most knitters, our minimalist journey must begin with letting go – of all the yarn, all the needles and notions, and most of all of the ideas we have about what it is to be a knitter.

The process can be exciting, but it can also feel incredibly overwhelming. When I began my minimalist knitting journey, I had no idea where to start, and would get exhausted and nervous quickly. Once I figured out the letting go can be freeing and exhilarating, it became much easier – and a lot more fun!

At its core, letting go must be taken literally – as much as you are letting go of the picture of yourself as a traditional knitter, you must also do the hard work of paring down your knitting stash. For me, this meant taking one skein at a time out of my yarn closet and making a tough but instantaneous decision about it; for you it may look a bit different.

Ultimately, you will end up with the same result I did – a much smaller stash, and a much lighter knitting life.

# **Part Two: Becoming A Minimalist Knitter**

## Knowing Is Half The Battle

How many times have you found yourself heading out to the yarn shop to pick up a few skeins of yarn for a specific project, only to head home with a bag full of new yarn to discover you had something suitable already in your stash? Or you've decided to ask only for sock yarn for your birthday to build up a depleted stash only to discover 100 skeins sitting in a bin you forgot you had?

The unfortunate truth of the matter is that you cannot begin to even THINK about paring down your yarn stash unless you know what you actually have.

What this means, quite simply, is that you need to take stock. Create an inventory list if you will. When I made mine I used the Stash feature on Ravelry – you may just want to set up an Excel spreadsheet.

However you catalog your yarn, you need to take a look at every single skein of yarn you own. Did you buy it for a specific project that has yet to be knit? Group all that yarn together and place the pattern with it – now you know what you will knit with it. Was it gift yarn you aren't sure you want to keep? Place that note on your list as well.

While you organize your yarn, you may feel the urge to purge. Go with that urge as much as possible! When I made my first stash organization list, I found I had a few distinct groups of yarn in my stash that I could pare down, donate, and get rid of. They were:

- Bad Idea Yarn Skeins
- Special Stash yarns
- Works in progress

## **Bad Idea Yarn Skeins**

You know the yarn I'm talking about – it sits in the far corners of your stash, buried under all the pretty yarn, the squishy yarn, and your favorite yarn. It's the yarn you picked up because it was on sale, or because your knitting friends promised you'd love it. Maybe it was given to you as a gift or as part of someone's de-stashing efforts.

No matter how it got into your stash, every knitter has it – the bad idea yarn skein.

Not sure which yarns in your stash deserve this title? I've devised a simple test to help you easily figure out the most likely suspects.

When you look at, think about, or touch the yarn, do you have to resist the urge to bury it at the back of your stash? Has it languished in your stash for more than a year for reasons other than sentimentality? Have you attempted to pair it up with a project at least three times, and simply given up?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are in possession of bad idea yarn skeins!

In my case, it was novelty yarns. I picked up knitting steam right around the time novelty yarn scarves were becoming immensely popular, and my mom and I began to knit them to donate to a local oncology ward. While I never particularly liked the yarn, I knew the scarves were doing some good, and so I just kept picking up yarn and knitting away on them. As the craze wore thin, however, I still had plenty of skeins of the stuff in my stash and nothing to do with them.

If you're honest about your yarn stash, you will admit you've got at least one of these types of skeins buried somewhere. More likely, you've got a bag or two stuffed full of these skeins, more if you've been knitting for more than a few years. Chances are you can pinpoint exactly where they're hidden, stuffed off to the side so you don't have to look at them when you search for yarn to pair up with your next project.

These skeins represent the easiest way to jump on board with minimalist knitting. You don't want them around, and most likely only hold onto them out of knitter's guilt – the feeling that you really should knit with that skein, even though just the thought of it makes you squeamish.

Let go of the guilt and then let go of those skeins! You can do this simply and quickly a few different ways.

Organizations around the world are constantly looking for yarn donations for their charity projects – a simple search on Lion Brand's Charity Connections page will help you find the perfect charity to send your yarn to!

List these skeins on Ravelry, marked as "will trade or sell". Keep your price low - remember, you're just trying to get them out of your stash, so covering shipping alone might be all you need to get them out of your stash.

If all else fails, bag these skeins up and drop them off at the Goodwill or Salvation Army. There are plenty of knitters who live on very strict budgets that would love to find a bag of yarn within their price range at a thrift store!

Once you've rid yourself of your Bad Idea Yarn Skeins, your stash should feel lighter – and so should you!



# Knitting Through Your Special Stash

Every knitter has a "special stash" of yarn. You know the stuff - these are the skeins bought on vacation, the yarns with price tags that meant we could only buy one skein, or yarn given to us by very special people.

Most knitters won't use it, choosing instead to keep the skeins around as a reminder of the person, place, or time the yarn was acquired. The fear that you will ruin the yarn by knitting it into a less-than-perfect item, or that somehow the yarn will lose its special meaning once knit locks you into place, and the yarn sits un-knit – loved on and admired yes, but not knit up.

I refuse to keep a special stash. I say SPEND OUT {to borrow a Gretchen Rubin<sup>1</sup> phrase}. Chances are you have attached more importance to this yarn that it rightly deserves. Sure, you had a great experience at Rhineback in 2002, but will keeping that yarn on a shelf remind you of those times any better than you already remember them?

The yarn was purchased not to be left on a shelf or in a box, but to be used and loved! What better way to honor your memories associated with the yarn in question than to knit it into something you will love and cherish? Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

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<sup>1</sup> Gretchen Rubin is the best-selling author of The Happiness Project.

## **Vacation Yarn**

Knit up a pattern that reminds you of the place the yarn was purchased.

Make it something you can wear often, but that will not wear out quickly – think scarf or cowl – so you can enjoy it for years.

## **Expensive Single Skein Yarns**

Go for simple patterns that allow the yarn to shine. Stockinette stitch lets gorgeous yarn stand out where intricate patterns overwhelm it.

Small shawls and cowls, or even mitts will show off gorgeous yarn perfectly.

## **Yarn That Reminds You of Someone**

Knit yourself something you think that person would love to see you in.

Knit something FOR that person!

More than anything, if you know you'll never end up knitting that special stash yarn, don't buy it to begin with. Make your memories in other ways, and leave your yarn purchases to those skeins you know you'll use.

# Tackling Your WIP Bin

Once upon a time, I had myself fooled into thinking I was a one project at a time kind of girl. As I started to consolidate my knitting stash and work towards a minimalist knitting existence, I realized just how many WIPs [works in progress] I actually had on-hand.

Part of my minimalist knitting goal has been to rid myself of all those WIPs, and hopefully end up as someone that has one or two WIPs going at any given time. I've been working through my WIP pile for a few months now, and I've come to a very harsh decision. There are really only two options when it comes to your WIP bin:

## **You can either frog it or you can finish it.**

Those half-finished sweaters and blankets, those single socks waiting patiently for a mate – they all ended up in your WIP bin for a reason. Maybe the pattern wasn't as amazing as it looked, or you tired of all the edging the thing needed. Whatever your reason, you need to figure out if it's a big enough hindrance to keep you from finishing the project or not. Sometimes the decisions can be hard to make, but if the goal is a pared down, minimalist knitting life, the WIPs have to go!

## **Don't be afraid to frog.**

We all have projects we started with the best of intentions, but didn't finish for one reason or another. Examine each project individually, and decide if you really want to finish that project RIGHT NOW. If you do, knit on that until it's done. If you don't, frog it right then and there.

## **Finish it up.**

If the project is one you still want to finish, or there's so little left to be done you can power through and have the thing done in a day or less, let this be the next knitting project you finish.

As you finish each WIP, be sure to decide immediately what to do with it. Is it becoming a holiday present? Then add it to your holiday present stash. Will it be donated? Then make up the envelope and get it into the mail. If you don't have a home in mind for your WIPs while you're knitting, they are more likely to fall back into the unfinished knits bin.

The yarn that's been sitting unloved can be repurposed for another project, or it can be donated to someone else. Don't simply wind the yarn up into cakes and toss them into your stash, however. If you're going to frog your project, let that yarn become either the next project you cast on, or give it to someone who will use it and love it.

### **No More Unfinished Knits.**

As you work through your WIP bin, keep this goal in mind – this will be the last time you have to tackle an unfinished knits pile. From this day forward, let no project languish unfinished. Apply these two basic ideas to any and every project you are knitting AS SOON AS you start to feel yourself straying to a new project. Stash yarn is still stash yarn until it's been made into something useable!

# **Ditch The Stash: Five Tricks For Getting Rid Of All That Yarn You Don't Use**

As a minimalist knitter, my goal is to only have enough yarn in my possession to knit projects for a three-month time frame. Projects I know I want to knit, using yarn and needles I know I love to knit with. For most knitters, this isn't the case.

Most knitters are slaves to their yarn stash, carrying around guilt over skeins left un-knit. With the minimalist movement taking hold of the world, people everywhere are paring down their possessions, focusing on what truly matters to them, and loving more and more minutes of their days. It's time for knitters to join the ranks!

Rather than hold onto all that yarn you're probably never going to use, pare it down to the stuff you love and KNOW you'll use soon, and let the rest of it go.

It can be scary to start weeding through your yarn stash, but if you want to live with less and feel joy from your knitting rather than guilt at owning so much stash you will never use, the following five tips can help you weed through half your stash in as little time as a weekend!

## **1. Figure out what you actually knit.**

Before you even dive into your stash, do an hour of reconnaissance work and figure out what you actually knit. If you've got a Ravelry account {my Ravelry handle is "adevinelife"}, look at your finished projects. If you keep a Flickr account, start surfing backwards.

Make note of specific types of projects you see a lot of – hats, baby items, sweaters, shawls.

Dig a bit deeper and figure out which needles you use most often – are you a size 8 queen, or do you stick to the smaller needles, working mostly in the 3-4 range?

What yarn fibers do you love most? Do you spend most of your time with wool, or do you love cotton or acrylics more?

Doing the work of figuring out what you love to knit, and love to knit with, will help you decipher what you don't use. For me, it became clear I don't use much sport weight yarn, cotton, or any needles that range outside of the 5-10 range.

## **2. Flip Your Stash.**

Now the hard work begins – you need to dump out every container of yarn you have into the middle of the floor. I'm not joking here – don't let any of it sit in a box. You can do this one box or container at a time, or you can do what I did and make one huge pile of all your yarn on the floor all at once.

Allow yourself to feel overwhelmed. You didn't acquire this yarn overnight, and each ball and skein of yarn was brought into your home with the intention of being knit up into something amazing. Give yourself a few minutes to freak out at the amount of yarn you have, and then grab some garbage bags or boxes and get to work.

## **3. Divide and Conquer.**

Remember that list you made earlier of what you liked to knit and didn't like to knit? Now

it's time to use it – and be ruthless with it.

Start at the top of your big pile, grabbing one skein at a time {or one batch of skeins, if you've got several of the same color way together}. Ask yourself the following questions:

Has this yarn been in your stash for more than six months, without a specific project attached to it?

Did you buy this yarn with a specific project in mind, but it's sat in your stash for more than a year?

Did you think you'd love knitting with this yarn, but it turns out you HATED it? Is it a yarn weight or fiber that's not on your "use it all the time" list?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, get rid of it! Grab that yarn and put it into a box or bag to be donated.

Once you've done this, you should only have yarn left that falls under the "love to knit with this yarn" category or the "it's the right weight and fiber type" category.

#### **4. Get rid of the donate pile.**

There are hundreds of organizations that will gladly take your yarn off your hands! Check with local organizations first. Not sure where to call? Here's a few suggestions:

Check with your local knitting groups and non-profits.

Ask your local nursing homes if they have a crochet/knitting group. They may want any acrylic you have.

Lion Brand yarn has a great charity connection space, where you can search for organizations that are looking for yarn donations. Search your state first, the states around you next.

When all else fails, you can bag up that yarn and take it to the Goodwill. There's always a knitter poking around the bins that will squeal with delight at the treasures you'll have left for them.

Only keep the donation bags around for one week. Send e-mails to as many charities as you can, and offer to drop off any yarn to local charities to save on postage. If you keep the bags around longer than one week, you're more likely to open them back up.

### **5. Go back through your "to keep" pile.**

Once you've donated all the yarn in your "get rid of it" pile, you'll want to take one last pass through your "to keep" pile.

Do you have more than three months worth of knitting there? If so, pare down again, or do the following if you can't bear to let go of any more yarn:

Set aside yarn for specific projects.

Figure out a few fun and simple projects you can make for the holidays to give away, and bag up yarn for that purpose.

Create a "knitting club" for yourself with all the single skeins. Connect specific yarn with specific projects, and draw one project at a time until all the single skeins are used up. It's a fun way to keep the surprise in your knitting.

Exhausted? I bet! But I also bet your stash has been significantly depleted. Now here comes the hard part:

### **In six months, do it again.**

Chances are you'll have accumulated new yarn in the interim, you'll fall less in love with some of those skeins of yarn you had to keep, and you'll have a better handle on how much you can knit with over a few months' time. By repeating this process every six months, you'll keep your stash manageable.



I'll be honest here – when I was paring down my yarn stash, I went through these five steps twice in one month before I felt like I had my stash at a manageable level. I know how hard it can be to let go of yarn you spent good money on and had pure intentions of knitting with, and sometimes just tackling these five steps once isn't enough.

For me, the desire to be a minimalist knitter has won out over my desire to use up every skein in my stash. I know how fast I can knit, what projects I'll actually complete, and what yarn it takes to do that. This means I have to repeatedly do the hard work of deciding what I can and can't keep in my yarn stash. It's a process I'm not done with, but am willing to commit to – and these steps are exactly how I commit myself to it.

## **Design Your Own Knit Club**

If you like knitting a particular item very much, say socks or hats, you may find you have accumulated a large stash of yarn specific to this type of knitting. This is not yarn you want to give away, but the thought of finding a way to knit it all can overwhelm quickly.

One fun idea I've put to use, with great success, is to create my very own Knit Club! Modeled after the one the Yarn Harlot created for herself as a way to knit through some of her sock yarns, my Knit Club helped me knit through my One Hundred Hats project with ease.

Knit Clubs started when indie yarn dyers began to send out monthly packages to customers, complete with not just a brand new skein of yarn but also a pattern to knit that skein with. Quickly taking hold in the knitting community, sock clubs have been the most popular.

Setting up your own Knit Club is super easy – simply pair up single skeins of yarn with single-skein patterns, and knit through them one at a time. Keep them hidden, and grab one at a time at random for a mini surprise!

Hints to keep in mind when setting up your Knit Club:

Set up your Knit Club to run for a specific amount of time. For example, knit through one item from your Knit Club each month for a year.

Keep things do-able, and be sure to leave time for other knitting. One project a month is about the limit to keep this sort of thing fun.

Pair up the patterns with the yarn beforehand. At first I tried to pair up the yarn with a pattern on the fly, and this quickly became too stressful. I took one afternoon and paired up skeins with patterns, each in its own bag, and the whole thing instantly became easy and fun!

Consider the yarn when picking out a pattern. If the yarn has lots of color change or texture, a simpler pattern may be best, to help showcase the yarn. Single color skeins lend themselves to patterns with more oomph, and are a great way to show off stitch work.

## Give it Away

That pile of yarn you no longer want – the bad idea skeins and the yarn you no longer love – cannot continue to stay in your home. Yarn is tricky, and if left unattended it will find its way back into your stash, potentially breeding new little balls of yarn as it goes!

Your best bet is to get rid of the yarn you've decided to de-stash as soon as you've made the decision. While you can commit to selling your unwanted yarn via Ravelry or Etsy, you'll end up holding onto it far longer than necessary. Instead, I advocate giving it away.

1. Donate your yarn to charity. There are hundreds of charitable organizations that will take your yarn off your hands. Great for all those skeins you've purged from your stash but don't know what to do with! {See Appendix B for some suggestions}
2. Have a rummage sale, yarn style, and invite your knitterly friends over to grab whatever they want from your discard pile. Ideally we'd be convincing all knitters to join the inimalist movement, but for now it's best to focus on your stash – and if other knitters will love and cherish it, then the yarn has ended up in good hands!
3. Drop it off at the Goodwill. When all else fails, bag up that yarn and take it to your local thrift store. More than likely some savvy fiber shopper will happen upon it and snap it up, grateful for your paring down.
4. Donate it to a nursing home or school. Teachers love using yarn for craft projects with their students, and crafters living in nursing homes will be grateful for the donations.

Bottom line – don't toss the yarn! There's someone out there who will be grateful for it, and the faster you can get that unneeded yarn out of your stash, the happier you'll be.

## Stash Busters

When you get down to the last vestiges of your stash, you may start getting frustrated. You are almost there, what can one or two balls of yarn for new projects hurt?

Before you cave in, bust through the last bits of your stash with some great projects designed just for that purpose! Here's a few ideas – I've used all of these to use up the last bits of my stash!

Baby items use up small bits of yarn, and are great for your cotton and acrylic stashes. You can whip through baby hats and booties in an evening, and your local hospital will be ecstatic to have the hand-knits for their babes!

Charities like Knit-A-Square and Warm Up America collect knitted and crochet squares that they then sew together into blankets. These blankets are given to orphans, people who are hospitalized, elderly folks in nursing homes, and victims of natural disasters to name just a few.

Hats are a great way to knock through single skeins in colorways you're not super excited about. Woolen and acrylic hats alike can be donated to a variety of charities, and chances are you know someone who would love to receive a hand-knit hat in one of those colors you can't figure out why you purchased.

I've included a few patterns at the end of this handbook to help you use up some of your yarn, and all are perfect for donating to charity!

## **Knitting Needles: Use or Toss**

Take a good hard look at the things you've finished knitting in the last six months. Chances are a pattern will emerge – yarn weight and needle size tend to be consistent for most knitters, even if project type isn't. You won't find many avid sock and shawl knitters {fingering yarn and small needles} that also love to knit bulky sweaters up regularly, for example. We tend to stick with what we love when it comes to our knitting needles – despite what our needle stash looks like.

In my case, it was worsted weight yarns and sizes 6-10 needles, and those that can be used to make hats most specifically. I really didn't use much else, and when I did I wasn't happy. So I made the choice to limit my knitting needles down to only what I loved to use.

To pare down, simply grab every knitting needle you can find, and divide them up by size. Then bag up all those needles that don't fit in with what you knit 75% of the time. Take that bag with you to knit group and give those needles away, or donate them to a local knitting charity. If giving away these needles fast makes you nervous, stash that bag in the back of your closet for six months first. I'd bet you don't touch it once.

This was by far the easiest part of my own personal pare-down. I was shocked when I realized just how many needles I had that I couldn't find any evidence of ever having used. It was a mystery why I picked them up in the first place as well as why I was still holding onto them! Quick as can be they went off to the donation pile, and I was left with enough room in my needle stash bin to also store all my notions!

If you find a pattern you LOVE, but it uses a needle you don't normally use, either alter the pattern to use the size needles you have, borrow the needles from a knitter who already has them in his or her stash, or don't make it. Don't buy needles you'll only use once – in reality, you don't use those needles for a reason, so the project you think you'll love that uses those needles? Probably won't get finished if it even gets cast on.

## Six Things Every Knitter Needs in Their Notions Bag

A trip to any craft store or yarn shop will showcase not just gorgeous yarn to pet, fondle, and eventually knit with, but also a plethora of knitting tools you will feel compelled to add to your pile. Besides knitting needles and crochet hooks you will find package after package of product designed to meet a specific need – a need you may not even have been aware of! Over the years I've bought into plenty of these products, and have learned over time that most of these items are simply not necessary. In reality, there are six simple items that any knitter should have in their notions bag, leaving all the rest to languish on store shelves without remorse.

**1. Tape Measure.** This is an invaluable tool. You can use it to measure a person for a sweater or hat, and figure out the length of someone's foot for socks. You can also use a tape measure to figure out your knitting gauge and measure your finished items to figure out its size. I've also used my tape measure to find Wraps Per Inch of questionable yarn (thereby being able to determine yarn weight) and to measure storage spaces!

**2. Stitch Markers.** Those more minimalist than I may say you can get away with not having stitch markers – simply keep better track of your stitches or use waste yarn! I have found however, that my stitch markers have become an invaluable resource. I purchased a package just under a decade ago now, and despite losing a few to cat playtime, I still have the majority of them with me. Stitch markers can let you know at a glance the beginning of a row in circular knitting; they can mark where to increase/decrease for sleeves on a sweater, and can be used to mark where a pattern repeat begins. You can even use removable stitch markers (mine look like little safety pins!) to mark rows if you need to knit a certain number for your pattern.

**3. Pencil or pen.** I've got a turquoise pen in my notions bag, although you may prefer a black pen or a pencil, or even a Sharpie. I use my pen to grab escaping stitches, to mark on patterns which sections I've finished, and to track rows when I need to keep a super accurate count. Your pencil or pen will help you jot down notes when you change parts of a pattern, or write down the phone number of a new knitting friend you met while checking out at the grocery store!

**4. Scissors.** If there's one thing you should have on hand at all times while knitting, it's a pair of scissors. You use them to snip ends after they've been woven in, which is invaluable unless you want to weave in ends until their bitter ends. I know I don't!

**5. Darning needle.** Last but not least, you'll need a darning needle. This somewhat single-use item is used to weave in ends. I'd recommend getting a plastic, blunt-tipped needle for this, rather than a metal sewing needle – the sharper the needle tip, the more likely you are to split your yarn.

**6. Cabling Needle.** I didn't used to use one of these, and I know plenty of knitters who prefer to use either their DPNs or simply do a needle-less cable. I find I have gravitated back towards the cabling needle when making something with more than one or two cables, so I've included it on the list.

Most knitters will find they have a few extra items in their notions kits, but I find that with these six basic items those other notions aren't necessary. That gauge guide isn't necessary now that you've got your tape measure on-hand always. Safety pins aren't needed thanks to stitch markers. Row counters can be left at home thanks to your multi-use pencil!

Not sure if you're ready to get rid of everything in your notions bag besides these five items? Consider bagging them up and storing them away in a closet for six months – if you don't pull the bag out, you didn't need what was in it! Six months from now, donate all those unneeded notions to a charitable organization or school knitting club – they'll be grateful for your de-cluttering!



## Organizing Your Patterns

Patterns are easy to acquire and hide away. Knitting books fit quite nicely on your bookshelves, and those PDF patterns we all have grown to love hide out on your computers, taking up no space at all!

This does not mean they can be left alone – pattern clutter is still knitting clutter!

Most of us have a library of knitting books we rarely use. We've bought the books because they were full of patterns we thought we would love to knit, only to have them sit on our shelves unused.

To combat this, go through each book and mark every pattern you know you'll want to knit. Only keep those with patterns you use over and over, or patterns you have on the docket to knit in the next three months.

Once you've got every knitting book you own marked up in this way {I used stickie flags}, follow these steps to pare down your knitting books:

If you've knit from the book and don't see knitting from it again in the next year, donate it to your library.

If the book only has one pattern flagged in it, chances are you can get rid of it. Donate it to the library so you can check the book out if you decide you want to knit that pattern in the future.

If you know another knitter that has the book, write down the patterns you'd like to knit and then donate the book. If you decide you want to knit one of those patterns in the future, borrow the book from your friend who has it!

By following these three steps I pared down my knitting book collection to 12 books! You may end up with more, but your collection will shrink by leaps and bounds.

Once you've pared down your knitting books, it's time to tackle all those pattern PDFs you've got floating around on your computer. In today's digital age, we've all got dozens of PDF knitting patterns saved on our hard drives all willy-nilly, downloaded for free with every intention of being used one day. It's time to weed through those to find the patterns you actually use!

First, if you don't already have a folder set up on your computer for patterns, do so. I named mine "patterns", and then transferred all patterns I've purchased or downloaded to this folder.

Next, within your patterns folder, divide up your individual patterns by finished product type, who will end up with them {men, women, etc}, or come up with your own system.

I set up a separate file for baby and kid-related stuff, and then divided the rest of the patterns by type – sweaters, hats, etc. Also set up a separate file for any pattern e-books you've purchased. This way you'll be able to find those easier.

As you place patterns into folders, open up each pattern and decide if you still want to keep it. Chances are half of the patterns you've saved are ones you'll never knit again.

If you're leery of getting rid of these patterns, set up a "to toss" file in your larger patterns file. Place any patterns you don't think you want any longer in this file. Save them there for a year – if you haven't opened that file up once, dump the whole thing without looking!

# **Part Three: Living As A Minimalist Knitter**

## **Life As A Minimalist Knitter**

Now that you've done the hard work of paring down your knitting stash, it may be a bit difficult to imagine what comes next. How do you avoid jumping right back into your old knitterly ways now that you don't need to figure out how to pare down, and instead need to figure out how to live as a minimalist knitter?

In reality, living as a minimalist knitter can seem just as hard as the getting there – the struggle to not buy yarn now is just as hard as it was before. Once you get used to it however, it can be fun and freeing!

I've implemented a few "rules and regulations" to help keep myself on the path of minimalist knitting now that my stash busting is complete. Part of this involves keeping up with the tactics employed during my pare-down days: avoid yarn shops, knit what I've got, and remember what I love to knit with.

The exciting part of living as a minimalist knitter is knowing you can head to the yarn shop and pick up yarn you need, and you know you'll be knitting with it right away! You don't feel tied down by your stash – you are freed up to love and use your yarn now!

## The Three-Month Rule

The easiest way to keep yourself on the minimalist path is through the three-month rule. Reality says you will end up with a small stash again – you'll buy eight skeins to knit a sweater with, but then quickly want to cast on a hat for a friend's birthday. The three-month rule can help keep your yarn stash to a minimum, and ensure you're using everything you've got!

The three-month rule is simple:

**If you can't get to it in the next 3 months, don't buy the yarn for it.**

If you're unsure of getting the project done in that time-frame, chances are you'll change your mind about knitting it or forget about it in that amount of time, anyhow. We knitters are fickle, after all – new patterns show up all the time that we want to knit, people have babies or decide they want hand-knits for their birthdays, and we've moved on before we realize it.

The easiest way to do this is to keep a record of all the projects you want to knit. Do this in a notebook or go paperless and track items on Ravelry, but become a project-based knitter. By having an idea of what you want to knit up in the next three to six months, you'll have a better idea of what you need when you head to the store.

When you get to the store, buy only what you need for your next one or two projects. All knitters work at different paces, but we all only have a one to three project attention span. Beyond that, our minds change fast and furious!

Remember this when you head to the store – pick up yarn you need now, not later – this will keep you to the three month rule with breathing room, and your stash will stay tamed.

## **Project-Only Purchases**

Once your yarn stash has been completely obliterated, buy yarn on a project-by-project basis, keeping in mind what you truly do and don't like to knit.

The point of minimalist knitting is not to eschew new yarn purchases all together. At that point you would cease to be a knitter! What we're doing here is owning up to how much yarn one knitter actually needs at any given time.

If you are knitting a sweater, you will by default have more skeins in your stash than if you are knitting socks. And that's okay. The idea is to buy yarn that you need in order to start knitting specific projects, and to not buy more yarn until those projects are done.

It is incredibly freeing to look in your little knitting bag and know that you have each of those skeins ear-marked for something specific, and that in a short amount of time those skeins will have been knit up and there will be room for more new skeins of yarn!

This satisfies the best part of picking out fun new yarns – you don't ever feel that guilt that comes along with yarn sitting in the closet or bins for months and years, and frees you up for guiltless knitting all the time!

## **A Question Of Storage**

With no large stash left, the need for knitting storage should be drastically cut down. You still need a small space to store your yarn and notions, however – especially if you have animals or smaller children around who always seem very interested in your knitting projects!

I advocate having only enough yarn, needles, and notions that you can store it all in one bag, box or basket. I keep all of mine in a large Land's End travel bag I received as a gift a year or so ago. I can carry it with me around the house and on trips, making it perfect for my knitting needs. With the bag by my side, I can pull out what I need for my current project, and then put it away at the end of my knitting session. No searching around for needles, notions, or that extra skein you ended up needing after all.

You may decide to have a knitting bag like me – something you can carry with you and that will hold all your items. You may decide instead to keep your yarn in a storage bin on the floor of your closet, or in a basket by the edge of your couch. I've been known in the past to have a knitting basket that sat in our family room {where I do the majority of my knitting}, all the yarn balls poking out prettily.

The main thing here is to be sure your storage does not grow bigger than the size of your stash. Use a bag or basket slightly smaller than you think you need. If you give your stash room to grow, grow it will!

Once you have your storage solution in mind, do not let your stash grow larger. Do not let yourself purchase or re-purpose any other storage for your yarn than this original storage solution. The easiest – and quickest – way for your yarn stash to grow while you aren't looking is to have storage space available!

# Using Up Leftover Bits Of Yarn

One of the more annoying bits to being a minimalist knitter? All those remnants of yarn you inevitably end up with. Most patterns do not use up full skeins of yarn, and knitters are often left with half skeins, quarter skeins, or even just a few yards of yarn to place back in the stash pile.

Over the last year I've made it my mission to knit and crochet my way through these remnants of yarn lurking in the corners of my stash – no matter how small or large your stash is, know that you'll have these lurkers as well!

In an effort to knock these remnants out of my stash, I've set up a very simple plan of attack – and today I'm going to share it with you! By following this three-step process, you'll be able to use up every last piece of your yarn when done with a project, clear through your stash faster, and even find projects for some of those lurking half skeins!

## **Step One: Assess The Situation**

Do you have a large portion of a skein left when finished with a project, or is there less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  remaining? Knowing what you're working with will make the process easier.

If you've got a large remnants stash problem, I suggest dividing it up into piles, one for  $\frac{1}{2}$  skeins or more, and one for those smaller bits of yarn. This will make it a bit easier for you to use these little bits up faster.

## **Step Two: Squares or Blankets?**

Based on how much yarn is left, decide to do one of two things with it – either use it to make a baby or kid-sized hat, or use it as stripes in a larger, adult-sized hat. I do this on the fly, guesstimating if the remnant is more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  skein, or less.

If it's less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  skein, I add it to my 'meant for stripes' jar on my bookshelf. Once that jar is full, I grab some grey yarn (which I always use as the base color in my striped hats), and work up some ribbing. Then I use the leftover bits of yarn to



make stripes of varying sizes before using the grey yarn to finish off the hat.

If I've got more than ½ skein left of a specific yarn, I knit up a baby or kid-sized hat. I use my Basic Beanie hat pattern for this (included in Section Four of this handbook), always adding these hats to my latest donation bin.

### **Step Three: Move on to the next!**

If you've got quite a few remnants laying around, I suggest working through them all before you start your next project. This way you can clear up space in your yarn storage area, and you'll probably have a box of squares you can send off by the time you're done!

Be sure to keep your stash-busting projects in their own space, so you can easily move from your finished stash busting item onto the next project, and you'll never have to worry about random half-balls of yarn again!

### **Some helpful hints:**

I use up my remnant balls as soon as I'm finished with the project they came from as often as I can. This helps keep them from piling up and taking over the stash, and I can always record my skeins as fully used in Ravelry.

Use easy-to-memorize patterns. Part of the reason I'm able to get through so many hats each year is thanks to my using the same four or five hat patterns on repeat. I know when I make a baby hat that exactly how many stitches to cast on, how far to knit before I decrease, and how the decreases will work. Same goes for kid-sized hats and those for adults.

Once you know about how much yarn it takes to knit a hat, using a food scale can help you determine if the yarn you've got on-hand will finish one. This takes the last bits of guesswork out of the process!

## **Tackling Those “New Yarn” Cravings**

What to do when a shopping craving hits? We all have times when we want to start ten new projects – fine as long as it doesn't make you want to pick up new yarn! When you feel yourself drawn to the yarn shop despite the commitment to knit from your stash, here's a few tricks that might help.

Learn something new. Grab your favorite needles and yarn, and teach yourself a new knitting technique, try out a new pattern, or swatch for your next project.

Check out free patterns on Ravelry

Go for a long walk.

Whip through one of the projects on your WIP list.

Set a date for when you CAN buy that new yarn you're craving.

Hang out with a knitter. Meet a local knitter for coffee and share the projects you're working on – just feeling their yarn may help!

Head to the store – but leave your money at home! There's nothing wrong with a little stash fondling from time to time; just don't bring your wallet so you're not tempted.

Repurpose yarn from a sweater. Head to your local thrift shop and pick up a sweater you can take apart for the yarn – you'll have new-to-you yarn in your stash, and that old sweater will get new life!

# Ten Minimalist Knitting Choices You Can Make Today

Excited about minimalist knitting, but feeling overwhelmed at all it will entail? I've been there, too! I had plenty of days where this process and lifestyle change seemed far too daunting to take on, and I wanted to run to the yarn shop credit card in hand!

If you're having one of those days, or unsure of how much commitment you want to make to minimalist knitting, consider the following ten steps your cheat sheet.

By doing one of these things once a day – or once a week, or even once a month – you will be setting yourself on the path towards a minimalist knitting life before you know it!

**1. Donate one skein of yarn.** Everyone has at least one skein of yarn in their collection they wouldn't miss – find that skein and get rid of it. You can gift it to a fellow knitter, sell it on Ravelry, or donate it to charity, but get it out of your stash and your home.

**2. Get rid of a set of knitting needles.** We've all purchased a set of needles we'll never use again. Put it in your "to donate" box and take it on your next trip to the Goodwill. You won't miss it.

**3. Organize your PDF patterns.** Divide them up by finished product type, who will end up with them {men, women, etc}, or come up with your own system. As you work, open up each pattern and decide if you still want to keep it. Chances are half of the patterns you've saved are ones you'll never knit again.

**4. Knit a hat – and give it away.** There are people all around you that need warmth this winter, and you've got yarn and the skills to help out. Grab a skein of your workhorse wool and knit a hat you'll give away – then go find someone who looks cold and offer it to them.

**5. Clean out your notions bag – get rid of anything you haven't used on your last ten projects.** Notions bags are like purses; they collect crap. I like to clean out my notions bag a few times a year, and am always surprised at what I find inside. Most likely you'll be able to lighten your notions load by almost half.

**6. Delete anything on your Ravelry queue that's been there for more than a year.** With very few exceptions, if you haven't knit it by now, you most likely won't knit it anytime in the near future. And with Ravelry's amazing search capabilities, if you really want to find it again you'll be able to. Lighten that visual clutter!

**7. Frog a WIP.** If it's been sitting in your "to finish knitting" pile for more than a year, you will probably never finish it. Whatever stalled you out the first time will continue to keep you stalled out indefinitely. Frog that project so you can use the yarn for another project. Better yet, once you frog it, give the yarn away!

**8. Finish a WIP.** If it just needs a button band, cuffs on the sleeves, snaps sewn on, or the ends woven in, just finish it. Put down this book, go grab what you need, and take the time to get it done and out of your WIP pile.

**9. Knit outside.** Connecting with nature brings a sense of peace and calm, centering you and helping you let go. It will get you away from your stash, all the knitting clutter you've accumulated, and re-focus your minimalist knitting mission.

**10. Re-purpose yarn from a thrift store sweater.** There are dozens of sweaters in any thrift store that can be repurposed for new-to-you yarn. Find a tutorial if you don't already know how, and help give new life to used yarn rather than buying new.

# **Part Four: A Few Patterns To Get You Started**

# Luxury Cowl



This cowl can be made using any weight yarn – the thicker the yarn, the wider the cowl!

## **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- One skein luxury yarn – worsted, aran, or chunky weight preferred
- US 13 / 9.0 mm 24" circular needle
- Darning needle for weaving in ends.

## **GAUGE**

16 sts per 4" in stockinette on larger needles (row gauge unimportant)

## **SIZES**

13 (15, 17, 19) inches – infant, toddler, child, adult

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

BO = Bind Off  
CO = Cast On  
K = Knit  
RND = round  
STS = stitches

## **DIRECTIONS**

Using the provisional cast on method found on Knitty.com, cast on 26 stitches.

Row 1, and all odd rows: knit all

Row 2 (and all even rows): knit 5, purl 16, knit 5

Repeat these two rows until you are almost out of yarn.

Place provisional stitches onto a needle, and perform 3-needle bind-off to close cowl into a circle. Your cowl's length will be determined by the yardage in your skein.

Wrap around your neck a time or two, and enjoy!

# Stash Blanket



Don't know what to do with all those tiny leftover bits of yarn left over? Make yourself a stash blanket! It can be a great way to use up every last bit of yarn, and will leave you with an amazing record of past yarns used!

## **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Worsted weight yarn remnants
- One size US 9 / 5.5 mm 32" circular needle
- Darning needle for weaving in ends.

## **GAUGE**

20 sts x 25 rows = 4" in stockinette

## **SIZES**

small (medium, large) – 6 (7, 8)" around

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

BO = Bind Off  
CO = Cast On  
K = Knit  
STS = stitches



## **DIRECTIONS**

Cast on 230 sts using the long-tail cast on method.

K every st until you're almost out of whatever ball of yarn you're using.

To attach a new ball of yarn, simply tie the old yarn to the new yarn using a simple knot. Leave those knotted bits hanging out as a design element!

Continue on in this manner until the blanket is at your desired length, and then bind off all stitches.

## Katie Mitts



Note: This pattern was originally published in the Three-Season Mitts E-book.

### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- One skein Patons Classic Wool (100% wool; 223 yards/204 meters per 100 grams)
- One set size US 7 / 4.5 mm double-pointed needles
- Darning needle for weaving in ends.

### **GAUGE**

20 sts x 25 rows = 4" in stockinette

### **SIZES**

small (medium, large) – 6 (7, 8)" around

### **ABBREVIATIONS**

BO = Bind Off  
CO = Cast On  
K = Knit  
P = Purl  
RND = round  
STS = stitches

## **DIRECTIONS**

Using long tail method, CO 30 (34, 40) sts. Divide between three DPNs and join for working in the round, being careful not to twist.

Rnd 1-10: [K 2, P 2] around.  
Rnd 11: K all sts.

Repeat rnd 11 until mitt measures 10 (12, 14)".

## **MAKING THE THUMB HOLE**

Rnd 1: K to last 7 sts. BO 7 sts.  
Rnd 2: K around to BO sts, and CO 7 sts.  
Rnd 3-6: K all sts.  
Rnd 7-16: K2, P2 around.

## **FINISHING**

Bind off all stitches in K2, P2 pattern. Weave in any remaining ends.

## **PATTERN NOTES**

Mitts are meant to be baggy at the wrist and fore-arm and tighter around the elbow, to give a relaxed fit.

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