

# F r a z z l e h e a d ' s H a n d s p u n S o c k R e c i p e

*A recipe for building toe-up socks using whatever weight of handspun you managed to end up with.  
by Lonna Cunningham (Frazzlehead)*

So you got a lovely batt and spun it up. Maybe you got two or three. You have this pile of lovely yarn and it really wants to be something awesome, but ... what does it want to be?

Perhaps what it wants to be is a pair of socks.

Well, sure, you say, but did I make “sock yarn”? What if my yarn is thicker than the usual stuff you get for socks? What if I’m not sure I have enough for socks? Will I run out partway through the second sock? How do I know how many stitches to cast on when I’m using non-standard yarn?

Fear not, brave knitter, Frazzlehead’s Handspun Sock Recipe addresses all these problems.

This is, however, a Recipe (*it’s really more of a guideline than an actual code...*) and it’s probably going to work best if you’ve already knit a sock or two from predictable yarn and predictable patterns. Then again, if you are brave and adventurous and willing to follow instructions and rip back and start over if necessary, well, hey, go for it! Yarn is reusable and very forgiving. **The Recipe does assume that you know how to knit in the round with either two circular needles or a set of DPNs.** You will also be happiest if you are comfortable taking out a few rounds of work and picking up the stitches to start where you left off – this is a guided-trial-and-minimal-error sort of recipe rather than a do-the-math-up-front-hope-you-get-it-right-and-knit sort of recipe.



## **Materials**

This pattern is meant for handspun yarn, so it’s intended to work with whatever you might’ve ended up with once you were done plying – however, that means it’ll also work with whatever you may have in your yarn stash, whether it was originally intended to be used for socks or not.

That said, socks get a lot of wear and you want to work with material that is going to hold up to some abuse: wool is a good choice, though your softest, finest merino is not likely to hold up well. Choose something a bit on the sturdier side, like Corriedale (which happens to be the base fibre in a standard FrazzleBatt ... just sayin’). Alpaca blended with wool is a great choice, as is a yarn with

some mohair in it. If you're after thicker socks than what you get with normal sock yarn, you can also take one strand of your handspun and ply it with a commercial sock yarn.

Before you begin, divide your yarn in half: if you happened to ply up two full bobbins of the same stuff, there you go, it's in two batches already. If you wound it all into one ball, divide it in half by weight: weigh the whole batch of yarn, then start winding it into a ball. You'll want at least 100 grams of yarn for a pair of socks – if you are okay with ankle socks you can get away with a little less, unless you have really big feet. When you have a ball that weighs half of the total weight (an easy way to do this is to wind the whole batch into one big centre pull ball and set that on the scale, then, pulling from the centre of that big ball of yarn wind a second ball ... just keep winding until the scale reads half of what it did originally). Wind what's left into another nice ball. Voila: one ball of yarn for each foot.

For needles, you will almost certainly need to do some experimentation to get the right gauge, unless you are either really lucky or really talented at estimating which needle size to use with any given yarn. For the socks shown here, I was working with 300 grams of a 7.5 WPI yarn: I started out with 3.5 mm needles but the fabric was like armour plating so I went up to 3.75 mm. The fabric was still too unyielding, so I tried again with 4 mm needles and got a nice sturdy but flexible fabric. Of course the exact size you need will vary with your knitting tension and your yarn thickness, so it's just about inevitable that you will need to do some experimenting. That's okay, experimenting is part of the Recipe – just gather up a few different sizes of DPNs or circulars before you start so you don't have to go hunting for them once you get going.

## **Setup**

These are toe-up socks because we want to make the most of our yarn, so we will knit the foot first, then knit as much of the leg as we can to use up the yarn we've got left. Also, the toe of the sock serves as our gauge swatch: just give it a go and see what you get, if it's too tight or too loose, pull it out and start over, you'll know after just a few rounds. Just be mentally and emotionally prepared to start over a few times: this is part of the process.

Start off by using **Judy's Magic Cast On** (Cat Bordhi has an excellent YouTube video on how to do this) and **cast on six stitches to each of two needles**. If your yarn is fairly fine, or you have broad toes, you may want to go with eight or ten stitches: this, like everything else, is flexible. **Knit one and a half rounds even**: if you are working with DPNs, divide up your stitches so they fit nicely (if I am working with a set of four needles, I often keep all the sole stitches on one needle and divide the instep over the other two, leaving me with one needle to work with ... if I have five needles in the set, then I can also divide the sole stitches in half if I need to). If you are working with two circulars, just carry on, you're already set.

Now we need to increase so the toe of the sock will fit over all our toes: **on the next round, increase by one stitch at each end of the instep and each end of the sole**. The lifted increases that Cat Bordhi calls La-Link and La-Rink work well (again, there's a great video on YouTube) but any increase that doesn't leave a hole will work fine. **Increase every other round until the sock will**

**fit nicely over your toes** (or the toes of the intended recipient): at about 4.5 stitches per inch I needed 36 stitches in total to fit around my not-too-wide size seven feet.<sup>1</sup>

**From here on we work even, without any more increases, until the sock reaches the place on your foot where the heel pad begins.** Interestingly enough, this seems to be about the same size as the length of your hand from the tip of your middle finger to the bend of your wrist: try it, if you place your hand along the bottom of your foot with the tip of your middle finger on the end of your big toe, the base of your hand probably touches the edge of your heel. This is handy to know because it's easier to check the length of your sock against your own hand than it is to be constantly trying it on your foot. Of course if you're making the socks for someone else, you'll need to get measurements and use a ruler or a measuring tape. Or maybe you can just trace their hand!

Now just a moment, you say, this sock is going to be boring if it's just worked in plain stockinette. That may be true (though with funky colourful yarn, you don't need much in the way of patterning), and we don't have to work it in plain stockinette. Along the instep you can add whatever patterning you like: I used a linen stitch pattern on mine, but a section of seed stitch or basket weave would be nice, too. Just make sure you don't choose something that will cause the fabric to draw in too much or become too inflexible.

The linen stitch pattern I used is worked like this:

- R1: work to 3 stitches from the centre of the instep, then slip two stitches with yarn in front, knit two, slip two with yarn in front, continue round
- R2: work even in stockinette
- R3: work to 2 stitches from the centre of the instep, slip two stitches with yarn in front, continue round
- R4: work even in stockinette

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<sup>1</sup> Of course I didn't figure this out until I'd knit halfway up the foot at 38 stitches, and I tried the sock on and decided it was too loose. I just frogged back a few rows and picked up the stitches at the narrower point on the toe.



**When the sock is long enough that it reaches the front edge of your heel, we are ready to start the heel flap.** This is easiest if you get all the sole stitches onto a single needle, so shuffle them onto a single DPN if necessary. We're going to be working a German Heel<sup>2</sup> on a garter stitch base. Of course you can substitute any heel you like: any ordinary top down heel will work, even if you do it on a toe up sock, you just end up with the reinforced flap along the bottom of the foot instead of up the back of the heel. I wear out my socks on the bottom anyway, so I'd rather have the reinforcement on the bottom of the foot than the back of the leg. If you need more reinforcement up the back, you can just continue working the reinforced stitch of your choice further up the leg of the sock.

Okay, the heel flap. **Ignore the instep stitches for a while and just work back and forth in garter stitch (i.e. knitting every row) until the heel flap is long enough to cover your whole heel.** (My heel happens to be the same length as my pinky

finger, but that's a measurement you'll need to double check on your own feet and hands.) Count the number of garter stitch ridges you have, and write that number down so you can make the second sock to match.

Now we're ready to turn the heel, which is really quite easy with the German Heel method. **Divide the number of stitches on your sole needle into thirds:** if it won't divide evenly into three, then make sure the outer two sections have the same number of stitches and let the centre section absorb the difference. **Knit across the outer section and all but the last stitch of the centre section, then knit that last stitch together with the stitch next to it,** i.e. you're going to knit the last stitch of the centre section together with one stitch from the outer third. **Turn the work** (no wrapping and turning necessary, just turn). **Knit across to the last stitch of the centre section and knit that last stitch together with the stitch next to it,** again eating up one stitch from the outer section while keeping the stitch count in the centre section the same. **Keep doing this,** working across those same centre stitches over and over but always knitting the last one together with the next stitch in the outer section, until all that's left on the needle are the stitches of the centre section. Make sure you are on a right side row, ready to resume knitting in the round (just knit one more row if you are looking at the inside of the heel instead of the outside).

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<sup>2</sup> as per Elizabeth Zimmerman's instructions in *Knitting Without Tears*



Tada, you have a heel. This is a good time to try the sock on: make sure it comes to the back of your foot comfortably.

The next task is to connect the edges of the heel flap with the rest of the sock. **Pick up one stitch for each garter stitch ridge along the edge of the heel flap that is next to your working yarn, and knit across them.**<sup>3</sup> **Knit across the instep, maintaining whatever pattern you may be using along the top of the foot. Pick up the same number of stitches along the other side of the heel flap and knit those as well.** Adjust the position of the stitches on your needles if necessary: you want all the sole-and-picked-up-stitches-from-the-heel on one side, and all the instep stitches on the other.

If you count the stitches on your sole-side needle(s), you'll see we have too many stitches. That's okay because our next step is to **decrease one stitch at each end of the sole on every other round until we are back to the number of stitches we started out with**<sup>4</sup>, which will be the same number as we have on the instep needle(s). To decrease, knit the first stitch on the sole needle(s), then knit two together, knit across the sole to the last two stitches, then knit two together through the back loop (or ssk) and knit the last stitch. Or do the ssk first and the k2tog second – it's best to mirror them, but which one goes where is not critical.

Try your sock on and make sure it fits your foot – if you need to go back and fix the length of the foot, it's better to find out now than after you've knit the leg of the sock as well.

Time to work on **the leg of the sock**: go ahead and be creative! You may want to start ribbing right away to help the sock fit very narrow ankles (or ankles that are sometimes swollen), or if you haven't got much yarn left in the ball.

If you like the way the patterning is working on the front of the sock and you aren't ready to give that up yet, you can just keep working, knitting the back of the leg in stockinette. You can add patterning to the back of the leg if you want. You can start ribbing just up the back of the leg keeping the patterning on the front, or, like I did on my socks, you can keep the pattern going and the majority of the sock in stockinette but with one narrow purl ridge at the centre back of the sock. I worked the centre back two stitches of my sock in purl, creating a small 'back seam' that can collapse in on itself if necessary, or stretch out a little. Plus, it looks neat and keeps the knitting from getting too boring.

**If you still have a lot of yarn, you may want to plan a longer leg for your sock.** I worked the leg in pattern (with the linen stitch on the front and the centre back seam) until it reached the place where my calf muscle (such as it is) starts to curve out from the back of my leg, then I switched to ribbing. I worked k2p2 ribbing until the sock arrived at the place on my leg where the calf muscle was almost at its widest point, then I added two more stitches to the purl ridge at the

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<sup>3</sup> *If it looks like there's going to be too much of a gap between the last stitch you pick up and the instep stitches, just pick up one more stitch (in whatever way seems to work) and knit it together with the stitch beside it, so that the count of 'picked up and knit' stitches is correct, even if you did pick up an extra one to close a gap.*

<sup>4</sup> *Of course if you have really skinny feet and really wide legs, then you can leave extra stitches so that the leg of the sock is wider than the foot. If you have wide feet and skinny legs, then decrease an extra few stitches away. Do whatever makes the sock fit the person it's meant for.*

centre back on one round, worked another round even, then added two more purl stitches so that the centre back purl section was now six stitches wide instead of two. On the next round, I just worked k2p2 ribbing across those newly added stitches, creating another rib in the sock and making it fit comfortably over the wider portion of my leg.

When I was nearly out of yarn, I used the **Super Stretchy Bind Off** to finish: make one stitch with the knitted cast on method, then put it back on the left hand needle and knit it together with the next stitch through the back loop; then for the rest of the cuff, you don't do the cast on, you just slip the stitch just created by knitting two together back onto the left hand needle knit *that* together with the next stitch (through the back loop), repeating this all the way around, keeping the tension very loose as you go.

**If you aren't positive that your yarn was divided evenly**, when you come close to the end of your first ball of yarn you may want to put your stitches on a holder and start the second sock. When the second sock is nearly done you can add yarn to one sock or the other to make sure they come out to the same length.

**There you go: socks from your own handspun yarn!**

Cool, eh?

*This recipe is for sharing! Please keep it intact, so that credit is given where credit is due.  
What you do with the items you create based on this pattern is, of course, entirely up to you ...  
I hope that you enjoy what you make and wish you happy knitting!*