

Getting Started With Knitting & Crocheting in the Library

Lara Killian

There are innumerable websites and books with basic instructions for how to knit and crochet. A number of North American libraries have successful knitting programs for various ages, and there are lots of ways to go about organizing related programming. You could cater to beginners, or offer help for all ability levels. Perhaps teens who have mastered the basics could teach younger patrons, as a crossover teen/children programming idea.

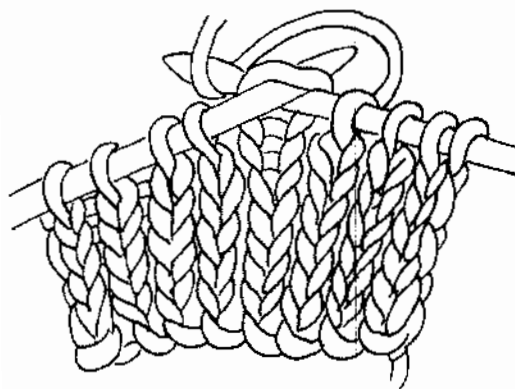
Searching in Google or on YouTube for videos and tutorials will bring up any number of visual lessons for beginners. Knitting and crochet have come back into the mainstream in the last few years, possibly due in part to the popularity of

Debbie Stoller's *Stitch and Bitch* book series. There is a vast array of recent books, stylish magazines, popular blogs, free online patterns, and even a social networking site dedicated to fibre crafts, Ravelry. The necessary tools are widely available and chances are you have a fibre enthusiast on your staff already, so ask around. Check local thrift stores for vintage needles and random lots of yarn. Posting signs around the library stating that you're looking for donated materials could be a great way to get the stuff you need as well.

So getting started with knitting or crocheting can be easy and fun. But what happens once some of your interested teens have mastered the basic skills and want to try something new? Read on!

Swatches

Simple shapes: part of the process of learning to knit/crochet generally requires creating a square 'swatch' – or sample. Producing a simple square or rectangle while learning to knit or crochet is exciting – but the end result looks kind of useless. Turn this simple shape into something fun, like a cell phone cozy, iPod case, or wee cosmetics bag. A pile of such swatches can be easily turned into a stuffed animal as a gift for a younger sibling or a local charity. A particularly misshapen swatch could become a piece of artwork if folded and pinned into a flowery shape. Read on for more details on those ideas!



Swatch idea: electronics case or makeup bag

You'll need:

- swatch(es) (those random squares/rectangles created while learning to knit or crochet, or while practicing to get better tension or figure out the correct gauge for a future project)
- some spare yarn/thread for sewing
- a needle appropriate to the yarn/thread thickness
- a button if desired for closure
- any other bits and pieces you want to jazz up the finished piece – ribbons, lace, more buttons, bits of fabric... be creative!

Depending on the size of the swatch, you may want to fold it in half and sew up two sides, then attach a button and sew on a piece of string or ribbon on the opposite side of the opening to loop around the button as a closure.

If your swatch is too small to do this, you'll need at least two swatches. Sew them together on three sides and then attach a button and closure (see above).

If you want to make a case for holding smaller things like personal items, you may wish to partially sew up the last open edge of the case, just leaving enough of an opening to stretch the fabric and retrieve your items. The button closure will help keep things inside, but if there are a number of small items and the opening is too big, they might accidentally slip out!

TIP: Another great way to use a simple square or rectangle swatch case is to fill it with dry beans and sew all four sides closed – make a few and you have a set of beanbags for juggling!

Swatch idea: Stuffed animal / pet toy

You'll need:

- swatches (they can be all different colours and textures, or a bunch of similar ones)
- spare yarn/thread for sewing
- needle appropriate to the yarn/thread thickness
- buttons for facial features and decoration
- yarn for embellishments like a mouth and whiskers
- stuffing material: dry beans, spare fleece, quilt batting etc. (or other swatches you never want to see again?)

Plan ahead on this one – larger swatches can be rolled into a tube and sewn up for

TIP: If you think you might need some extra swatches or want a better assortment of colors, pick up a couple of knitted items like sweaters at a thrift store or summer yard sale – keep an eye out for stripes and colourful patterns to dissect. And the size doesn't matter!

limbs, while you may want to sew together two roughly same-sized swatches for the body and head. Keep an open mind – your end result doesn't have to look like a typical teddy, it can be misshapen and funky! If it turns out really crazy looking, name it Igor.

Be sure to stuff each body part before you sew it completely shut. Attach limbs (consider a tail if you have a narrow swatch!) to the body and think about embellishing the head before you attach it, just to make things a little easier.

Now that you have a 'stuffie,' consider crafting some clothes for it – knitting a little t-shirt would be a great way to practice increasing and decreasing stitches! And if you liked creating a stuffed animal from scraps, take a look at the 'amigurumi' section of this issue for more fun creature ideas!

Swatch idea: Funky Flower Art Pin/Embellishment

You'll need:

- a swatch that is irregularly shaped, OR two or three swatches that are not too thick, and fairly flexible (not too densely knit/crocheted)
- button for centre of flower if desired
- spare yarn/thread for sewing
- needle appropriate to the yarn/thread thickness
- pin backing if desired (a large safety pin could suffice in a pinch, or find flat-backed pins for broaches at your local jewellery supply store)

TIP: For a really unusual piece, pick up costume jewellery broaches at yard sales or a vintage shop and shape the knitted swatch around the center 'stone' as a fancy flower pin!

With needle threaded and at the ready, place your swatch(es) on a flat surface. If you are using multiple pieces, arrange them at different angles, but overlapping on top of each other, like a multiple-pointed star. Place a finger in the centre of the stack or swatch, and gather the fabric around it, pinching the centre as though it's where the stem of a flower meets the petals. Make a few simple stitches through the centre part of the underside you've gathered, then spread out the rest of the knitting to be sure you're happy with the shape. You can adjust the piece easily by pulling the thread out and starting over.

Once the swatches are fixed together and you like the look of the piece, you can sew a button in the center on the right side, or embellish using other materials. Run a safety pin through the bottom 'nub' or attach it to a flat-backed pin and pin it to a messenger bag or jacket lapel for a fun accessory. Sometimes an extra bit of colour or texture can really make an outfit or tote bag special.

Knit & Crochet Online Resources for Patterns and Tips

Berroco Design Team Free Patterns: http://www.berroco.com/pattern_library.html

Interweave Crochet: <http://www.interweavecrochet.com>

Interweave Knits: <http://www.interweaveknits.com>

Knitting Daily: <http://www.knittingdaily.com>

Knitty Magazine: <http://www.knitty.com>

Ravelry: <http://www.ravelry.com>

The Anticraft: <http://www.theanticraft.com/>

Twist Collective: <http://twistcollective.com>

Editors' Pattern Pick:

Coraline sweater pattern modelled after the one in the movie adapted from Neil Gaiman's popular novella – (and it's free!): http://coraline.com/images/sweater_pattern.pdf

What next? Now that your swatches have turned into all sorts of other objects, here are some more ideas for how to get fibre crafts into the library! Make yarn with your own inexpensive drop spindle created from everyday objects.

Start spinning: Make your own drop spindle

If you have a group of teens who have been learning to knit or crochet, they might be interested in making their own yarn. There are lots of ideas out there about not only using pre-drafted fibre that has already been cleaned, combed, carded, and portioned out in neat strips of fibre (which you can pick up at your local fibre purveyor or perhaps a nearby farmer's market), but all kinds of random materials that teens might have laying around, like worn out cassette tapes and bits of Christmas tree tinsel.

Making a drop spindle is the first step in creating 'art yarn,' or a basic one-ply skein of wool to use for a new project.

It's fairly simple to create a basic drop spindle out of a couple of old/blank/promotional CDs, an eyehook, a rubber grommet and a small dowel. Most of these materials can be picked up inexpensively from your local hardware store. Consider collecting the materials, pre-drilling a small hole in the centre of one end of the dowel, and then having teens assemble their own using discarded promotional CDs or DVDs from the library that are too scratched to play any longer.

You'll need (for each drop spindle):

- 2 CDs
- a narrow wooden dowel about 12 inches long (3/8" or so in diameter) with smooth (sanded) ends
- an eyehook (3/4" long)
- rubber grommet

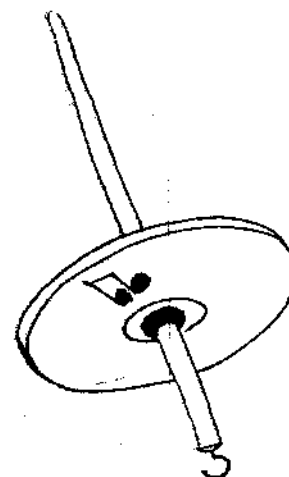
Using two discs, fit the rubber grommet between them so the CDs rest in the groove of the grommet. Screw the eyehook into one end of the wooden dowel. Insert the dowel through the grommet and move the CDs about 5 centimetres away from the eyehook – this is a top-whorl spindle.

You can look online for lots of great tips about how to get your spindle balanced correctly, and how to spin with fibre and other fun stuff once your spindle is ready. I found the DIY Network instructions to be very helpful; just search the site for "How to Make a Hand Spindle" or check out other knitting resources at the webpage below:

http://www.diynetwork.com/diy/na_knitting/

And there are how-to videos on YouTube, so that's another place to look for directions, plus lots of drop spindle demonstrations! If you don't have many old CDs kicking around, and would like a more professional looking spindle, you can also use a round cabinet or cupboard handle with a hole drilled through the centre, or a wooden car wheel, for example. Check this site out for more pointers:

<http://www.joyofhandspinning.com/make-dropspin.shtml>



TIP: You can make an even simpler version using a CD-sized piece of corrugated cardboard, a pencil stuck through the centre of the cardboard, eraser first, and a hook with a screw on the end of it, screwed into the eraser! You might wish to weight the cardboard down with something, like a glued on CD. A bit of weight on the spindle helps the spinning motion happen evenly. Experiment, and have fun!

Amigurumi

Amigurumi are extremely popular in the crocheting community. Amigurumi is a Japanese word meaning knitted or crocheted stuffed toys. Another important word in this context is 'kawaii,' pronounced "kah-wah-ee" - it means 'cute' in Japanese, and is often applied to these toys, although more books are starting to be released with pattern ideas for toys other than cuddly bears and cupcakes with happy expressions. Amigurumi often appear as animals, food items, or various inanimate objects with facial features stitched on. You can find tons of pictures on the Internet (try searching on Flickr for 'amigurumi' - there are over 50,000 related images!) and there are more and more books being released or imported from Japan to give amigurumi fans more projects to try their hand at.

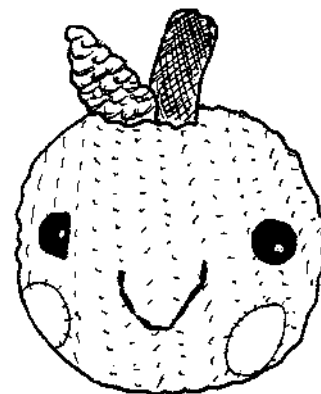
Amigurumi are great for using up small bits of different colours of yarn, and by using different textures of yarn you can get completely different looks for your toys as well. Amigurumi are composed of simple crocheted shapes, using a

smaller crochet hook than you might ordinarily select, so that the fabric will be very dense and the stuffing won't come out. A typical doll consists of a round head, an oblong body, and four narrow limbs, often crocheted as tubes. Once all the pieces have been stuffed and joined to the body, a lot of the fun lies in embellishing the dolls and giving them interesting facial features. There is lots of room for experimenting and variety - and if you're not happy with how a face looks the first time, you can pull out the threads and easily start over!

Rather than try to explain here how to make a basic amigurumi doll, I am going to point out some needed materials and then resources for further investigation, including sites with tutorials. There is such a wide variety of amigurumi options out there, it would be too limited to explain how to make just one sort! Of course, once you get the basic shapes down, they can be customized to look like just about anything!

Here's what you'll need to get started:

- yarn in various colours - at first you may wish to use smooth mercerized cotton, but it's possible to use any sort!
- crochet hook(s) in appropriate sizes
- embroidery thread/finer yarn for embellishing
- a darning needle or finer needle appropriate to the thread on hand
- stuffing material such as quilt batting or cotton balls
- buttons for eyes if desired
- felt for cutting out shapes and stitching them on as decorations - for example, small circles in red or pink to stitch on the face for cheeks, or a heart shape to stitch onto the chest area of the doll
- ribbon if desired, or any other things you want to use in your embellishing efforts!



Online Amigurumi Tutorials

DIY - Amigurumi Tutorial: <http://www.diy-life.com/2007/08/07/diy-definitions-amigurumi-with-tutorial/>

Hooks and Needles - Amigurumi Tutorial:

<http://www.hookandneedles.com/2008/03/22/amigurumi-tutorial-1/>

Planet June - Tutorials: <http://www.planetjune.com/blog/amigurumi-help/>

My Gurumi – How to start Amigurumi Tutorial:

<http://mygurumi.blogspot.com/2008/10/how-to-start-amigurumi.html>

Online Resources

Crochet Me Amigurumi: <http://www.crochetme.com/amigurumi>

Gourmet Amigurumi (includes photos of amigurumi mermaids and fantastic creatures, plus tips and yarn recommendations): <http://www.gourmetamigurumi.com/>

Geek Crafts Amigurumi (includes photos of amigurumi of *Pulp Fiction* actors, Mario of Nintendo's *Mario Brothers*, *South Park* characters and more!): <http://geekcrafts.com/tag/amigurumi/>

Print Resources

Aronzo, A. (2008). *Aranzi cute stuff*. New York: Vertical.

Doherty, E. (2007). *Amigurumi!: Super happy crochet cute*. New York: Lark Books.

Haden, C. (2008). *Creepy cute crochet: Zombies, ninjas, robots, and more!* Philadelphia: Quirk.

Rimoli, A. P. (2008). *Amigurumi world: Seriously cute crochet*. Woodinville, WA:

Martingale.