

Mitten Lesson

by Arenda Holladay

In our new “Fashion Framework” series, we will help you explore basic elements of pattern make-up – things to know before you knit. Each article in this series will provide a “lesson” for a basic type of garment. The lesson will describe in detail aspects of the garment as well as provide a basic pattern and show ways to alter the standard pattern to customize the garment. The first lesson is for mittens.

ABOUT MITTENS

Mittens can be simple or very complex. Obviously developed to solve the practical problem of how to keep hands warm, in many parts of the world mittens have evolved into an art form. There are many books devoted to mitten traditions. The bibliography includes some of the best known books. These types of mittens are important parts of the cultural heritage and often incorporate designs from the natural world into the stranded designs. They are works of art that show off the technical and design skills of the knitter. However, they may not be the mitten you want to put on the hand of a nine-year-old boy on his way out the door to build a snowman.

Mittens are often the first real project a knitter undertakes. They take less time to knit than a sock and they make wonderful gifts. With the current popularity of fingerless mitts, even knitters in warm climates can enjoy making this traditional garment.

The construction of a mitten is not all that complicated. It consists of a cuff, hand, thumb and top. When you are looking at patterns for mittens, you should study how the pattern handles these various components.

Cuff

Most simple mittens call for a ribbed cuff. The benefit of a ribbed cuff is that it is elastic but fits tightly around the wrist. This keeps out cold air and helps keep the mitten on the hand. The disadvantage of a ribbed cuff is that it is not as decorative. Many traditional mittens do not have a ribbed cuff but the pattern continues over the wrist. These types of mittens generally have some sort of special edging or cast on so that the cuff does not curl. A compromise is corrugated ribbing. Generally worked on K2P2 ribbing, the knit stitches are worked in one color and the purls are worked in another. Corrugated ribbing is not as elastic as plain ribbing.

Many patterns will specify that smaller needles be used for ribbing but if you tighten up your tension and pull the yarn very firmly

when changing from knit to purl stitches and vice versa, it may not be necessary.

Hand

Most patterns for simple mittens will change from ribbing to Stockinette stitch for the hand. Sometimes it is necessary to increase a few stitches. Many traditional mittens have one pattern for the cuff and another for the hand. In some cases, there are different patterns for the front and back.

Thumb

There are two basic thumb treatments. The most common one and the one which mimics the shape of the hand is the gusset. Although “gusset” sounds like some sort of Victorian undergarment, it’s a technical term used to describe a triangular piece of fabric used to reinforce the connection between two pieces to improve the fit. “Gore” is another term sometimes used instead of gusset. The most common types of gussets are created by increasing stitches on both sides every few rows. When there are enough stitches on the gusset to encircle the thumb, the gusset stitches are threaded onto waste yarn while the hand is worked. The thumb is worked after the hand is complete.

The most practical location for the gusset is at the side of the hand. This makes the mittens interchangeable unless some decorative pattern is worked on the top. Some patterns call for the gusset to be offset from the side.

Most traditional mittens do not use gussets or gores for the thumb. The patterns specify that the mitten be worked in pattern until the location of the thumb. Waste yarn is used to knit the stitches at the location of the thumb. When the hand is complete, the waste yarn is removed and the stitches are picked up. This type of thumb is generally called a “peasant thumb.” It is easy to see why this thumb treatment is used. The placement of a gusset or gore would interfere with the elaborate stranded patterns.

There are exceptions to every rule. For example, some types of Norwegian mittens use a combination of a peasant thumb and a gusset. When evaluating a mitten pattern, always check the section on the thumb shaping.

continued on page 44

Top Shaping

The stitch pattern of the mitten frequently determines the shape of the mitten (and thumb) top. Simple mittens generally have a more rounded top. The decreases are evenly spaced throughout the round. The more decreases worked each round, the more rounded the top. Since it is difficult to maintain a stranded design while making the decreases, traditional mittens generally have a more triangular top since decreases are made at each side. Fingerless mitts are a mitten with no top.

Needles and Yarn

Other factors you should consider when looking at patterns is how the mitten is knit. Few mittens are knit flat and then seamed. Most are knit in the round using double pointed needles (dpns). With the popularity of the “Magic Loop” style of knitting, one long circular needle could be substituted. Many knitters use shorter dpns for the thumb. It isn’t necessary but it is less cumbersome.

To create a denser fabric, many mitten patterns suggest smaller needles for the yarn than you would typically use. Check the recommended gauge when looking at the pattern.

You should also consider the weight and type of yarn. Simple mittens can be knit in any weight of yarn. Traditional mittens generally use Fine or Superfine yarn in two or more colors. If you have not tried stranded knitting before, a traditional mitten might not be the best first project.

MITTEN LESSON

The pattern in this lesson is for very simple, basic mittens. There will be an explanation of each step in the construction preceding the pattern section. **Pattern instructions are boxed to set them off from the explanations.** These mittens have ribbed cuffs, thumb gussets and a rounded top.

Pattern Information

This section provides introductory information needed before you work the pattern.

Basic Mitten (1)
by Arenda Holladay

Sizes: S/M (L)

Finished Measurements:

Circumference: 7 1/2 (9)"

Length (Cuff to Top): 8 1/2 (9 1/2)"

Materials:

Jo Sharp ALPACA SILK GEORGETTE (1.76oz/50g,
142yds/130m, 40% Merino Wool, 40% Alpaca, 20% Silk):
2 skeins #754 Kelp
Size 3 (3.25mm) 5" (13cm) & 7" (18cm) dpns or size needed
to obtain correct gauge
Tapestry needle
Stitch markers

Gauge:

In St st, 26 sts & 38 rows = 4"/10 cm.
To save time, take time to check gauge.

Abbreviations:

Inc1R – Right slanting lifted increase. Knit into the purl
nub below the stitch. Then knit the stitch.

Inc1L – Left slanting lifted increase. Knit the stitch. Then
knit into the purl nub below the stitch.

Preparation – Measuring Gauge

The most important part of the general pattern information is the description of the expected gauge. Before beginning it is necessary to knit a gauge swatch even if you are using the recommended yarn. (Some knitters have a different gauge when knitting in the round, you may want to knit the swatch in the round.) Using the recommended needle size and the yarn, cast on at least 30 stitches and work at least 2" in Stockette stitch. (Row gauge is not as important for this pattern.) Block the swatch and measure the width (do not include the selvedge stitches) to an eighth of an inch and note the decimal measurement on the worksheet below. Also note the number of stitches you measured.

Gauge Worksheet

Width:

1/8 = .125

1/4 = .25

3/8 = .375

1/2 = .5

5/8 = .625

3/4 = .75

7/8 = .875

Number of Stitches: Don't include the selvedge stitches. Divide the number of stitches by the width. This gives you the number of stitches per inch. Do not round off the number.

Number of Stitches Per Inch: Multiply the number of stitches by 4. Round this number up or down.

Number of Stitches in 4": Repeat this procedure to determine the row gauge.

Length:

- 1/8 = .125
- 1/4 = .25
- 3/8 = .375
- 1/2 = .5
- 5/8 = .625
- 3/4 = .75
- 7/8 = .875

Number of Rows: Don't include the cast on or bind off edge. Divide the number of rows by the length. This gives you the number of rows per inch. Do not round off the number:

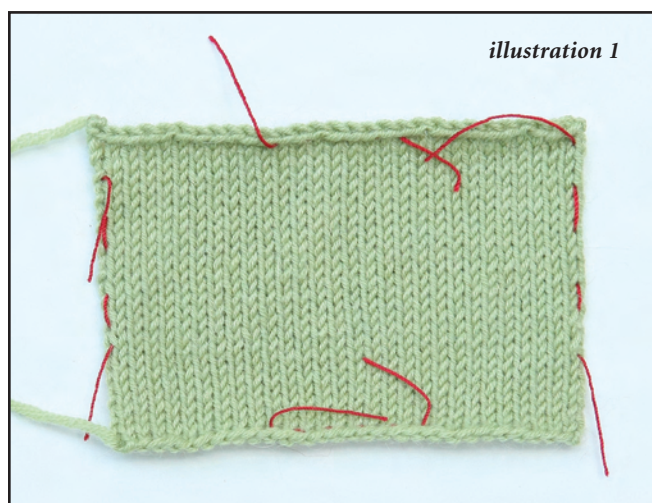
Number of Rows Per Inch: Multiply the number of rows by 4. Round this number up or down.

Number of Rows in 4":

Gauge Example

Illustration 1 shows the gauge swatch for the mitten. Notice that red thread indicates the portion to be measured.

- Width: 4.375"
- Number of Stitches: 28 ($28 \div 4.375 = 6.4$)
- Number of Stitches Per Inch: 6.4 ($6.4 \times 4 = 25.6$)
- Number of Stitches in 4": 26
- Length: 2.75
- Number of Rows: 24 ($24 \div 2.75 = 9.45454$)
- Number of Rows Per Inch: 9.45454 ($9.45454 \times 4 = 37.8181$)
- Number of Rows in 4": 38



If you are getting fewer stitches than the recommended gauge, try using a smaller needle size. If you are getting more stitches than the recommended gauge, try using a larger needle size. How important is

gauge for mittens? If your gauge is only slightly different, your mittens might be a little narrower or wider but it will probably still fit.

Knitting the Cuff

The cuff for this pattern is K2P2 ribbing which requires a multiple of 4 stitches to be cast on to maintain the K2P2 pattern. The long-tail cast on is recommended as it provides a stable yet elastic edge. In the last row of the ribbing, you will need to increase a stitch. The best type of increase to use in this situation is a bar increase. If it is worked in the knit stitch immediately before a purl stitch, the purl bump from the increase blends in with the purl stitches.

Cuff

CO 48 (56) sts. Divide sts evenly on 4 dpns. Join into rnd being careful not to twist sts. *K2, p2; rep from * to end of rnd. Work in Pat as est until cuff meas 2 1/4" or desired length. Inc 1 st in the last rnd – 49 (57) sts. Work 4 rnds in St st.

Knitting the Thumb Gusset

In this pattern the gusset is shaped by working mirrored Lifted Increases on either side of a center stitch (see illustration 2). This type of increase is made in a stitch and the instructions for making it include knitting the stitch as well (see description in Abbreviations). (If you have not made this type of increase before, try the videos found in knittinghelp.com/videos/increases. They are called the KLL and KLR increases.) Increases are made at both sides of the gusset every third row until the gusset is complete.



Markers are used to separate the stitches for the gusset from the stitches for the hand.

continued on page 46

Thumb Gusset

Est Pat: K23 (27), pm, k3, pm, k to end of rnd.

Rnd 1: Knit to first marker, Inc1R, knit to last st before marker, Inc1L, k to end of rnd.

Rnd 2: Knit.

Rnd 3: Knit.

Rep rnds 1-3 until there are 17 (19) sts bet markers. Knit up to first marker. Using tapestry needle and waste yarn, place sts for the thumb on waste yarn.

Knitting the Hand

Once the stitches for the gusset have been placed on waste yarn, it is necessary to close the gap left by the gusset. In this pattern two stitches are cast on at the gap. The join at the thumb will be less bulky if you use the twisted loop cast on. (Wrap the working yarn around your index finger with the yarn tail on top. Slip the needle into the loop and pull tight.)

Hand

CO 2 sts using the twisted loop method. Knit to the end of the rnd – 48 (56) sts. Work in Pat as est until the hand meas 7 3/4 (8)" from the cuff or 1" less than desired length.

Knitting the Mitten Top

The top of this mitten is rounded. The shape of a mitten top is determined by the number of decs worked in ea rnd. The more decs, the rounder the top.

Shaping the Top

Rnd 1: *K4, k2tog; rep from * to end of rnd – 40 (45) sts.

Rnd 2: Knit.

Rnd 3: *K3, k2tog; rep from * to end of rnd – 32 (36) sts.

Rnd 4: Knit.

Rnd 5: *K2, k2tog; rep from * to end of rnd – 24 (27) sts.

Rnd 6: *K1, k2tog; rep from * to end of rnd – 16 (18) sts.

Rnd 7: *K2tog; rep from * to end of rnd – 8 (9) sts.

Cut yarn leaving a tail at least 8". Using tapestry needle, pull through rem sts, pull tight and secure end on the inside.

Knitting the Thumb

The trickiest, hardest part of knitting a mitten is picking up the stitches for the thumb. There will be gaps and loose stitches. Don't worry. You can improve its appearance when you are finished. To

begin, you put the stitches on the waste yarn back on the needles, distributing them evenly and pick up 2 sts in the gap. If you have shorter dpns, you may want to use them. If there is still a large gap, you can pick up an additional stitch or two at the gaps. If you do this, remember to decrease the stitch(es) in the first few rows. The best location for the decrease(s) is at the inside of the thumb (see illustration 3). Be sure to leave a long yarn tail. You will use this to neaten up the joins during finishing.

When the thumb is the desired length, the top is shaped similarly to the mitten top.

illustration 3



Thumb

Place the sts on waste yarn on dpns. Leaving at least an 8" yarn tail, join the yarn and work a rnd, picking up 2 sts in the cast on sts – 19 (21) sts. In the next rnd, dec 1 st – 18 (20) sts. Work in Pat as est until thumb meas 1 3/4 (2)" from base or 3/4" from desired length.

Shape Top

Rnd 1: *K2tog; rep from *.

Rep Rnd 1 until 4 sts rem.

Cut yarn leaving a tail at least 8". Using tapestry needle, pull through rem sts, pull tight and secure the end on the inside.

Second Mitten

Since the thumb gusset is worked at the side, the second mitten can be worked exactly the same as the first mitten.

Tidying Up

When the mittens are finished, the final step is to weave in the yarn tails. Before weaving in the yarn tails for the mitten and thumb tops, be sure the yarn is pulled very tight and that the ends are secure.

Weave in at least 1 1/2" of the yarn tails before trimming them close. Weave in the yarn tail at the cuff running it up through the column of knit stitches (see illustration 4). Look at the thumb join. Note any gaps or loose stitches. Close the gaps when you weave in the yarn tail. Don't worry if the join isn't absolutely perfect. Remember, the join is at the inside of the thumb!



illustration 4

Finishing

Weave in yarn tails and block, if necessary.

PATTERN VARIATIONS

Changing a pattern this simple is quite easy as Mittens 2 – 3 demonstrate. The patterns for these mittens begin on the following page.

MITTEN 2 – This mitten is very similar to the Basic mitten. A cabled cuff has been added as well as a duplicate stitch design. The sample has an initial for the design, but any design could be used. (The chart for the letter “K” on the sample is from *Tink’s Big Book of Alphabets For Duplicate Stitch and Knitting* by Tink Boord-Dill. More information can be found at www.tinkbd or tinkBD on Ravelry.)

MITTEN 3 – A very simple stranded design has been added to the Basic Mitten. Maintaining the pattern over the thumb gusset and hand has necessitated minor changes to the pattern.

MITTEN 4 – This is actually a fingerless mitt. Picot edges are worked at the cuff and hand top. A simple Bavarian Twisted stitch pattern is worked on both the front and back of the mitten.

Conclusion

Mittens are a quick and fun project which make wonderful gifts for friends and family. A mitten can be a blank slate for adding touches of your own.

Bibliography

- Budd, Ann, *The Knitter’s Handy Book of Patterns*, Interweave Press, Loveland, CO, 2002.
- Bush, Nancy, *Folk Knitting in Estonia*, Interweave Press, Loveland, CO 2000.
- Gottfridsson, Inger and Gottfridsson, Ingrid, *The Mitten Book*, Lark Books, Asheville, NC, 1991.
- Hansen, Robin, *Favorite Mittens*, Down East Books, Camden, ME, 2005.
- Lewandowski, Marcia, *Folk Mittens*, Interweave Press, Loveland, CO, 1997.
- Ligon, Linda, Editor, *Homespun Handknit*, Interweave Press, Loveland, CO, 1987.
- Shea, Terri, *Selbuvotter Biography of a Knitting Tradition*, Spinning-wheel LLC, Seattle, WA, 2007.
- Upitis, Lizbeth, *Latvian Mittens*, Schoolhouse Press, Pittsville, WI, 1997.