

Keys to Successful Duplicate Stitch

by kathryn mates

Duplicate stitch is an important skill to include in a knitter's assortment of decorative techniques. Also known as Swiss darning, duplicate stitch is simply the tracing over of a completed stitch using a tapestry needle and yarn. Duplicate stitch is a way to work a design or pattern into your knitting after the piece is complete. It is actually embroidery worked on the surface of the knitted fabric.

The uses for duplicate stitch are numerous. It is a good technique for working small motifs, letters and outlines. Knitting books and magazines contain many beautiful designs having color work patterns that include florals, leaves or pictures of objects knitted into the fabric. Large areas of color can be worked with an intarsia technique where each area of color is worked with a separate bobbin of yarn. Duplicate stitch worked on intarsia patterns adds small areas of detail to a larger color work pattern. Duplicate stitch becomes useful for adding other colors for shading, highlights or small details.

In addition to the decorative aspect of this technique, duplicate stitch also has some practical uses. It is useful for correcting small problems or mistakes in the knitting. I recently noticed a broken stitch in a well worn but much loved Fair Isle tam. I used a duplicate stitch to repair it. Also, when picking up stitches on a sock heel sometimes the last stitch does not fit as snug as it should. A well-placed duplicate stitch can tighten the gap.

Master Knitting Program Requirements

In the TKG Master Hand Knitting Program, working duplicate stitch on a swatch is a requirement in Level III. The swatch can include a small motif or initial. Duplicate stitch can also be optionally used in Level II to work diagonal lines on the argyle sock.

Many technique books explain the process for making a duplicate stitch, but most descriptions neglect to explain what the end result should look like.

- The duplicate stitch should fully cover the original stitch. The background color should not show through. It is important to use yarn of the same weight as the original piece of knitting. A finer yarn will not fully cover the stitch and a heavier yarn will add too much bulk.

- Duplicate stitches should be neither too loose nor too tight. They should match the tension of the original stitch and should be even in shape and size. A stitch worked too loosely will be enlarged. A stitch pulled too tightly will be too small and may disappear entirely. In either case the uneven tension will distort the pattern.
- A duplicate stitch traces over the path of the original stitch. This means the yarn flows from one side of the stitch to the other without twisting or crossing.

Technique For Working Duplicate Stitch

Working duplicate stitch is a simple process. It can be worked horizontally, vertically or even diagonally. Use a blunt tip tapestry needle. Smooth yarn works best. Avoid textured or novelty yarns that have bumps or uneven threads. For designs with multiple colors, work with one color at a time. It is essential to work in good lighting to effectively see the stitch you are trying to trace.

Insert the threaded needle from the back of the work to the front at the base of the V of the stitch to be covered. Pass the needle under two strands of the stitch in the row above it (See Swatch A). Be careful to avoid splitting the strands of the yarn in the original stitch. Bring the needle down through the original starting point to finish the stitch. Make sure you place the needle directly in the center without crossing the yarn and causing a twist. Continue this process to work the next stitch. Check the tension and smooth out the stitches so that the original stitch is covered completely without being too tight. After completing all stitches, weave in the yarn tails on the reverse side of the work being careful to secure the stitches and avoid twists.

Stitch Direction

Many Master Knitting participants, myself included, are surprised to learn that they need to resubmit their duplicate stitch swatches because of twisted stitches. Many commonly used reference books neglect to discuss this issue. To avoid twisted stitches it becomes important to pass the needle in the proper direction. Remember that the duplicate stitch traces the path of the original stitch. Duplicate stitches need to flow in a consistent direction without crossing the yarn.

Horizontal

When working a horizontal row of duplicate stitches, insert the needle in the same direction as you are working the stitches. In other words, if you are working the horizontal row from right to left, insert the needle from right to left (See Swatch B). Similarly, if you are working a horizontal row from left to right, insert the needle from left to right (See Swatch C). If you find the left to right motion awkward, try turning the work upside down. By doing so, you can continue to work the stitch from right to left, but the twists will not occur. When starting a new row, don't forget to secure the last stitch of the previous row to anchor both sides of the last stitch.

Vertical

When working a vertical row of duplicate stitches, alternate the direction on every other stitch. Work the first stitch from right to left and the next stitch from left to right. By working a sample swatch with a vertical line you will see that this alternating method will avoid crossing the yarn and therefore stitches will not become twisted.

Diagonal

A diagonal line is best worked from bottom to top. Insert the needle in the same direction as the slant of the diagonal line. If the line moves from right to left, insert the needle from right to left. If the line moves from left to right, insert the needle from left to right (See Swatch D).

Duplicate stitch provides a creative opportunity and enables the knitter to give a unique finish to plain knitting. With a little practice, it can become an easy way to create that eye catching, one-of-a-kind garment.

