

KNITTING WITH COTTON TIPS

By Carol Hurt, September 2003

HISTORY

- Cotton was first used 7,000 years ago. It's the oldest known fiber. It's a vegetable fiber now grown widely in hot climates around the world. It's grown in 17 states and 80 countries.
- Interesting fact....The UK considered cotton contraband in 1720 because of the wool industry in that country. It was repealed in 1736.
- 2 kinds of cotton - ELS (extra long staple) - and Pima or Egyptian (finest grade)
- Cotton treated with caustic soda and then stretched to be made smoother, shiny in appearance, stronger and less shrinkage is referred as "mercerized" because the man who invented the process was John Mercer (Lancashire, England).

PROS	CONS
Takes dye beautifully - multitude of colors	Colors may bleed
Breathable, comfortable	May have thicker seams - use ½ stitch, mattress seam
Inexpensive	Take stretch/shrinkage into account
Soft, strong, durable	Slippery - may use wooden needles
Non-allergic	25% of ALL the insecticides/pesticides used in the world, are used in growing cotton. Try organic cotton such as Fox Fibre.
Well defined stitches	
Very little pilling	

HINTS

SWATCH (extra large)- include your ribbing and use the colors (if more than one) in your swatch to test bleeding. (do a swatch, wash/lightly dry & dry flat to check) - black, navy & red are especially prone to bleed.

Use 1 c. vinegar & cold water in rinse water to help set colors.

Use elastic thread in ribbing. (3 rows is good) or use a twisted rib stitch (knit into back of each knit stitch).

You can also try working rib in 3-4 size smaller needles, instead of the usual 2 size difference.

Firm gauge is best.

Seed stitch is great for cotton.

Use "new" FrayChek for ends or whip to the inside with matching sewing thread.

Join new skein - use sharp pointed needle to penetrate strands and weave back in a u-turn.

Use wooden needles if yarn is slippery or splits. Some knitters don't like to use a needle larger than size 6.

Use the Russian Join to join new yarn - <http://www.knittinganyway.com/freethings/russianjoin.htm>

Try to join new yarn at the seams rather than the middle, if possible.

Crochet seams are bulky in cotton, so this is an ideal time to learn the mattress stitch.

When doing intarsia, try using embroidery yarn or smaller yarn to duplicate stitch. Be sure to tug/tighten at color changes.

Your garment will probably get shorter and wider. Swatch Swatch Swatch

CARE

Keep dryer filter clean and use good softener sheets. Freshen up in dryer between wearings

Cotton will become smoother the more you wash it.

If using black, red, or navy colors - put 1 cup of vinegar in rinse water or try RIT dye remover to take out excess dye (this is a dryer sheet).

NO bleach, NO Woolite.

Ultra Tide is recommended **or mild dish detergent.**

Use warm water, turn garment inside out and leave buttons undone.

Always dry in dryer (can dry with a towel to absorb some heat & protect it) - DON'T HANG. Some knitters dry partially then dry flat or when ¾ dry then dry in dryer.

Can use a floor fan to dry sweaters in half the time.

YARN REVIEWS

(There are many fibers composed of cotton/silk, cotton/rayon, cotton/wool, etc)

Tahki Cotton Classic - 137 colors - 108 yards \$4.50

Classic Elite Newport - may split, heavy WW, mercerized, vibrant colors, clear definition, 70 yds/\$4.75

Mission Falls 1824 Cotton - Easy to use, soft - unmercerized - pleasing texture. 84 yds / \$3.95

Noro Cotton Silk Lily - High definition, shiny (30% silk), soft - BUT grew ½ stitch per inch. 120 yds/\$10/50

Brown Sheep Cotton Fleece - has 20% wool which gives elasticity and helps keep shape. Shows cables great. 215 yds/\$7.75

Heirloom Breeze - Excellent reviews - small 0.4% lycra adds memory as well as the 30% wool to prevent stretching. Only \$3.35 a ball for 105 yards. 14 colors

BOOK SUGGESTIONS

There are several knitting books that deal with cotton fiber. I've found the following two to be useful in learning about cotton tendencies, and they have some nice patterns.

Cotton Knitting - Edited by Sally Harding
Barron's - publisher
ISBN-0-8120-5816-x
Copyright 1987

Cotton Collection - by Sue Bradley
Henry Holt and Company - publisher
ISBN 0-8050-0674-5
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