



How to Choose and Use the Right Type of Yarn Every Time

Created exclusively for Craftsy by Ashley Little, Lisa Gutierrez and Breeanna Sveum

This guide is just the beginning!



The fastest way to become a better, more confident knitter or crocheter is to understand your fiber! Learn how to choose the right yarn for the best results with fiber guru Clara Parkes in the Craftsy class

[Know Your Yarn: Choose the Perfect Yarn Every Time](#)

Table of Contents

- 3 - From Lace to Bulky: Knowing Your Yarn Weights
- 4 - Knitting & Crochet Metric Conversion Guide
- 5 - Tips for Choosing the Right Fiber
- 7 - How to Substitute Yarn
- 10 - Mystery Stash Yarns: Determining Yarn Weight
- 12 - A Cheater's Guide to Wraps Per Inch
- 14 - Ways to Mix Yarn: Brilliant Solutions for Stash Busting
- 16 - Meet the Experts

From Lace to Bulky: Know Your Yarn Weights

By Ashley Little

Yarn weights can be overwhelming, especially for a beginner knitter or crocheter. What's the difference between this green sport yarn and that purple bulky yarn? Why make a doily with lace weight yarn instead of worsted weight? What will happen if you make a lace shawl with a worsted-weight yarn? If you're going to branch out into the world of knitting and crocheting, you need to know about different yarn weights.



Why yarn weight matters

Yarn weight can tell you a lot of important information. It tells you the gauge of the yarn, allowing you to make yarn substitutions when you can't afford or find the type of yarn suggested for a new project. Yarn weight is also a factor in determining the drape of your project. For example, if you're in the mood for a light shawl that's flowing and folds up easily, you don't want to use a bulky weight yarn. It wouldn't wrap around you very easily, and it might even look like you're wearing a rug on your shoulders instead of a shawl!

Types of yarn weights

0 - LACE

Yarns: fingering, thread
Used to make: Doilies or other delicate projects

1 - SUPER FINE

Yarns: sock, fingering and baby
Used to make: baby items, socks, airy shawls and wraps

2 - FINE

Yarn: sport and baby
Used to make: baby items, lightweight throws

3 - LIGHT

Yarns: DK, light worsted
Used to make: baby clothes, socks and other lightweight clothing

4 - MEDIUM

Yarns: worsted, afghan, aran
Used to make: practically anything — this is the most common yarn weight. If you're a beginner, it's a great weight to practice your stitches with.

5 - BULKY

Yarn: rug yarn, chunky, craft
Used to make: home decor, bulky winter items like hats and scarves

6 - SUPER BULKY








Yarns: roving
Used to make: heavy scarves, hats, home decor items or anything else you'd like to knit up quickly

For more information on each weight, including gauge and recommended needles and hooks, check out the [Craftsy metric conversion guide](#) on the next page!

METRIC CONVERSION GUIDE

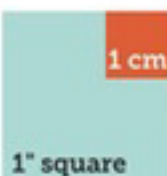
Knitting
& Crochet



							
Yarn Weight Category Names	LACE	SUPER FINE	FINE	LIGHT	MEDIUM	BULKY	SUPER BULKY
Type of Yarns in Category	Fingering 10-count crochet thread	Sock, fingering, baby	Sport, baby	DK, light worsted	Worsted, afghan, aran	Chunky, craft, rug	Bulky, roving
Knit Gauge Range* in Stockinette to 4" (10 cm)	33–40** sts	27–32 sts	23–26 sts	21–24 sts	16–20 sts	12–15 sts	6–11 sts
Recommended Metric Needle in Metric Size Range	1.5–2.25 mm	2.25–3.25 mm	3.25–3.75 mm	3.75–4.5 mm	4.5–5.5 mm	5.5–8 mm	8 mm and larger
Recommended U.S. Needle	000–1	1 to 3	3 to 5	5 to 7	7 to 9	9 to 11	11 and larger
Crochet Gauge Range* in Single Crochet 4" (10 cm)	32–42 double crochets	21–32 sts	16–20 sts	12–17 sts	11–14 sts	8–11 sts	5–9 sts
Recommended Metric Hook	1.6–1.4 mm, 2.25 mm	2.25–3.5 mm	3.5–4.5 mm	4.5–5.5 mm	5.5–6.5 mm	6.5–9 mm	9 mm and larger
Recommended U.S. Hook	Steel: 6, 7, 8 or B1	B1–E4	E–4 to 7	7 to I–9	I–9 to K–10½	K–10½ to M–13	M–13 and larger

Source: craftyarncouncil.com/weight.html

Guidelines Only:** The above reflect the most commonly used gauges and needle or hook sizes for specific yarn categories. *Lace weight yarns** are usually knitted or crocheted on larger needles and hooks to create lacy, openwork patterns. Accordingly, a gauge range is difficult to determine. Always follow the gauge stated in your pattern.



Note: Please print at "actual size," or at 100 percent scale. Make sure your print settings are not adjusting or resizing this page to match your printer margins.

Metric Conversion Guide

Tips for Choosing the Right Fiber

By Lisa Gutierrez

At the heart of both knitting and crocheting, there is fiber. Your projects are made entirely out of fibers, so it makes sense they are the most important aspect of your work. What makes certain fibers more appealing to work with than others? Is there a secret to choosing a yarn for certain knitting and crocheting projects? Let's examine some of the most prevalent fibers in commercially available yarns. We'll explain some of the characteristics of the different kinds of yarn, how they work up and the fabrics they create.

Animal fibers

Three popular types of animal yarns are used in many yarns, alone or combined with other fibers. Animal fibers are generally very warm yet lightweight, and are great choices for garments and cold weather accessories.



WOOL

Wool comes in a great assortment of colors and styles from a variety of sources (there are many breeds of sheep!). The texture of the yarn is primarily affected by the source of the wool. It is an easy fiber to work with and creates a great fabric for garments and accessories. Its natural elasticity helps it to retain its shape when worn.

The fibers have microscopic barbs that like to stick to each other, so wool is prone to felting when wet and agitated. It is a water-loving fiber and will absorb moisture readily. This gives it the great feature of wicking away moisture from skin, keeping its wearer dry.

You can knit and crochet easily with wool. Working with the suggested needles or hooks to get the specified gauge is always recommended, but if you desire fabrics with more drape and flexibility, increasing needle or hook size is a good idea.

ALPACA

There are two types of alpaca yarns: The softer, silkier alpaca fiber is Suri. The more wool-like fiber, Huacaya, is more suitable for knitting and crocheting than Suri is and it's a great alternative to sheep wool. It lacks lanolin, so it is hypoallergenic and a good choice for knitted baby garments. The fiber creates a very soft and warm fabric that is less likely to felt when laundered.

Alpaca fiber is often combined with other fibers in yarns. It lends its warmth and strength to other fibers like silk or even plant-based fibers like viscose.

CASHMERE

Cashmere is a luxury fiber from the cashmere goat. It is insulating and very, very soft. When worked at a normal gauge, the fabric created is perfect for scarves, shawls or even sweaters. It has a lightweight and silky drape. While readily available and easy to find, this fine fiber can be a bit pricey for the casual crafter.

Plant-based fibers

Plant-based fibers tend to be less elastic than animal fibers, but they are often stronger and more durable. They also retain less heat, so are more desirable in the spring and summer.

COTTON

There are a variety of cotton yarns on the market. Cotton is generally a lightweight fiber that is great for warm-weather projects. It is breathable yet strong enough to withstand many washes, which will actually soften the yarn.

Stitch definition with cotton is superb! Some finer cottons produce a drape comparable to even the silkiest of wools, but in general, cotton is very inelastic and likely to stretch and sag, a problem exacerbated by its ability to hold water so well.

Cotton is great for knitting and crocheting things for the home. Finer cottons are suggested for garments and accessories.



How to Substitute Yarn

By Ashley Little

Have you ever tried a project that required a discontinued yarn or a yarn that was totally out of your price range? It's heartbreaking to want to recreate the exact project, only to have your dreams crushed when you can't find the right yarn. But don't worry! It's just a matter of knowing how to substitute yarn.

With the right knowledge, you can find another yarn that's just as lovely as the one the pattern designer used.



Yarn substitution can be a big obstacle for knitters and crocheters, and going in blind can totally change a project. A nice, warm wool hat could suddenly turn into a floppy, chilly nightmare when substituted with a linen yarn. Legwarmers substituted with an improper gauge might leave you with something that fits both of your legs instead of just one. Substitution can be especially troubling when working with vintage patterns whose yarns haven't been heard of since 1960.

Like anything else in yarn arts, you can learn from every substitution success and failure. Read these tips before you substitute the yarn in your next project.



Yarn gauge and weight

Take a look at the gauge the designer specified for the pattern. It's best if your yarn can match that gauge — otherwise, you could run into trouble. For example, if your substitute yarn has a looser gauge than the pattern, a warm winter sweater could turn into an accidental see-through sweater because of the open, loose stitches.

To find an appropriate substitute, look at yarns in the same weight category as the pattern's yarn. For example, if the pattern is worked with a bulky-weight yarn, start your search in that weight category.

There are exceptions to this. Just because a yarn label's gauge doesn't match the pattern gauge, that doesn't mean it's not a good substitute. If you change your needle or hook size, you could potentially achieve the same gauge as the pattern, and everything will be just fine.

Use the weight category as a starting point. If you can't find anything you like, move to another category and try your luck by testing the gauge.



Fiber

Do you want your substitute yarn to feel exactly as the original yarn does? If so, you should use a similar fiber. The most obvious example of this is wool. Let's say you're working on a sweater to keep you warm through the winter, but you need to substitute the yarn. The original sweater is worked with a wool yarn. Can you substitute a cotton yarn? You could, but you wouldn't be nearly as warm as you would be in that wool. Think about the purpose of your project and what you'll use it for. That will help you determine whether you should match the fiber exactly or if you can go in another direction.

Fiber not only applies to something like warmth; it also applies to drape. Remember that yarns like cotton won't stretch as easily as yarns like wool. Some yarns are a little stiffer than others. The shawl that drapes so beautifully on the model may not drape as great on you if you don't use a similar fiber.

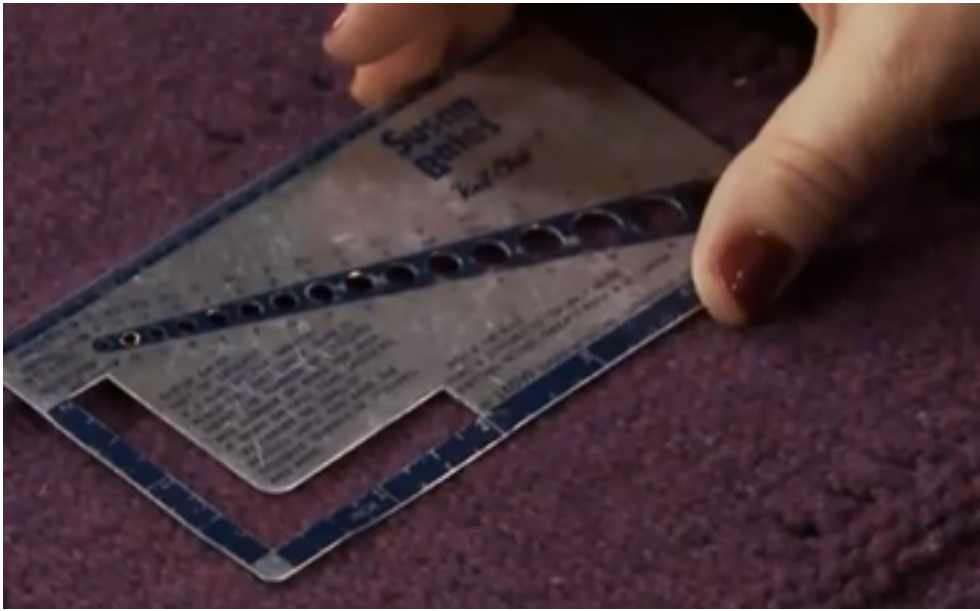
Yardage

Don't forget that the substitute yarn and the pattern yarn are probably sold in different yardages. Once you find your substitute, you'll need to calculate the yardage to make sure you buy enough yarn.

The most accurate way to figure out how much yardage you'll need is to check out the length of the pattern yarn. If the pattern yarn requires 4 skeins of yarn and each skein contains 130 yards of yarn, multiply 4 skeins x 130 yards to get 544 yards. That's the total amount of yarn you'll need to buy in your substitute yarn.

Swatch, swatch again

Swatch your substitute yarn and see how it compares to the pattern. Does the gauge match up? Can you tell how it will hang if it's a garment? Always make sure to test the drape of your swatch and wash it to see how the size might change. Keep swatching until you reach a match you're happy with.



Consult your local yarn store

If you don't want to keep buying different yarns to test, talk to the employees at your local yarn shop. They may let you test certain yarns, and they can be great resources when you need help substituting a yarn. They're familiar with a wide range of yarns, and it's possible they've even worked with the yarn you're trying to substitute.

Ask around

Knitters and crocheters love to share advice, especially when it involves yarn choices. When in doubt about a specific yarn, try to find other fiber fanatics who may have substituted that same yarn to see how it turned out for them. Often knitters and crocheters will blog about projects and have useful advice regarding the yarn they used. Take a look at how their project compares to the one you're working on in terms of drape and gauge.

You can also look up specific projects to see what other yarn lovers have used for that pattern. If fellow knitters or crocheters have posted photos of their finished projects, you'll know right away whether you like the drape and overall look of the yarn. Reading comments from crafters who used different yarns can help your decision, too.

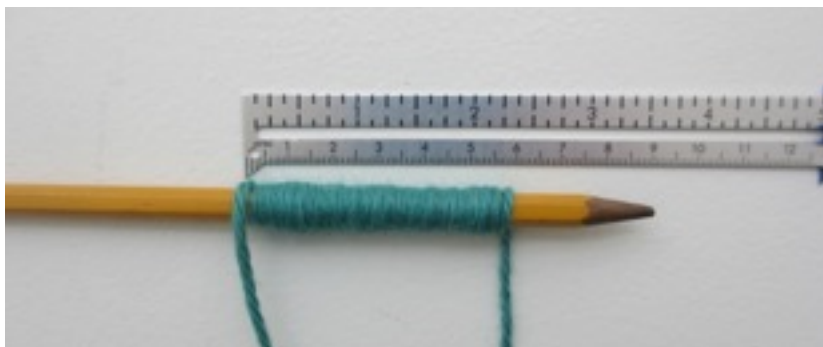
Mystery Yarn Stash: Determining Yarn Weights

By Ashley Little

It's difficult to organize your yarn, especially when most of it has been given to you by family members cleaning out their attics. Or maybe your stash is composed of skeins you picked up from secondhand stores along with scrap yarn from old projects.

Inheriting yarn and having a huge stash to choose from is great, especially for scrap yarn projects. But when you're using these mystery bits and pieces for projects, you need to know the yarn weight to substitute the correct yarn, and often this information isn't available for bits of leftover yarn. It could be because the label is torn or yellowed — or maybe there's no label at all.

Don't worry. All is not lost! You can calculate the yarn weight with a handy little secret called WPI (wraps per inch).



What you'll need:

- Your mystery yarn
- A ruler
- An object with a consistent circumference, such as a pencil

Note: It's also an option to wrap your mystery yarn around a ruler, eliminating the need for an object with a consistent circumference. You can even buy a special WPI tool that has notches to hold the yarn in place while you wrap and comes with a handy card to help you categorize.

HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR YARN WEIGHT

Begin by wrapping the yarn around the pencil (or whatever object you've chosen). Don't wrap too tightly. The goal is to get the yarn strands as close as possible without overlapping them or leaving holes. Usually, wrapping about an inch should give you an accurate measurement, but if you're using a yarn with an inconsistent shape, like an eyelash yarn, you should wrap it for more than an inch to get the most accurate measurement possible.

Once you've wrapped your yarn, count the number of times you wrapped it around the pencil within the first inch. The WPI chart here will tell you the weight of your yarn.

So for example, if your yarn wrapped around the pencil eight times in 1 inch, your yarn is bulky weight. If the yarn wrapped around the pencil 16 times in an inch, it's a sport weight.

If you were wrapping a yarn with a funky texture, as mentioned above, and you wrapped extra inches, just do a little bit of math to find your WPI. If your eyelash yarn wrapped around the pencil 30 times in 2 inches, for instance, just divide 30 by 2 to find that your WPI is 15, making your eyelash yarn sport weight.

WPI chart

LACE
 > 35 WPI
 > 8.5 sts/inch



WORSTED
 9-11 WPI
 4-5 sts/inch



FINGERING
 19-22 WPI
 7-8 sts/inch



BULKY
 7-8 WPI
 3-3.75 sts/inch



SPORT
 15-18 WPI
 5.75-6.5 sts/inch



SUPER BULKY
 < 6 WPI
 1.5-3 sts/inch



DK
 12-14 WPI
 5.5-6 sts/inch



A Cheater's Guide to Wraps Per Inch

By Breeanna Sveum

The downside of using wraps per inch to figure out your yarn weight, of course, is that you have to have a chart and ruler handy. Is 11 WPI worsted weight or DK? Fortunately, there are two easy (and quick!) ways to determine the weight of your yarn, whether it's mystery stash or hand-spun, without a WPI chart. They're not perfect, of course, and you might still have to swatch, but there's no chart needed.



CHEATER METHOD #1: USE A NEEDLE GAUGE

Grab a needle gauge, fold a length of your weight-less yarn in half and poke it through some of the holes. You want the yarn to be snug in the hole so it's not flopping around and falling out, but you want a little wiggle room, too — not so tight that you have to really force it in there. When you find a hole that seems comfortable, start your swatch with the needle or hook that corresponds with the hole.

This method won't tell you the actual weight of the yarn, just the size of your tools — so it's a little harder to determine whether your yarn will work as a substitution for a given pattern. Still, the ease and speed makes up for that. And if you're making something pattern-free, like a simple hat or a scarf, this method will show you a comfortable needle or hook for your yarn.

One more note: This method will give you a needle or hook size that is closest to the typical suggestions on a ball band. The fabric it produces (depending on how tightly or loosely you knit) will be a typical, relatively firm fabric. If you know you're going to want a looser fabric, go with a hole size where the yarn is a little looser. If you know you're going to want a firmer fabric, go with a hole size where the yarn is a little tighter.



CHEATER METHOD #2: EYEBALL IT

If you've been knitting or crocheting long enough with a wide variety of yarns, you can probably just look at your yarn, compare it to your mental database of yarns you've worked with and make a reasonable guess at the weight. If you don't think you have that expertise, that's OK. Just grab some yarn that seems comparable and lay some strands out in front of you. You can compare, side by side, various weights of yarn and see where yours comes closest.

Above, we have from left to right: a mystery-weight hand-spun yarn, a fingering weight yarn, a sport weight yarn, a DK weight yarn and a worsted weight yarn. Pick up your mystery yarn (in this case, the hand-spun) and place it next to each known yarn in turn. In the example above, you can see that it comes closest yarn in the middle, the sport weight. You can reasonably conclude, then, that the hand-spun is probably a sport weight.

If you want to be more sure of your choice, compare the mystery yarn to several different kinds of yarn in the weight you think comes close. Yarn weights vary, even within a category, so using multiple examples for comparison will give you a better idea of the weight if your yarn seems to fall between two categories.

Ways to Mix Yarn: Brilliant Solutions for Stash Busting

By Ashley Little

If you're ever going to use up those little scraps of yarn — yes, including that three yards of luxurious silk you're saving — then you'll probably want to think about mixing yarns together in one project.

When we talk about mixing yarns, we're not just talking about using different colors. We're also talking about mixing different textures, fibers, brands, weights — there's no limit to what you can combine.

Ready to say buh-bye to that stash that's taking over your home? Here are a few tips to keep in mind when you're mixing yarns.



Photo via Craftsy member iMake

YARN WEIGHTS UNITE

The Knitted Patchwork Recipe pictured above was created using sock weight yarn of various colors, fibers and brands. If you want your mix of yarns to result in a similar gauge, then matching weights is a great place to start. A similar patchwork can be created using any weight of yarn you'd like, so dig in that stash and see what you can find.

SWATCH UNTIL YOU'RE HAPPY

The key to mixing yarns is to work up swatches. Trying out the combination is the only way you'll ever know if the mix makes you happy or has the effect you're going for. You could even pin your swatches to a bulletin board and consider the options for a few days before making a decision.

TRY DOUBLE STRANDED

Mixing yarns doesn't just mean alternating yarn every couple of rows. It can also mean that you work two different types of yarn held together at the same time. Who needs a variegated yarn when you have two complementary yarns in your stash that would look amazing together?

Try double-stranded to make a cool color combo, or pair a bulky yarn with a beaded yarn to see what kind of texture results.



Photo via Craftsy member Carolyn Doe

COLOR PALETTES MATTER

You can get as creative as you want when mixing yarns, but keep color in mind when you're playing around. Check out the scarf pictured here — this scarf was created using several different yarns of the same weight, and the color palette has an autumn feel.

TRY MULTIPLE GAUGES

Working with yarns of different gauges can create gorgeous textures and colors. A variety of gauge yarns work especially well in freeform crochet. The simplest way to start mixing different gauges of yarn is to simply add a border, but the more you experiment, the braver you'll be about alternating yarns in the actual project.



Photo via Craftsy member extremhaeklerin

Caring for the finished project

Something else to keep in mind as you mix different fibers is care. For instance, are you mixing a superwash wool with a regular wool? If so, you won't be able to take advantage of the superwash yarn's easy care instructions.

No matter what you're blending together, you'll have to follow the care instructions for the most delicate yarn.

Meet the Experts



Lisa Gutierrez

Lisa is the blogger behind craft blog [Goodknits](#). She resides in Houston, where her two young sons drive her passion for DIY. A double threat in knitting and crochet, she can often be found with yarn and various hooks and needles in her purse. After all, a skein of yarn is a great cushion for her beloved camera.



Ashley Little

Ashley Little is a writer and editor who left her job at Martha Stewart to freelance in the mountains of Asheville, North Carolina. She has her hands in all kinds of crafts, from knitting to crocheting and sewing. When she's not crafting, she's eating peanut butter, listening to Paul McCartney and playing ukulele — sometimes all three at the same time. You can see what Ashley is making on her blog, [The Feisty Redhead](#).



Breeanna Sveum

Breeanna Sveum, also known as Brinn, is never more than 5 feet away from a ball of yarn. She dabbles in just about every craft that can be done in the home, the results of most of which can be found on her blog, [Stitch Brinn Stitch](#). She lives in Northern Virginia with her partner and her copious yarn stash.

