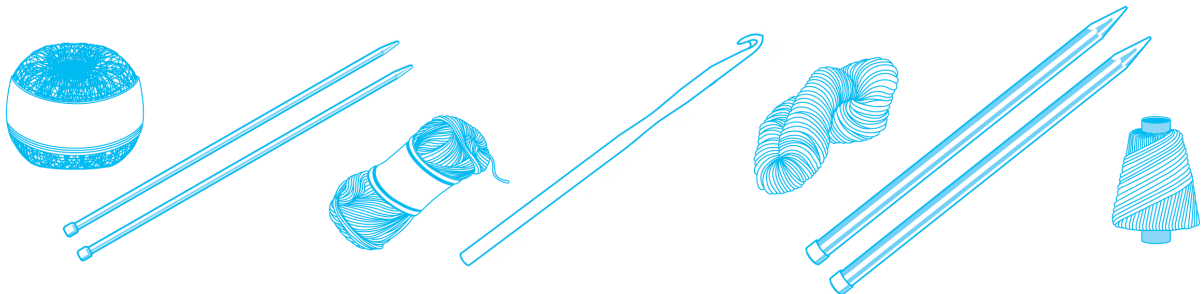


## In This Chapter

- ◆ Fundamental skills of long ago
- ◆ The modern popularity of knitting and crocheting
- ◆ Why learn these skills?
- ◆ The difference between knitting and crocheting



# Chapter

## Why Knit or Crochet?

Knitting? Crocheting? Didn't these skills die out some time ago along with butter churning? Absolutely not! Knitting and crocheting are alive and well and more popular than ever before.

You are about to join the millions of people who in recent years have learned the arts of knitting and crocheting. In this chapter you'll discover the joys of knitting and crocheting; while no longer necessary to daily life, they're creative, relaxing, and very fulfilling pastimes. You'll also learn the differences between them.

### From Fundamental to Just Plain Fun

A long time ago, knitting and crocheting were skills as fundamental as breathing, particularly for young girls. They were practiced not only for practical reasons (you couldn't just run down to the store and buy a pair of socks) but for ornamentation such as lace collars.

As mechanism increased, the need for knitting and crocheting in many countries all but disappeared. People could buy sweaters, socks, and blankets. Even fancy crocheted lace items such as doilies, bedspreads, and tablecloths—once the sole property of the hand crocheter—are now produced by machine and sold in department stores.

You would think the automation that made these crafts unnecessary also would have deemed them extinct. Not so. Knitting and crocheting are gaining in popularity, and thousands of new enthusiasts learn every year. According to research conducted by Research Incorporated in the fall of 2000, more than 1 in 3—or 38 million—people in the United States knew how to knit or crochet. With the advent of the Internet, technology has allowed us to share our interest with others around the world. Clearly, knitting and crocheting are here to stay. And with the help of this book you'll be able to get in on the fun, too.



### Yarn Spinning

Knitting dates very early in the history of man. Actual fragments can be traced only to 200 C.E. However, these fragments show great sophistication and understanding of the craft, causing historians to believe that the craft originated much earlier.

Interestingly enough, knitting started out as a craft mainly pursued by men and it remained predominately a man's craft for centuries. Sailors and traders from Arabia were instrumental in passing on this knowledge to the rest of world. Although today many men are accomplished knitters, considerably more women than men knit.



### Yarn Spinning

Knitting and crocheting seem to have skipped a generation. They were tremendously popular with those born in the 1920s and 1930s, but experienced a sharp drop with the next generation. Today, one of the largest groups of people who knit or crochet is composed of people in their 20s or 30s. It's theorized that the first generation of women that didn't need to knit or crochet to keep their families warm chose not to. However, this generation's sons and daughters have found knitting and crocheting to be a source of relaxation, creativity, and fulfillment.

## Why Bother?

What's the point? If you can walk into a store at any mall across America and buy a wool sweater, why spend valuable free time knitting or crocheting? By picking up this book you've shown that you believe, on some level, that pursuing this endeavor is worthwhile.

Some people enjoy the actual process the most, while others get the greatest satisfaction from what they produce at the end. Others still enjoy both equally.

## Get Creative!

Knitting and crocheting are arts—generally a wearable or usable art—but still arts. When you knit or crochet, you are creating something from nothing but yarn and some needles or a hook. You are choosing the dimensions and how you want the finished product to look, and then executing the design. Think about wearing a beautiful hat or scarf you created yourself. You can wear it with an enormous sense of pride and accomplishment, and when a friend asks you where you got it, you can say with pride, “I made it.”

## Slow Down Your Hectic Pace

In a world full of cell phones, traffic jams, and the like, knitting and crocheting are not only fulfilling; the repetitive motion can be incredibly soothing as well. In fact, if done during quiet times it's meditative in nature. You might also find it fuels the creative process in other areas of your life. You could discover a solution to a problem at work, overcome writer's block, or perhaps come up with a new recipe.

Case in point: Writer Dorothy Parker was an avid knitter whose projects accompanied her *everywhere*. During Hollywood's heyday, Dorothy and husband Alan Campbell co-wrote award-winning screenplays for large film studios. Their writing method was simple and effective: After Alan blocked out the scenes Dorothy sat in a corner, knitting and spouting brilliant dialogue, while Alan typed up her words.



### Tangles

Please don't let your knitting or crocheting become a task. This is something to do for enjoyment. If you find yourself feeling regimented, put your project away for a couple days so that taking it out again truly is a treat.

## Make Pieces for the Future

Family heirlooms are precious. They make us feel like we own a piece of our own history. Are you lucky enough to perhaps have your great-grandmother's brooch? Imagine how you would feel if you owned an afghan she had crocheted maybe 100 years ago. Your projects can become family heirlooms. Think of the next five generations in your family wearing a christening gown you created.

## Take It Along

Knitting and crocheting are portable—you can take your project with you wherever you go. Heading on a family vacation where you'll spend 10 hours in the car on the way to Disneyland? Riding the train into the office? Waiting for your appointment in a doctor's office? Throw your knitting or crocheting in a bag; you can pull it out and work on it when time allows, turning down time into quality time. Women have even been known to spend time on their projects during labor!



### Yarn Spinning

During World War I American citizens were asked to knit socks for the soldiers fighting in Europe. Several knitting bees in New York City's Central Park drew thousands of men, women, and children, all clicking needles in unison, working to clothe the troops.

## So What Exactly Is Knitting and Crocheting?

You might already know how to knit or crochet—or perhaps both. In that case, this book will serve as a reference for you. Or maybe you learned many years ago and would like to begin again and need some help. However, if you're totally new to the worlds of knitting and crocheting, you might be asking, “What's the difference?”

Both knitting and crocheting involve creating a fabric made with interlocking loops—but that's where the similarity ends.

When you knit you use two needles (although there are other types of knitting, as you'll find out later in this book). You keep a whole row of loops, or *stitches*, active. You use one knitting needle to hold the stitches; another to work the new row of loops. When you crochet you use one hook, and keep only one loop at a time active. Each new stitch, created by catching the yarn with the hook and pulling it through a loop, seals off the last loop.

Crochet and knit stitches are shaped and sized differently; as a result, the fabrics you create knitting and crocheting look, feel, and behave very differently. Using identical yarn, crocheted fabric will be bulkier than knit fabric. Knitting will produce a piece that has more flow, or drape, to it.

Inch for inch, crocheting uses more yarn than knitting; crocheting is also generally much faster than knitting.

If you're not sure which you'd like to learn, try them both and see for yourself whether you have a preference. The only additional item you will need to purchase is a hook or a pair of needles. You might find that you enjoy both equally!

## The Least You Need to Know

- ◆ Years ago, knitting and crocheting were considered essential skills, primarily for young women.
- ◆ Despite the machine age eliminating the necessity of knit or crocheted items, the popularity of knitting and crocheting continues.
- ◆ Both are portable, creative endeavors that are fulfilling and soothing.
- ◆ Knitting and crocheting involve making loops, but they are worked differently and the fabric you produce is not the same.