

# MINI KNITTING FOR BEGINNERS – A SIMPLE SHAWL PROJECT PRESENTED BY SUSANN CRACK

This lesson is aimed at someone who knows at least the basics of knitting and would now like to try miniature knitting.

If you have no knitting experience, I recommend you practise the basics a little before you try mini knitting. There are plenty of sites on the net with instructions and also many videos. Once comfortable with the basics you can scale down. You do not need to be an expert or have years of experience.

That being said I suggest you begin with something simple and inexpensive.

First you need to think about equipment. What you decide to use when you first start will depend on how confident you are and whether or not you are aiming to complete a one off or hope to do more.

## Resources

### Needles

If you are just keen to make at least one item yourself and/or you are not that confident I suggest you use needles at the upper end of those that mini knitters use. (Size 16 UK, 1.5mm or 00 in the USA).

(Yes there are different sizing systems but there are conversion charts such as the one found at the bottom of the page on this supplier's site

<http://www.buttercupminiatures.co.uk/patterns-materials.asp> )

If you are keen to do more however then I suggest that you purchase one of the more commonly used (possibly the most) needle sizes, Size 19 UK, 1.00mm or 00000 US.

Most patterns of course specify needle size and yarn but for the shawl I am suggesting as a starter project you can use a range of needles. (The Shawl patterns are available at the end of these notes.)

Note there are several different styles of needles made for mini knitting each with its pros and cons. Most mini knitters have a favourite and some folk simply cannot manage with some styles.

If you find yourself really struggling then perhaps a different style of needle will help.

You can buy needles from lots of places but here are some

Buttercup Miniatures <http://www.buttercupminiatures.co.uk/index.asp> in the UK

Bugknits <http://www.bugknits.com/> in USA

Atelier de Witte Stee <http://poppenhuis.tripod.com/breimaterialen.html> Europe

Jeannette Fishwick <http://www.miniknitting.com/> Australia

### Yarn/ Thread

As a rule mini knitters rarely use anything thicker than a 1 ply yarn (available in wool and acrylic) and frequently knit with tatting, crochet and sewing threads. The above suppliers can help you with these also. But you might find suitable threads at embroidery, lace making or quilting suppliers. Needle punching threads are also useful. An option for wool is to find someone who can supply you with the fine machine knitting yarns. These usually come on large cones but you might be able to get someone to wind some off for you.

It is best to work with natural fibres, wool, cotton or silk as these drape well whereas polyester will often be quite stiff. Some rayon threads drape beautifully.

You need to know that wool has elasticity while cotton does not. Elasticity can make it easier to knit and is also important for fitting garments but the latter is not significant for this pattern. You also need to know that many folk find the 1ply yarns on offer quite difficult to use. A lot of frustration can be avoided by trying alternative threads.

Now what you choose to use here will depend on the look you are after. It will also depend a little on your tension. Tension varies between knitters and sometimes patterns will designate loose knitting but for the most part for mini knitting your tension should be relatively tight. Of course you don't want to make it so tight that it will not move along the needles.

As a rough guide if you opt for the 1.5mm needles a good thread weight for a firm knit would be a crochet cotton size no 30 to 50 whereas you would want a 70 weight crochet cotton, a 80 weight tatting thread, Venne Cocltton 34/2, Shetland wool or something similar for the 1.00 mm needles. If you are after a more open look you can extend that range.



Look at these shawls, (all knitted with 1.00mm needles). The first 2 are both done in simple garter stitch. The brown one is knitted in the equivalent of a 1ply yarn. This yarn by the bye does not need to be purchased through mini suppliers but might be available in your local knitting supply shops. It is an Italian yarn made by Madil called Kid Seta and is a beautiful yarn to use. A similar yarn also generally available is made by Elann and is called Silken Kydd and comes in great colours. Check it out here <https://www.elann.com/Commerce.web/product.aspx?id=123624>

The white shawl on the other hand is made with a mid range cotton sewing thread. If you intend to wrap your shawl around the shoulders of a doll one will look warmer and the other more of a summer wrap but both work equally well. If you wish to drape it over the side of a chair, hang it on a knob etc then the thicker one simply will not work.

The green and fuchsia shawls are both worked in the open mesh pattern and you will note that the pattern is more visible in the cotton (fuchsia) one worked in 30 weight cotton. (The green one is the same Kid Seta yarn.) It might help to knit a small swatch about an inch square to see what how your thread knits up on your needles. It can always be used later as a cushion cover even if it has to be lined.



When knitting with sewing cottons be aware that cottons come with a dual numbering system. One number indicates the colour and the other the weight or thickness of the thread. The higher the number the finer the thread. Therefore one strand of DMC 25 stranded embroidery thread is thicker than a thread with a 30 count. Also a thread marked 60 is not only thinner than a 30 wt but it is actually half the thickness. 80 wt (sewing cotton not tatting cotton) is half the thickness of 40 wt cotton and so on. Although the numbering system is supposedly standard there are of course minor differences but these should not be enough to affect the pattern markedly.

You can get very fine threads indeed, thinner than 185 wt but be careful as it is difficult to find needles that are fine enough to knit this on or to keep a sufficiently even tension if using larger needles. It is even harder to find fine sewing needles to sew up your work.

Sometimes the cotton weight number comes with a vinculum e.g. 60/2. The later number indicates the number of threads twisted together to make the thread, the ply if you will. It does not affect the thickness but does impact on the strength.

There are a number of metallic threads available as well plus hologram and a whole range of other looks. They come in varying thickness and there are significant differences in how easy they are to use. They can add a touch of glamour but rarely drape well.

An easy way to dress up a very plain pattern is to use a variegated thread but they tend to weaken the effect of fancier stitches. Be careful though. Not all variegated threads are suitable for mini knitting as sometimes the colour interval is too long. The following are all suitable for mini knitting.

Gutermann CNe50  
Signature cotton Quilting Thread no 40,  
Birch Silco 100% Cotton lint free

YLI Quilting 100% Long Staple Cotton 40/3  
Mettler Silky Sheen Rayon  
King Tut 40 wt,  
Mettler Stick/Embroidery Cotton No 30  
DMC 25 Stranded Embroidery Cotton ( single strand and the equivalent Anchor product)  
Gutermann Sulky  
Venne Colcotton 36/2  
Valdani 35 and 50 wt  
McKenna Ryan 40 wt  
DMC 80.

## **Setting yourself up for Success**

There are a number of little tricks you can use to help you when you first start knitting in miniature. After you have been knitting for a while you will find you no longer need these.

So here are some things you might want to consider.

1. **Start with something simple.** Cushion covers are great as they are both small and require no shaping. In fact if you choose to make them 1inch square they will double as swatches. You can record the no of stitches and rows per inch for each needle thread combination and start your own thread comparison chart while still having something to use. (There is a rather rapid turnover in available threads as some are discontinued and others are introduced. Swatches help you to be able to use your patterns when the recommended thread is no longer available.) Other items which require no shaping are blankets and rectangular stoles. Next try something with very little shaping such as a triangular shawl. These can be easily adapted to fit specific dolls and can be modified for that special touch.
2. **Make sure you have clean hands and keep a cloth with which to regularly wipe your hands to keep them dry and clean.** If you are truly concentrating and perhaps also straining and stressing a little you may find you sweat more and this makes it harder to control your needles.
3. **Make sure you have very good light.** In daylight sit next to a window and at night use an adjustable work lamp – consider an energy saving light bulb as they generate a lot less heat.
4. **Make sure nobody will interrupt you when you work.** Take the phone off the hook. Train others not to interrupt until the end of a row and only after you have marked it off. This later thing also becomes less important with practice but then if you keep trying for more complicated or finer work it just comes back.
5. **If you are using a pattern photocopy it and have a pen to cross out each line as you complete it.** Alternatively you can cover it in clear contact and use a non permanent marker to cross out sections as you complete them. (The work is fine so in the beginning it can be very hard to work out where you are if you have to put your work down for a while.)
6. **Drape a cloth (that is a single colour which contrasts strongly with the thread/yarn you are knitting with) over your lap to make it easier for you to see your work.** For example if you are knitting with a pale thread use a black cloth.
7. **Have on hand a small safety pin, a fine sewing needle and a crochet hook.** All of these can help if you drop a stitch. The crochet hook should be a size smaller than your needles and is not only great for dropped stitches but also to actually knit the stitch if one proves difficult. Just mimic the knitting needle role and when finished drop your stitch onto your knitting needle. I found this helpful the first time I had to knit 2 together. Incidentally if you do this and cannot hold all the needles I recommend pushing your right handle needle up quite a deal so that the stitches already on it are at least halfway down the needle and will not drop off. You can push them back up when it comes time to place the stitch onto that needle.
8. **Even if you do not need it to see the stitches consider using a magnifier at least at first to make those first efforts easier.** The type of magnification you need depends on your eyesight. There are ones which clip onto your glasses, ones that hang around your neck or can be attached to a table and also free standing ones.
9. **Don't try to break any speed knitting records in miniature – it is better to take your time and be accurate.** This is especially true in the beginning. You may find you have to go incredibly slowly

at first but except for intricate patterns or very fine threads you will soon find you can knit at something closer to your usual speed.

Once you have been gained some experience you can dispense with these hints but should you want to start designing your own patterns there are hints available to help you here too.

## Patterns

### Pattern 1. Shawl in Garter Stitch

Cast on 3 sts.

Row 1. Knit to the end.

Row 2. M1, K2, M1.K1. (5)

Row 3. Knit to the end.

Row 4. M1, K to the last st, M1, K1.

Repeat Rows 3 and 4 until the work measures a minimum of 10cm or 4 inches across.

Cast off loosely\* Darn in ends.

(For the Kid Seta on No 19 needles 31 repeats are needed and for the white Anchor thread I needed 38 repeats.)

### Pattern No 2 Shawl in Open Mesh stitch.

Cast on 3 sts

Row 1. Knit to the end.

Row 2. M1, K2, M1, K1. (5sts)

Row 3. K1, #( YON, K2tog), repeat from # to the end.

Row 4. M1, K to the last stitch, M1, K1.

Row 5. \*(K2tog, YON) , repeat from \* to the last st, K1.

Row 6. M1, K to the last stitch, M1, K1.

Repeat rows 3 through to 6 until the work measures at least 10cm (4inches) across or a suitable width for the doll.

Cast off loosely. Darn in ends.

(In the Kid Seta I needed 14 repeats.)

### Pattern No 3. Alternative Shawl in Open Mesh stitch

The following pattern allows you to knit the open mesh style without having to knit 2 *together*, should you find this a little difficult at first.

Cast on 3 sts.

Row 1. K to the end.

Row 2. ( K1,P1) into the same stitch, K1, (P1,K1) into the same stitch. (5 sts)

Row 3. K1 #(YON, SKPSSO) repeat from # to the end.

Row 4. (K1,P1) into the first stitch, K to the last st, (P1, K1) into the last st.

Row 5. \*(K1, RSLN, SLOF, RSRN, YON), repeat from \* to the last st, K1.

Row 6. As per row 4.

Repeat rows 3 through to 6 until the work measures a minimum of 10cm (4 inches) or a suitable width to wrap around the doll.

Cast off loosely.\* Darn in ends.

\*Note for the fuchsia coloured shawl in the finer thread I cast off a little more tightly to create a curve at the top end. This makes it easier to drape the shawl over a doll's shoulders without

having to fix it on the doll. This requires a little skill though to keep it even and works best with the finer threads.



Curved neckline created by casting off a little more firmly.

(With 1.00mm needles and 30wt sewing thread I needed rows 3 through to 6, sixteen times.)

#### Abbreviations

K.....Knit

K2tog...Knit 2 stitches together

P.....Purl

M....Make a stitch. (This can be done in a variety of ways. The method used here is as follows. Insert your right needle into the stitch as you would for a knit stitch. Wind the thread around the needle and pull through as you would for a knit stitch but do not slip the old stitch off the left hand needle. Pass the thread to the front, through the gap between the old stitch and the one just forming. Next return the new stitch to the left hand needle. Pass the thread to the back of the work and again return the new stitch to the right needle. It will now have a loop around it. Insert your right hand needle back into the stitch on the left hand needle again and knit as per normal. You have now made 2 stitches from one.)

When the whole step is completed this then equals M1, K1

RSLN.... Return the last knitted stitch to the left needle

RSRN....Return the knitted stitch to the right needle

SKPSSO.... slip 1 stitch, knit the next then pass the slipped stitch over the knitted one and off the needle.

SLOF..... Pass the second stitch on the left hand needle over the first stitch ( the knitted one that has just been returned) and off the needle.

St(s)....stitch(es)

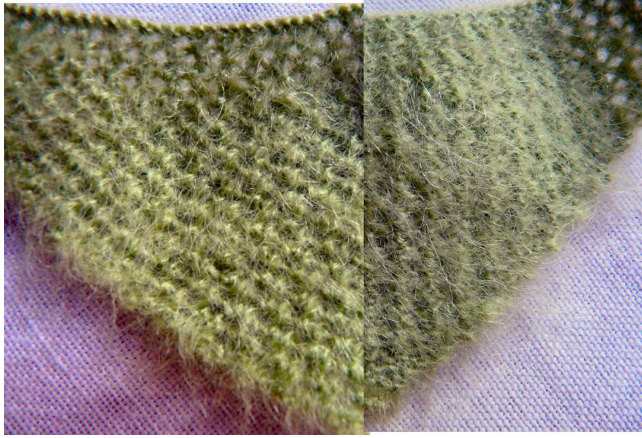
YON.... yarn over needle

#### Further notes.

1. There are several ways to make a stitch. I have used 2 here. Knitting and purling into the same stitch done on the garter stitch shawls leaves a fairly even edge while the other method leaves a loop which looks a little like a loose scallop on the edges.

Other methods would require a border along the side edges of the shawl.

2. There are no right and wrong sides for these patterns but Pattern No 2 will produce a subtle variation in the two sides.



The two sides of pattern number 2.

3. You might notice a difference in how fluffy the brown and green yarns are if the photos allow. As I said these are the same yarn. I have however worked the brown yarn to make it look more luxurious. This is done by taking the loopy side of a piece of Velcro, lightly touching it to the surface of the work and pulling it away.



4. These patterns are for a deep shawl not a scarf or kerchief style wrap.
5. If you are having trouble doing *K2tog* and wish to conquer it the following suggestion might help. Use your right hand needle or another needle to first loosen the 2 stitches (but do not pull too hard as many of the yarns are not very strong). Once loosened then knit it in the usual way. Use the needle purl wise to loosen the stitches.

#### What Next.

Now that you have tasted success you need to consider where to go from here. There are lots of folks out there selling patterns but buying individual patterns can become quite expensive. There are often patterns in miniature magazines and this is not costly *if* you are already buying the magazines. The cheapest way to move forward is to buy pattern books.

A good book to start with is Linda Sprately's "Mini Knits for 1/12<sup>th</sup> scale Dolls House" from the Guild of Master Craftsman Publications ISBN 1 86108394 7. I recommend this as it uses DMC stranded embroidery thread which is readily available, in a large range of colours and is inexpensive. It also uses size 19 knitting needles (1 mm) which is the most commonly used needle size in mini patterns found in magazines. Don't be put off by her illustrations. Her dolls

are dreadful, the work looks like she does not block it and her knitting appears a little loose or her tension is perhaps less than perfect but the designs I have tried are good as well as fairly simple. (I have not tried them all though). I would not recommend her shawl however. It is an open mesh style and uses the same basic method. However her pattern works by repeating just 2 lines after the base has been established. These are akin to rows 3 and 4 of my pattern no 2. Row 3 creates the mesh look but also creates a bias which needs correcting. Otherwise the shawl will skew to the side which the one in the Sprately Book does.

Another book you might like to try after you have done a few things is Yvonne Wakefiled's, "Edwardian Style Hand Knitted Fashion for 1/12<sup>th</sup> scale dolls. This is also from the Guild of Master Craftsman publications. ISBN 1 86108 241X

*Happy Knitting*