

Evelyn Clark Designs . . .

Yarns for Lace & Wraps-per-Inch

It is a fabulous time to be a knitter since there are so many wonderful yarns to choose from. Finding a pattern for a particular yarn sometimes can seem like a challenge; however, lace can be the solution. Lace shawls and scarves can be knit in a variety of yarns—from slinky rayons to hairy wools in lace to worsted weights.

This means you can use yarns from your stash, support small mills and independent dyers, experiment with exotic fibers, and play with handspun, in addition to selecting from the incredible array of commercial yarns. To do this, it is helpful to understand a little about yarn characteristics, gauge, and wraps-per-inch.

Yarn Characteristics and Gauge

Yarns can be smooth as silk or hairy as mohair. They can be inelastic like cotton or springy like merino wool. And, they can be plied or woven. These characteristics will affect the desired gauge.

For lace shawls and scarves, gauge can be a personal preference. However, one guideline often used is that lace can be knit with needles 2–3 sizes larger than recommended on the label. That is a good starting point if you have yarn with a label since lace usually is knit at a relaxed gauge.

If there is no label, look at the characteristics. Hairy fibers, such as Shetland wool, can be knit more loosely because the fibers fill in the stitches. Smooth fibers, such as silk, look stringy if knit too loosely.

The fabric surrounding the holes gives the lace definition, so a swatch can be knit in plain stockinette or garter stitch to determine needle size. It is important to stretch the swatch to see how the stitches will look when blocked. Later when knitting the lace, stretch it to see how much it can grow during blocking.

Personal knitting style—whether you knit loosely or tightly—also is a factor. To track this, keep a record of yarn, needles, and gauge for projects. Another useful measurement is wraps-per-inch (wpi).

Wraps-per-Inch

This is one method spinners use to determine the size of yarn. It is helpful for knitters since it can be



Track yarn size by wpi—Wild West Lace Shawl in 13, 17, and 21 wpi yarns.

used to substitute yarns. To measure, wrap yarn around a ruler for 2" (5cm), counting the strands as they are wrapped. Do not stretch yarn, and nestle strands next to each other. Divide number of wraps by 2 for wpi. Following are yarn categories:

Yarn Weight	WPI
Lace	18 or more
Fingering	16–17
Shetland/Sport/DK	13–15
Worsted	11–12

If your measurement does not match the yarn label description, that is not a problem. Label categories vary for a variety of reasons. The point is that you have a measurement that later can be used for needle size, gauge, and yarn substitutions.

To double-check measurements on commercial yarns, Woodland Woolworks www.woolworks.com shows wpi for their yarns.