

Knitting Gauge – A Necessary Evil!

The Words “Knitting Gauge ” Strike Terror with Inexperienced Knitters

Aahhh, gauge. The word looks so innocent... it's not a 4-letter word, it's accepted in polite society. But when we put the word 'knitting' in front of it, gauge becomes downright sinister. That's because it leads to the other nasty knitting nuisance – a swatch. Yes, my friends, in order to determine gauge we have to do a swatch. And we can't use a swatch from the sweater we just knit. Oh no, we have to do a fresh one with each project. And we have to figure out what the pattern wants – a swatch in stocking stitch, garter stitch or in pattern. And if it's in pattern, is it the cable part or the diamond piece or neither or both? Then comes the kicker – do we wash it and block it or just measure it as knit? Well, let me share some answers with you. The rule of thumb is to knit the swatch in the pattern unless the writer specifically tells us otherwise. There's really no point in straight knitting 16 stitches and 20 rows to 4 inches if the bulk of the project is made up of cables. If we want the sweater to fit, we need to measure the cable part or else there's just no predicting the final size. As to washing? If it's acrylic you're working with, then washing isn't necessary. If, however, you're working with anything else, then take the extra time to wash your swatch according to the instructions on the label. Much better to watch a perfect 4 x 4 shrink to 2 x 2 than to see your entire size 14 sweater shrink to a size 2! It could happen the other way too – some wools stretch to unimaginable proportions and if you don't figure out the washed gauge then that body-hugging top becomes a football

player's favourite comfy sweater!

The next challenge is to figure out what to do when the swatch doesn't match the required dimensions. If it's too big, try the next swatch on smaller needles. If it's too small, go up a needle size or 2. And remember, keep washing and measuring. If you absolutely can't get rows and stitches to match up at the same time (my usual problem), then you'll have to use your higher math skills and add or subtract a couple of stitches. Be consistent throughout, and good luck!