

Sizzlin' Stitches

by Maddy Cranley

The weather these past few weeks, at least in the northeast section of the continent, has been termed as a very cool spring. The key word here is cool, as these temperatures are always relative. A forecast of sixty degrees in July may seem on the cool side but if it was mid-January, it would feel downright tropical. Talk among neighbors and fellow gardeners seems to conclude that shrubs and trees are enjoying a bonanza season, sprouting in leaps and bounds. On the other hand in the flower beds some varieties of perennials didn't survive the winter at all and delayed bloom times seem to be a common complaint for those that did make it through. It seems that we never want to give in to the idea that we are dealing with a force over which we have no control. The weather has played out its cycles for centuries but we still insist on labelling the more dramatic climate changes as threatening or a bearer of good fortune.

We may even find that our knitting is weather related, tied to the ups and downs of the thermometer. At first thought, knitting does conjure up an image of a sweater, usually a warm one and likely knit of wool or other cozy fiber, to be worn while taking brisk walks when autumn breezes blow and temperatures slide. Though, there is really no need to abandon the needles because the weather turns warmer. With a few tweaks and adjustments to knitting comfort, we can knit throughout the summer months. Even if the needles do turn our thoughts to the warm and fuzzy yarns, it increases the chance that the sweater wardrobe will be complete for that October walk in the woods.

With the ever present distractions of summer living such as taking a quick swim or brushing away that pesky mosquito, it is important to choose to knit something that is easy to pick up and put down. For sticky hands, more frequent hand washing is a must along with a dusting of talcum powder and a handy supply of individually-packaged wet napkins. A cotton pillowcase placed on the lap can add comfort if working with a warmer yarn or one that will be in close proximity to recently suntan-oiled limbs. Metal needles seem to perform better than plastic and a quick wipe with a glass cleaner can keep needles in top knitting form.

As for yarns, cool natural fibers float to the top of the list for knitting ease. Cottons and linens are certainly much more comfortable to handle. Choosing colors from a cool palette such as a mint green, icy blue, or sherbet pink can convey a cooling illusion while gazing at those finished stitches. Add to the lightweight yarn and low-temperature colors some lacy, openwork, or dropped stitch patterns and this additional airiness will afford the added benefit of the project knitting up quickly, particularly if the pattern chosen is short in length and sleeve. An easy knit may also guarantee that the sweater will be worn this season. If you dare to knit in the sun, don't forget your hat, sunscreen, and a good pair of sunglasses to aid in peering at those stitches.

Air conditioning, of course can eliminate most of the above-stated problems except for dropped stitches and the need for more knitting time. Offices and homes are likely to have some kind of cooling mechanism in place for the hot weather but why lose the opportunity of a change of scene. Winter knitting done indoors often in front of the television begins to feel confining by the end of the long winter months. Lakeside knitting, knitting on a park bench, or perched on a porch can afford such a great change of view. Last but not least, pour a glass of lemonade and toast the summer with all the wonder it brings.

Maddy Cranley is a professional knitwear designer, who has created exclusive designs for knitting and craft magazines, authored and published three books on the subject of creating felt garments and projects from handknitting, and produces an ever-expanding line of maddy laine and maddy baby handknitting patterns. For additional information, see <http://www.maddycraft.com>