

Knitting presents a wonderful opportunity to contribute to the recycling movement and to explore the craft of felting.

## The Wearing O'The Green

*by Maddy Cranley*

No sooner than the last chocolate has been popped into our mouths and the roses have been hung to dry, St. Valentine steps aside for St. Patrick as green takes over from red to mark the next commercial milestone on the calendar. Shamrocks are everywhere even if their signature emerald green is not quite aligned with today's fashion palette which features more avocado, pear and lime shades - a green with much more yellow than blue. As well, green has become a strong symbol of the environmental movement and is earnestly displayed by political parties, coalitions and planet-saving products.

Concern for the environment in our everyday lives has finally found its rightful place. Recycling is a good thing and has become a regular practice. Just a few years ago, we didn't give a moment's thought to throwing a tin can into the garbage. Now a pang of guilt is felt if we toss out the odd non-recyclable juice container. Of course, our natural resources are there to be wisely enjoyed and with ingenuity we can squeeze out a little more value from nature's gifts.

Our knitting craft gives us the opportunity to make a contribution to the recycling movement. Flea markets and tag sales can be searched for "gently used" knitted garments. These garments if made from natural fiber (even if moth-eaten) can be an opportunity to finally try a fulling or felting project. If there are no garment labels to indicate fiber content, a quick burn test can easily determine if the yarn is of natural or man-made fiber. Over a sink or bowl of water, take a six-inch length of yarn and with a match light one end, allowing to burn for one-half inch. Extinguish the flame and when cool, examine the burnt portion. If the end is a hard charred lump, you have a synthetic yarn. If you are able to crumble the burnt portion between your fingertips, it is surely a natural fiber yarn.

Once the fiber has been identified as a natural fiber from an animal source, most often wool, place your "finds" in the hot water cycle of your washing machine in a sudsy soap solution. In the strictest sense you will be "fulling" these garments and the result will be felted sweaters ready to harvest for felted fabric. Now that you can cut this felt as yardage, even simple shapes can be stitched together to fashion a scarf accented with decorative stitching on the seams and edges. Cut out the front sections of a vest from the newly felted pieces and contrast with a slippery satin fabric for the back. If doing decorative stitching, remember to keep the yarns compatible so that laundering will pose no problems.

Then there's unravelling - an activity for someone who has tremendous patience or likes to test their patience. Be warned, it can turn into an Olympic recycling event if the sweater proves difficult to undo. I have a friend who bought a sweater at a flea market for twenty-five cents. She happened to love the particular color of this sweater's yarn. She unravelled the entire sweater, washed the yarn and knit another garment. She didn't win any gold medals but found it extremely

satisfying that she had retrieved this yarn and put it once again to good use. Once you start to unravel a sweater, you will soon determine if it will unravel in ball lengths or just in bits and pieces. Obviously, multi-colored garments will likely contain much shorter lengths of yarn not adequate for knitting. Once you have unravelled the sweater, wash the yarn by hand and gently wrap it around a plastic cutting board or a large book protected with plastic wrap and allow to dry. This should remove all those kinks and curls that have been locked into the yarn. Rewind the yarn into even amounts by weight or length so that you can determine how much yardage you have retrieved. Even if you don't have enough for a complete garment, this yarn could be used to knit ribbing, cuffs, or trim. Again, remember to match the fiber content to facilitate easy laundering.

So if you take on recycling yarn as a challenge or a purely practical exercise, your project will take on a fresh look either in texture or style. You will at the same time appease your "green" conscience to recycle and gain satisfaction from the fact that you have saved a few of those "green" dollar bills.

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