

A Stitch In Time

by Maddy Cranley

A general conclusion drawn in these modern times is that there seems to be less leisure hours available to us as career and commuting take precedence over hobbies and handicrafts. There are many who would think this state of affairs as entirely preferable to its opposite - a life of dull existence, with no rush of adrenalin or passion to enliven our days and hold us to a promised deadline. When it comes to setting aside time for crafts and hobbies, I have never had a problem placing the making of Christmas gifts miles above waxing the kitchen floor on the "to do" list. If you are a knitter, there really is a strong desire to make our gifts but the problem is one of finding the time to make them.

There are two paths you can choose to travel to complete some of these knitted projects - go small in size or large in stitch. If it is just a small project you are contemplating, you have an opportunity to add a little luxury and splurge on the type of yarn you will be requiring. The amount of cashmere yarn required for a pashmina shawl may certainly be prohibitive but the yarn needed for a pair of cashmere mitts or gloves certainly seems more affordable. Turn your sister-in-law into a snow queen and knit a headband in a fluffy yarn such as mohair or angora to wrap a frosty face in a cloud of soft pastel color. To add a little more plush, knit the headband in a double width and fold in half encasing a length of thin batting. Use Velcro® strips to create the fastener and allow for a comfortable fit for each snow queen. If a male member of the family resists the icy royal title, make his in a soft merino wool - in suitable masculine colors, of course.

For those who can't resist making gifts that are to be useful, you can always resort to a sturdy cotton yarn and start turning out piles of dishcloths and bath mitts. Draft dogs can be useful. Use a fine gauge yarn or increase the draft-stopping ability by making a liner out of a tightly woven fabric. Fill the draft dog with polypropylene pellets, play sand or batting. This is a great project to use up extra yarn and have some fun by knitting these dogs in striped patterns, fair isle designs, cable twists or polka dots. Match a décor or try some wild color combinations.

As luck would have it, big stitch knits in chunky yarns are extremely trendy this season. Armed with a giant pair of needles, chunky yarn or a double strand of regular yarn, should see you finishing those sweaters in no time. Cropping the sweater length or fashioning a vest will shave even more minutes off total knitting time. Accessories in these big stitches are an even quicker option. A simple scarf knit in one of the new fur yarns are a terrific fashion accent. It will knit up in a flash and makes for an up-to-date offering for anyone. Fun fur collars are also seen everywhere this season. If you are really short on time and had to resort to purchasing a ready-to-wear sweater, a fur collar can add a great deal of pizzazz. Mitts may not work because big stitches also create large spaces between them. Unless you throw a pair of liner gloves into the package, leave those mittens to be worked on smaller needles.

So big or small, practical or luxurious, handmade gifts are special. Make them with love and make them on time. Happy Holidays.

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-growing line of maddy laine handknitting patterns. For additional information, see <http://www.maddycraft.com>

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