

Mitts Givings

by Maddy Cranley

Yes, it is the first week of December and those of us with a true crafting spirit feel compelled to make at least one or two handcrafted items for gift-giving this coming holiday season. I know, time is short and the thought of knitting an entire sweater, even a vest, seems overwhelming. There are so many other activities that demand our attention at this time of the year. A quick and easy project with readily available materials - that's what we're looking for. No hunching over rows of complicated knitting or hours of darning in ends, pressing, blocking and joining. So may I suggest knitting some mitts for those you love. Mitts are a small project, quickly knit, and best of all, you can make a dent in that yarn stash - providing you can find it.

Both gloves and mitts serve as a protector for the hands from wind and cold but gloves have always been the somewhat snobby fashion-conscious cousin of the mitten. Throughout history, gloves have been considered to be a stylish accessory whereas mittens were worn for warmth. Linen gloves were even found in the 14th century BC tomb of the Egyptian king, Tutankhamen. Sticking with the upper classes, gloves in the Middle Ages were only worn by men of high rank or by those engaged in falconry, a past time of the well-to-do. The masses made do with mitts or garments that had extra long sleeves to keep their hands covered. Gloves became a must-have for women in the 16th century following in the fashion footsteps of Catherine de Medici, who was consorting with Henry II of France at the time. In the 17th century, gloves made from soft kidskin became very popular.

In 1834, glove making became a full-fledged industry when Xavier Jouvin of Grenoble, France invented a cutting die that made it possible to fashion a precise fitting glove. Gloves for both men and women were a requirement for proper dress in the height of the 19th century, a trend which continued until after World War II. Although, I certainly remember wearing a snappy little pair of stretch lace gloves. Then again, weren't we also wearing "spring bonnets" on our heads at the time? Although nowadays some wear gloves as a practical measure to get a better grip or to enhance a swing or a slap shot, mitts are born to keep hands warm but do take on many other tasks. There are bath mitts and baseball mitts, mouse mitts for carpal tunnel syndrome, heated beauty mitts, oven mitts, mitts to groom your pet and mitts to wash your car.

So make your list and gather some mitts patterns. Make soft mittens in angora or mohair - sure to warm up loved ones' hands and hopefully their hearts. Make luxury mittens in cashmere or alpaca. Knit stripes, felt wool, work a Fair Isle design, or embroider some spring flowers on mitten backs to brighten a dreary winter's day. On such a small project, even a complicated design can only last for a few rows. Lace patterns look terrific if the mitts are lined with a warm flannelette fabric - in a contrast color of course.

Attach a couple of pompons along with a twisted cord and these mitts will never make an appearance in the lost and found. Add a trim of faux fur or circle the cuff with a ring of antique buttons. Remember mitts don't have to stay outside - knit a mitt in cotton or linen, tuck in a sweet-smelling bar of soap, and tie with a ribbon for a bath lover's mitt. So I throw down the gauntlet and challenge you to knit some mitts. Best wishes for a terrific holiday season. Don't forget to steal away some time to knit.

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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