

CHARLIE'S CHRISTMAS STOCKING

by Cat Bordhi

My grandson Charlie needed his first Christmas stocking this year. Being an utterly in-love grandma, I wanted to design something extra special for my little guy. Children love pockets, so I inserted two pouches in the arch expansion area, one to hold carrots for Rudolph and the other a gingerbread cookie for Santa.

Felting makes the stocking sturdy and blurs all stitch details - any minor mistakes vanish! And the stocking knits up rapidly on one 24" (60 cm) circular needle, except for the toe and the inner pouches, which require dpn's, a second circ, or one long circ.

I describe a secret of arch expansion in my book, *New Pathways for Sock Knitters, Book One*: Arch increases may be organized in any way one likes. This knowledge assured me the pouches could function as a shaping (increasing) device.

Look at the photo. See how the pouches actually widen the leg over the arch, stairstepping their way forward? The lower edge of each pouch is twice the length of its upper edge. This is achieved through a technique I call disproportionate waste yarn openings. A cousin of standard waste yarn openings (which produce openings with equal numbers of stitches top and bottom), my disproportionate waste yarn opening technique lets you make one edge longer than the other. I've made two Youtube videos demonstrating the process. You'll find them here: tinyurl.com/2ho4ly and here: tinyurl.com/2c2d9v

I hope the readers of *Knitter's Review* might find this intriguing technique useful in their own knitting explorations. In a recent workshop I was delighted when I shared the idea and one participant began to spout design concepts like a fountain!



You can substitute a different yarn with a different gauge, and the proportions of the stocking should stay correct, although the size may vary. Use a yarn that will felt (no superwash, synthetics, or plant fibers), and a gauge that leaves plenty of "air" between stitches. For instance, Cascade Pastaza Paints recommends a gauge of 16 sts per 4" (10 cm), and I used a much larger needle to get a nice loose 11 sts per 4" (10 cm).

The skills you'll need: casting on, knitting, purling, working in the round, *k1f&b* (knit into the front and back of the same stitch to make an increase), *k2tog*, *k3tog* (simply knit all 3 stitches together), slipping sts, and wrapping sts (this is described in instructions). Disproportionate waste yarn openings, including picking up stitches held by waste yarn and knitting the pouch, are described in the instructions and demonstrated in the Youtube videos.

Yarn: Cascade Pastaza Paints (50% llama, 50% wool, 100 g/ 132 yds), 2 skeins color 9824 (Forest), 1 skein 9926 (Cranberry), and 2-3 yds of a smooth, contrast color yarn for waste yarn.

Gauge: 11 sts = 4" (10 cm)

Needles: One 24" (60 cm) circular, size 13 (9 mm) or size YOU need to get gauge; for the toe and inner pouches, your choice of same size dpn's, a second circ, or 1 long circ.

Size: (after felting) height about 15" (38 cm) height, foot length about 12" (30 cm)

Markers: **A**, **B**, and **C** (or 3 different colored markers to designate as **A**, **B** and **C**), also 5 plain markers.

Cuff

With Cranberry, cast on 78 sts, and join, being careful not to twist the cast-on edge. You need **A** and 5 plain markers for the cuff. See "The skills you'll need" above for *k1f&b* and *k3tog*.

Rnd 1: Repeat **k13*, place marker* 6 times; save **A** for the final spot - it marks end of round.

Rnds 2-15: Repeat *k1f&b, k4, k3tog, k4, k1f&b* 6 times.

Cut tail of Cranberry. Knot Cranberry to Forest so next st will be Forest. Don't worry about the knot - felting will hide it. Cut tails to about 1" (2.5 cm).

Rnds 16-18: Repeat *k1f&b, k4, k3tog, k4, k1f&b* 6 times.

Rnd 19: Repeat *k5, k3tog, k5* 6 times. (66 sts)

Rnd 20: Repeat *k4, k3tog, k4* 6 times. (54 sts)

Rnd 21: Repeat *k3, k3tog, k3* 6 times. (42 sts)

Leg

On first rnd, remove all markers except for **A** (it stays to mark end of round as well as center front).

Rnds 22-48: Knit all sts. (42 sts)

Disproportionate waste-yarn insertion

Knit to 4 sts before **A**. Now you'll use waste yarn, dropping Forest until instructed to use it again.

Waste yarn row 1: Knit 8, turn. (8 waste yarn sts)

Waste yarn row 2: Purl 8, turn.

Waste yarn row 3: Repeat *k1, then k1 in bar (strand of yarn between the needles)* 7 times, k1, **do not turn**. (15 waste yarn sts) Slide the 15 waste yarn sts from right ndl to left ndl. Cut tail of waste yarn.

Next rnd: Using Forest again, knit the 15 waste yarn sts and knit to **A**. (49 sts total)

Knit 15 more rnds, ending 11th rnd 4 sts before **A**.

Make second waste-yarn insertion same as first (56 sts total). After the stocking is done, you'll remove the waste yarn, pick up sts, and knit the inner pouches.

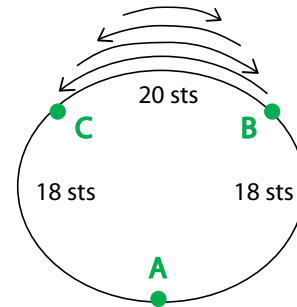


My first try had 3 pouches and was bigger than Charlie!

Heel turn

Knit 18 sts past **A**. Place **B**, then (without knitting, just count forward 20 sts) place **C** 20 sts after **B**.

The heel turn is worked between **B** and **C**, back and forth in rows that become shorter and shorter, stacking up like a mountain on the needle as shown below.



A marks center front. Heel turn is worked back and forth in shorter and shorter rows between **B** and **C**. (Not all heel turn rows are shown.)

How to "wrap next stitch, turn": Move yarn between needles to opposite side. Slip next st. Move yarn between needles back to original position. Return slipped st to left needle. Turn work around. *The slipped st is unworked, and wears a yarn collar.*

Row 1: Knit 19 (1 st before **C**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 2: Knit 18 (1 st before **B**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 3: Knit 17 (2 sts before **C**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 4: Knit 16 (2 sts before **B**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 5: Knit 15 (3 sts before **C**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 6: Knit 14 (3 sts before **B**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 7: Knit 13 (4 sts before **C**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 8: Knit 12 (4 sts before **B**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 9: Knit 11 (5 sts before **C**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 10: Knit 10, (5 sts before **B**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 11: Knit 9 (6 sts before **C**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 12: Knit 8 (6 sts before **B**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 13: Knit 7 (7 sts before **C**), wrap next st, turn.
Row 14: Knit 6 (7 sts before **B**), wrap next st, turn.
Between **B** and **C** there are 7 wrapped sts, then 6 unwrapped, then 7 wrapped (still 20 sts).

Base of heel

Base of heel is worked back and forth in rows on the same 20 sts. No need to conceal the wraps - you're felting!

Remove **B** and **C** as you come to them.

Row 15: (right side) Knit 19, k2tog, turn.

Row 16: (wrong side) Slip 1, k18, k2tog, turn.

Row 17: (right side) Slip 1, k18, k2tog, turn.

Repeat rows 16 and 17 another 5 times.

On final row 17, do not turn. Instead, resume knitting in the round: Knit 22, k2tog, k to **A**. (42 sts)

Foot

Knit 21 rnds.

Toe

Cut tail of Forest. Knot it to Cranberry so next st will be Cranberry. *Soon you'll need to change to 2 circs, 1 long circ, or dpn's because there will be too few sts for the 24" (60 cm) needle.*

Rnd 1: Knit.

Rnd 2: Repeat *k5, k2tog* 6 times. (36 sts)

Rnds 3-4: Knit.

Rnd 5: Repeat *k4, k2tog* 6 times. (30 sts)

Rnds 6-7: Knit.

Rnd 8: Repeat *k3, k2tog* 6 times. (24 sts)

Rnds 9-10: Knit.

Rnd 11: Repeat *k2, k2tog* 6 times. (18 sts)

Rnd 12: Knit.

Rnd 13: Repeat *k1, k2tog* 6 times. (12 sts)

Rnd 14: Repeat *k2tog* 6 times. (6 sts)

Cut tail, thread through tapestry needle, and weave end through remaining 6 sts, pull tight, and secure end. Weave in all ends.

Inner pouches (make one at a time)

Working on purl side (it's easier to see the sts on the purl side), use dpn's, 2 circs, or 1 long circ to pick up all Forest sts from waste yarn - 8 on top and 16 on the bottom, for a total of 24 sts. You'll see a line of Forest sts just inside a line of waste yarn sts - both look like lines of purl bumps. On the upper side are 8 Forest sts and on the lower side 16 Forest sts. Pick them all up with the needles of your choice. Then remove the waste yarn (snip or pull out). Push needles through opening to begin work on knit side.

With Cranberry, place marker and knit to corner (there's a gap here), pick up and knit several sts (pick up well-anchored spots so you don't leave a gaping hole), knit to next corner (there is a gap here), pick up and knit several sts (aim for about 28 sts total). Knit 18 rnds. Bind off. Fold bound-off sides together so they lie flat against the surface of the stocking, and sew base shut. (Or finish the pouches with a 3-needle bind-off if you prefer.) Push the pouches to the inside of the stocking.

Loop

Cast on 25 sts. Knit 1 row, turn and purl 1 row. Bind off. The long sides will curl inward. Sew ends together, then sew end to center back cuff, taking care to sew it so that it will hold in case the stocking's owner has been so good that Santa decides to stuff it really full of weighty goodies.

Finishing and felting

Weave in all ends, and check for gaping spots. If you find one, loosely weave in appropriate color yarn to fill gaps before felting.

You need either a top-loading washing machine (or an alternative such as the bucket-and-plunger set-up described at the end of this section) because you must check the felting progress every few minutes or a catastrophe (a gruesomely misshapen and/or shockingly shrunken stocking) may befall you.

You MUST enclose the stocking in a *securely closed pillowcase* if using a washing machine.

Otherwise loose fibers will swarm through your filter and pump, felting in there, and you risk an expensive repair. You can fold over the pillowcase opening several times and secure it with large bulldog clips, or sew a heavy-duty zipper in the top (wimpy zippers pop right open).

Once you've imprisoned the stocking in the pillowcase, set the washing machine for its lowest level, highest agitation, and hottest temperature. Add a small amount of dish soap - about a half teaspoon. Drop in the pillowcase, set a timer for 2

minutes, and spend that 2 minutes cleaning your laundry room, not checking your email. *Do not go away* - you might forget to come back and you *must* check the progress at least every 2 minutes. I speak from experience. Things can happen very rapidly, and there is no rewind button.

Pull out the pillowcase, press out most of the water, and have a look at your watery knitting. Straighten the stocking if it's twisted, pack it back in the pillowcase, close the top, and repeat process. Continue checking every 2 minutes. As the stocking begins to felt, encourage it to do what you want by pulling and pushing at the parts that misbehave. When is the stocking is done? You decide - take it out when you like the size and thickness.

After the final 2-minute swim, take it out, press out as much water as you can, arrange it flat on a towel

exactly as you want it to be, and wrap the towel around it. Now you may either stomp on the towel, or place it carefully along the side of the washing machine tub and spin put more water.

Unwrap the towel, take out your lovely stocking, and push and pull it, this time into 3-dimensional form. Stuff it lightly with something to help it hold its shape as it dries. I hung mine over a heater and it was dry by morning. You're done!

For a bucket-and-plunger felting set-up, buy a tall white plastic bucket with a lid and a tall-handled plunger at the hardware store, and for a bonus, get a little exercise in the process. Make hole in lid for plunger handle, fill bucket half full with very hot water and a dab of dish soap, immerse stocking, and plunge away for a few minutes at a time, checking progress as instructed.



Charlie with his felted stocking and an unfelted one for comparison.