

# Knitting Underfoot

by Suzann Thompson

We've seen a resurgence of knitting for the home lately, especially in unusual applications. Here, rugs are showcased for something extra special.

## What Can I Knit?



The first well-documented knitted carpets were probably made by apprentices who wanted to gain admission to the professional knitting guilds of old. These masterpieces may have been used on the floor, but were more likely hung on walls or used as tablecloths. Knitted rugs have appeared here and there ever since, up to recent times, when the knitwear designer Ottavio Missoni made knitted patchwork rugs and backed them with suede.

Here are some ideas for rugs that are actually meant for you to walk on. They rely on the unique properties of garter stitch to make planning and knitting easy. Recycle fabric and other materials to make shaggy



Photo 2 - Shaggy Rug Back

rugs. Or make a round rug which requires no gauge swatches and no calculations.

Choose yarn depending on where you will use the rug and what you will use it for. Wool is best for heavy traffic areas. Rug wool is spun to withstand trampling and it doesn't show dirt as readily as other fibers. Absorbent cotton is a better choice for a bath mat.

### Shaggy Rugs

Pile hides the knitted backing in a shaggy rug. Use worsted weight yarn with needles that give you a firm garter stitch fabric. The strips that make up the pile are worked into the knitting every other row. This affects the gauge in both directions, so if you need a rug to fit a specific place, work a gauge swatch of at least 40 sts to determine how many stitches to cast on for your rug.

This antique shaggy rug has all kinds of scrap fabrics tucked into the knitting. Photo 2 shows the knitting! You can only see it on



Photo 1  
Shaggy  
Rug Top



*Hose, plastic bags, and t-shirts make fine pile materials for shaggy rugs.*

the underside of a rug this shaggy. The needles are still in the work.

To cut uniform strips quickly, use a rotary cutter, a straight-edge, and a cutting mat. Scissors are best for cutting pantyhose. Ideas for pile material

and suggestions for dimensions of the strips are listed in the table below. Experiment with other materials until you find the best dimensions for the strips. Pile makes your knitting heavy. If your rug will be large, knit it in manageable strips and sew them together. To clean a pile rug, place it top-side-down on grass or a patio. Beat the back of the rug with a broom. This will knock most of the loose dirt out of the rug and give you a good aerobic

*Pour latex on the underside of the rug and spread it around with a piece of stiff cardboard.*



workout. Unfortunately, a determined child or dog can pull out the strips of a shaggy rug. Firm knitting helps, but painting the underside of the rug with latex will glue the strips into the knitting permanently. Latex gives a rubberized finish. Please work with latex outside or in a well-ventilated room.

### Basic instructions for shaggy rugs:

**Cut strips.** Cast on an odd number of stitches and knit one row.

**Row 2:** K 1. \* With yarn out of the way, place the mid-point of a strip between the needles so its ends hang on both sides of the work. K 1. With yarn out of the way, fold the back end of the strip between the needles, around the back of the stitch you just knitted, so that both ends of the strip now hang to the front of the work. K 1. \* Repeat between \*s across row.

**Row 3 and all odd rows:** Knit all sts.

**Row 4 and all even rows:** Work as for row 2.

Bind off on an even row with no strips.

**Variations:** Knit designs into your rug by using different colors of strips. Knit more stitches between strip placements for a less dense rug.

### Round Rugs

The width of one garter stitch is the same as the height of two rows of garter stitch is the same as the height of one ridge of garter stitch. I call this “garter’s golden rule.” Garter stitch lies flat without blocking, it is the same on both sides, and it stretches. All these properties make garter stitch perfect for knitting circular rugs. You can knit a circular rug in garter stitch without gauge swatches or calculations.

### Begin with a Pinwheel

A pinwheel is a knitted circle divided into six or more slices. Multiples of six slices are easiest to knit without calculations. A pinwheel can be the entire rug, or you can use it as the cen-

## Pile Strip Suggestions:

Material	Dimensions	Notes
Denim	3” long, 5/8” wide	Remove seams from old jeans. Cut strips on the bias. You’ll need a lot of jeans to make a small rug.
T-shirts	3” long, 1” wide	Lay t-shirt flat and cut the body into horizontal strips, which will actually be loops. Hook your thumbs into the loops and pull them out sharply to make them curl. Cut into 3” pieces.
Hosiery	1-1/2” wide loops	Cut away toe seams and the panty part of panty hose. Cut legs horizontally into loops. Use the entire loop for the pile.
Grocery bags	3” long, 4” wide	Gather 4” width into a bowtie shape before placing between needles. For heavier plastic shopping bags, experiment for correct width.



*My circular rug is about a yard in diameter. You can see garter intarsia in some areas of the rug.*

ter of a large circular rug. I'm going to give you row-by-row instructions for a small pinwheel. As you knit it, you'll begin to understand how a pinwheel is constructed. Then you can make larger pinwheels with more slices from the general pinwheel instructions.

### Sample Pinwheel

This is a 6-slice pinwheel. You'll need knitting needles, two-colors (A and B), a bit of waste yarn, a stitch marker, and a tapestry needle. As you knit, pay close attention to what the stitches and the yarn-overs look like. If you know what it is supposed to look like, you can knit future pinwheels without detailed instructions. Odd rows are worked from the outside of the pinwheel toward the center. Even rows are worked toward the outside edge.

With waste yarn, cast on 10 stitches.

**Row 1:** knit across. Cut waste yarn. Change to color A, leaving a 10" long tail.

**Row 2:** knit across. Place the marker at the end of this row. Turn. This completes the first garter ridge.

**Row 3:** K 9 stitches. Turn your work, leaving the tenth stitch unknitted.

**Row 4:** yo, knit across. Now you are back at the marker. Turn your work. This completes the second garter ridge.

**Row 5:** K 8. Turn your work, leaving the ninth stitch, the yo, and the tenth stitch unknitted.

**Row 6:** yo, knit across. Turn your work. This completes the third garter ridge.

**Row 7:** K 7. Turn your work.

**Row 8:** yo, knit across. Turn your work. This completes the fourth garter ridge.

(Have you noticed yet that when you knit away from the marker, you turn your work before the row is finished? When you knit towards the marker, you knit to the end of the row.)

**Row 9:** K 6. Turn your work.

**Row 10:** yo, knit across. Turn your work. This completes the

fifth garter ridge.

**Row 11:** K 5. Turn your work.

**Row 12:** yo, knit across. Turn your work. This completes the sixth garter ridge.

**Row 13:** K 4. Turn your work.

**Row 14:** yo, knit across. Turn your work. This completes the seventh garter ridge.

**Row 15:** K 3. Turn your work.

**Row 16:** yo, knit across. Turn your work. This completes the eighth garter ridge.

**Row 17:** K 2. Turn your work.

**Row 18:** yo, knit across. Turn your work. This completes the ninth garter ridge.

**Row 19:** K 1. Turn your work.

**Row 20:** yo, knit across (which is only one stitch). Cut yarn. Turn your work. This completes the tenth garter ridge and the slice.

**Row 21:** This is the first row of a new slice. With another color, K1, \* k2tog (one is a stitch, and one is a yo). Rep from \* across. Now you have 10 stitches again. Turn.

**Repeat Rows 2-21** until you have six slices in all, knitting the last Row 21 in waste yarn. Knit a few more rows of waste yarn. Cut yarn.



Row 20 is knitted and turned. Note how the yo's divide the stitches. The paperclip is the stitch marker.



Row 21 is knitted, but not turned. Now you can't see the divisions caused by the yo's.



Second slice done, third slice started.



To graft the slices together, follow the paths of the waste yarns in and out of the stitches.

Thread the long tail of color A into a tapestry or yarn needle. In essence, you will copy the route of the waste yarn through the rows you will graft together. Give the tail a tug to see which stitch it's attached to. Look at the waste yarn loop that goes through that stitch. With the needle, follow that thread down into the stitch. Look at the corresponding stitch of the last slice and use your needle to follow the waste thread into that stitch. Now, back up to the first slice. Following the waste thread, take the needle up through the first stitch and down through the second. Continue following the waste threads, down and up, up and down through the stitches of the two slices. When you are done, carefully snip the waste yarn from the finished grafting. You have used short rows to shape this pinwheel.

### General Pinwheel Instructions

Cast on and follow these instructions, knowing that your finished pinwheel will be about twice as wide as your cast-on. No calculations!

**A. Decide how many slices you want** in your wheel—a multiple of 6 is easiest. For six slices, each garter ridge will be shorter by one stitch, as you know from knitting the sample pinwheel. For twelve slices each garter ridge is shorter by two stitches; for eighteen slices, each ridge is shorter by three stitches. Do you see the progression? The more slices in your pinwheel, the larger the hole in the middle will be. Stitch a small hole closed, or fill a large hole with a small pinwheel.

**B. Begin the pinwheel.** Cast on with waste yarn.

**Row 1:** Knit across. Cut waste yarn. Change to the slice color, leaving a tail long enough to graft the slices together at the end.

**C. Complete the slice.**

**Row 2:** Knit across. Place marker at the end of this row for reference. Turn. First garter ridge completed.

**Row 3:** Knit, but stop short of the end of the row by the designated number of stitches according to how many slices you want (see step 1). Turn.

**Row 4:** Yarn over. Knit across. Turn. Garter ridge completed.

**Row 5:** Find the yo closest to the point of the left hand needle. Do not count this as a stitch. Knit, but stop short of that yo by the designated number of stitches (see step 1). Turn.

**Row 6:** Yarn over. Knit back across row. Turn. Garter ridge completed.

Repeat Rows 5 and 6 until you can't repeat them any more. Cut slice color.

**D. Begin the next slice** with a new color. \* Knit until you get to a yarn over. Knit together the yarn over and the next st. \* Repeat between \*s across, then knit to the end. Turn.

**E. To complete this slice,** follow the instructions in step C, starting with Row 2.

**F. Repeat steps D and C** until you have knitted all the slices.

**G. With waste yarn, repeat step D** for the last time. Knit a few more rows in waste yarn. Graft the beginning to the end using the long tail of yarn. Snip away the waste yarn.

### Making Bigger Rugs

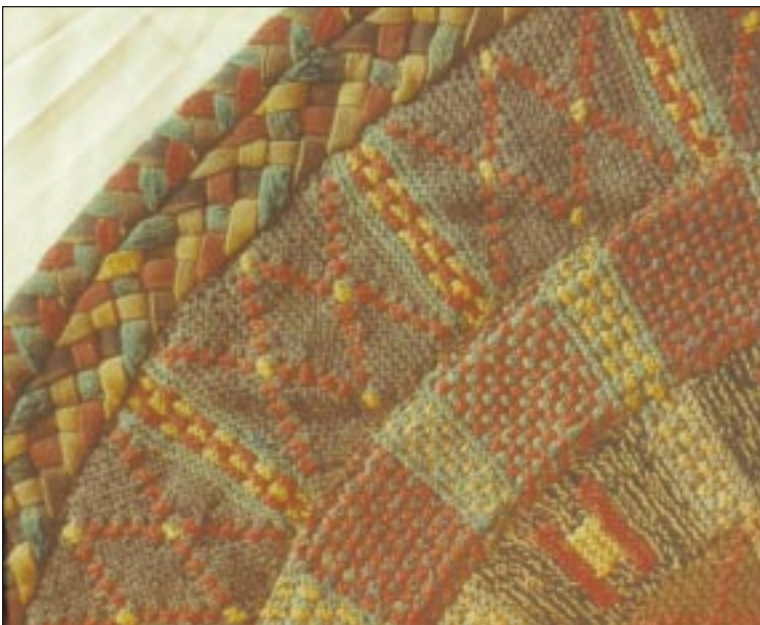
Sew garter strips around a pinwheel center to make bigger circular rugs. The garter stitch crunches to fit nicely around the edge of the pinwheel, and stretches to accommodate the new, longer distance around the outer edge of the rug. Garter strips must be narrow when they are close to the center, so for the first strip, cast on 5 sts and knit every row. Stop knitting when the strip fits around the rug's center. Sew the strip around the edge. Graft or sew the strips ends together. Each successive strip can be wider. Stop when the rug is big enough.

*Continued on page 73...*



The sample pinwheel and others.

Sister Elvira Hulett, a Shaker woman who lived into the early 1900's, introduced stranding into the garter strips for her knitted rugs.



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### REFERENCES

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Beautiful stockinette stitch rugs. They need heavy blocking.

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Janet Johnson Stevens, "Knitted Carpet Masterpieces of the Holy Roman Empire", *Piecework*, March/April 1995, pp. 56-61. Pictures and story of carpet masterpieces.

### SOURCES

The Fiber Studio, 9 Foster Hill Road, Box 637, Henniker, NH 03242-0637, 603-428-7830  
www.fiberstudio.com, sales@fiberstudio.com  
Send \$5.00 for yarn samples, which include woolen rug yarns and mill ends.

Harrisville Designs, Center Village, P O Box 806, Harrisville, NH 03450, 603-827-3333  
www.harrisville.com

Beautiful colors and beautiful wool for knitting rugs and anything else. Send \$6.00 for a yarn sample catalog.

Many thanks to Mary Hal Davis of the Dayton Knitting Guild for lending me the antique shaggy knitted rug for photography. The Shaker rug is housed at the Shaker Museum, Old Chatham, New York.

Suzann teaches a workshop called "Knitting Rugs". For details, please contact her by e-mail at [suzannt@easynet.co.uk](mailto:suzannt@easynet.co.uk).

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