

Choosing suitable yarn for your pattern:

A pattern will tell you how much yarn to buy if you plan on using the exact yarn specified by the pattern. You should get that amount plus a few hundred yards extra. Usually a ball or two more is adequate. Always check the yarn label to be sure the balls have the same color number and same dye lot number.

Many times you will have to make a yarn substitution for the yarn called for in a pattern.

Substituting Yarn:

There are several factors to consider when choosing a substitute yarn for a pattern. Obviously, the yarn must knit to the gauge of the pattern on appropriate needles. Usually, the gauge can be matched by using a yarn from the same category on the CYCA “Standards and Guidelines for Crochet and Knitting.” Since yarns are categorized along a continuum based on WPI’s, sometimes a higher or lower category yarn can be substituted.

Here is a somewhat trusty method for figuring out if a yarn can be substituted according to WPI: For fine weight through worsted weight: Using the yarn from the pattern, determine the # of yards per 50 grams; figure 20%. Look at the yarn you want to substitute and figure the # of yards per 50 grams. If this number is 20% higher or lower than the original yarn, it is probably a good match. For bulky and super bulky, figure 15%.

To determine the gauge a yarn will knit when two strands are held together (doubled): multiply the stitches per 4 inches by .73 (or 73 %). This method gives an estimate of the gauge you will get, so plan accordingly.

Besides matching the gauge and weight, the way a yarn behaves needs to be examined. The new yarn should behave similarly to the original yarn in the consistency of the fabric it knits as well as the drape of the fabric. Substituting a yarn with similar fiber content and structure will help obtain the desired fabric.

Some fibers substitute better than others. Wool has better elasticity and stitch memory than cotton. Cotton is much heavier than wool. Therefore wool substitutes for cotton and cotton rarely substitutes well for wool. Acrylics can often substitute for wool if desired.

It is important to look at the garment you want to knit and determine what about the original yarn is important in creating the look of that garment and then making sure these characteristics are present in the yarn you want to substitute (examples: fuzzy novelty yarns, halos from angora or mohair, etc). The only way to check that one yarn will substitute for another is to knit a swatch. Swatching will help you determine what needles you will need to work the project. Check the gauge and fabric character to make sure that the new yarn will substitute well. It has generally been my experience that the farther you move from the original yarn the less your project will look like the original, so be ready for surprises—good and bad.

Finally, the amount of new yarn should be calculated. Using the original, yarn multiply the yards per ball by the # of balls needed for the pattern. This gives the total yardage necessary. Take this # and divide it by the yardage per ball of the new yarn to find the # of balls needed.