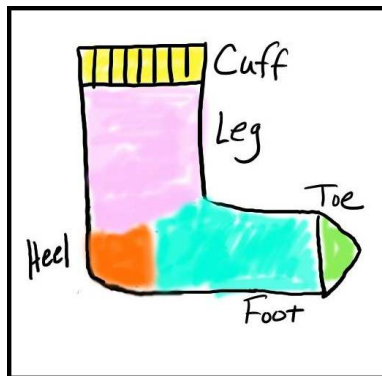


# Toe-up Socks by Heather Storta

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There are several advantages to working socks toe up. If you are concerned that you may not have enough yarn to complete a pair of socks, you can work toe up (either with your yarn divided into two equal balls or working two at a time from both ends of your skein) and simply stop when you run out of yarn. It is also a good way to get every inch out of your yarn if you like to have as little left over as possible. Some people find it easier to try their socks on as they knit when working toe-up socks. In addition, some stitch patterns look better when oriented in the toe-up position.

## Construction Basics

The toe is worked with a cast on, either provisional or some other method, and then increases are worked until the number of stitches that you need for the foot is reached. There are a few options for toes (see below). The foot is worked as normal until you are ready to start the heel. When you start the heel will depend on which heel type you have chosen, and there are several options for heels! The heel is worked (see the heel options below) and then you proceed to knit the leg. The cuff can be a separate stitch pattern from the leg stitch pattern, and then the sock is bound off at the cuff. The bind off will need to be stretchy enough to allow for the sock to go on over the heel.

## Cast Ons

Which cast on you use will be determined by which toe you choose to work.

### Provisional Cast On

You will use a provisional cast on with waste yarn to begin a few different toe options. A short-row toe would begin with a provisional cast on for half the total number of desired foot stitches, and then you would work a decreasing wedge, followed by an increasing wedge. The provisional stitches would be picked up to join the toe in the round and begin the foot. An “Easy Toe” (see below) would also begin with a provisional cast on.

## Double-Sided Cast On

There are a few ways to produce a double-sided cast on. This is different from a provisional cast on (although it can be used in place of a provisional cast on in many cases) as it produces the same number of live stitches on each needle without using waste yarn (whereas a provisional cast on produces one less stitch along the provisional edge), and these stitches are all made at the same time as you cast on. A ridge is sometimes produced along the center spine of these two opposing sets of stitches, but the ridge falls on the wrong side of the work and in most cases looks like a purl ridge.

## Judy's Magic Cast On

This is my personal favorite cast on for toe-up socks. You will need two circular needles or one long circular needle to work this cast on. After a few rounds have been worked you can switch to double pointed needles, if desired. This cast on produces a very smooth and seamless edge, with a single row of purl bumps on the inside.

To work, hold the needles in the right hand with the tips together, one on top of the other. Make a slip knot with a long tail and place on the upper needle. Hold the yarn in the slingshot position with the tail over the thumb and the working yarn over the index finger. Pivot the needles up and wrap the index finger strand over the bottom needle, moving from the bottom of the needle to between the two needles. Pivot the needles down and wrap the upper needle with the thumb strand by moving from in between the needles to the top of the needle. (This ensures that all stitches are mounted with the right legs in front.) Repeat this process until the desired number of stitches have been cast on. Rotate the needles so they are pointing to the right, and pull the bottom needle so that those stitches are sitting on the cable. Knit across the top stitches. Rotate the needles, pull the bottom cable, position the stitches at top onto the needle, and knit across those stitches. One round is complete. See my [video tutorial](#).

## Figure Eight Cast On

This is an alternative to Judy's Magic Cast On that might be a little easier to work. It creates a very seamless toe. You wrap the yarn around two needles like a figure 8. One needle will have the stitches mounted with the left legs in front with this method. Those will need to be worked through the back loops on the first pass across them. See my [video tutorial](#).

## Straight Wrap Cast On

This is another alternative to Judy's Magic Cast On that might be easier to work. It also creates a very seamless toe. Using circular needles can be very helpful with this method so that you can provide slack in half of the stitches at a time to make it easier to work the first round. You simply wrap the yarn counterclockwise around two needles (the number of wraps being half the total number of desired stitches.) See my [video tutorial](#).

## Toe Options

There are several options for toes with toe-up socks. The most commonly seen version nowadays is a double-sided cast on and then working a wedge toe from the toe up.

## Toe-Up Wedge Toe



You begin this toe with a double-sided cast on (Judy’s Magic Cast On, for example), with about a quarter of the total number of desired stitches to start, divided onto two circular needles or 4 double-pointed needles. Increases are worked every other round on each end of each half, or four increases each increase round. You work these two rounds—one increase round and one plain round—until you have your desired total number of stitches. This toe matches a cuff-down wedge toe.

## Short-Row Toe



The pink yarn shows where the provisional cast on was picked up.

As mentioned above, this toe begins with a provisional cast on with waste yarn. You cast on half the total desired foot stitches, and then, working flat, work a series of decreasing short rows. You then reverse and begin a series of increasing short rows. Once the toe is complete, you will pick up the provisional stitches, removing the waste yarn, and you now have your total number of foot stitches and are ready to work in the round.

## Easy Toe



This toe uses a provisional cast on to cast on about one quarter the total number of desired stitches for the foot. Work in stockinette stitch until the rectangle is about 1/2" tall, ending with a purl row. You will then knit across the stitches and pick up stitches (about 4 or so) along the one side, pick up the provisional stitches and knit them, then pick up stitches along the other side (the same number as were picked up on the first side.) Placing markers at each of the four corners of the piece (in the same locations as for a wedge toe), you will work increases at the marker locations on every other round until the total number of desired stitches are achieved.

For more toe options, be sure to check out my article on sock toes in the Summer 2023 issue of *Cast On*, and my [video](#) accompanying the article.

## Heel Options

There are several options for heels with toe-up socks. A short-row heel is a very common choice, but there is a toe-up heel flap heel that mimics the standard cuff-down heel flap heel. An afterthought heel is a great choice when working with self-striping yarns.

### Short Row Heel



Typically, short-row heels are worked over half the total stitches. A decreasing set of short rows is worked until approximately one-third of the heel stitches are left in the center heel. Then a set of increasing short rows is worked until all heel stitches are knit. Work resumes in the round after that point. There are many ways to work the short rows; almost any short row method will work. This heel has a shallow heel diagonal measure, since no excess fabric is introduced along the side of the heel. This tends to stretch the sock fabric along the heel and gaps can be noticeable as a result. A benefit of this type of heel is that the heel is worked independently from the rest of the sock, so stripes and other variations in multi-color yarns can be maintained if a contrasting color, or a separate skein of yarn, is used for the heel. See my [video](#) showing this short-row heel.

## Afterthought Heel



Afterthought Heels: at left, Forethought waste yarn placement; center, wedge shape; right, round shape

Afterthought heels are great for maintaining a stripe pattern in self-striping yarns. The sock circumference can stay the same across the area for the heel, and when the heel is added afterwards, you can use a contrasting color.

Waste yarn knitted over half the total number of stitches in the location for the heel makes adding the heel afterwards much easier.

Any type of cuff-down toe construction method can be used for this heel. Typically, a wedge-shape is worked, as shown in the center of the photo above, but a round or spiral heel could be worked instead, as seen above right. To avoid using Kitchener stitch to close the heel, one could work a round heel and close the live stitches left by running the tail through the remaining stitches, as in the top of a hat. See my [video](#) showing this afterthought heel.

### Toe-Up Heel Flap

This toe attempts to mimic the look and structure of a cuff-down heel-flap-and-gusset heel. You could just work a heel flap and gusset exactly the same as is worked for cuff-down socks, but the heel flap will instead sit at the bottom of the foot instead of the back of the heel. Functionally this works just fine. A toe-up heel flap reverses the order to make it more accurately match in appearance. A gusset with increases is worked until the necessary number of stitches are reached. Then a heel turn is worked over a smaller number of stitches at the center back of the heel. A heel flap is then worked, joining the sides together with the gusset stitches with decreases. This is worked until the original number of stitches has been reached. See my [video](#) about this heel.

### Fleegle Heel

This heel (so named for the blog on which it originated) is very similar to the “truer” toe-up heel flap described above. Gusset increases are worked until you have double your initial total number of stitches minus two. Short-row decreases are then worked, beginning two stitches from the center of the heel, to turn the heel over all of the sole stitches. On the final decrease row for the sole stitches, you then resume working in the round to work the last set of sole decreases, and are left with your

original stitch count plus two. These two extra stitches are decreased away in the last heel round, either on the sides of the heel, or at the center back of the heel. There is no real heel flap, since the heel turn takes up the entire vertical heel fabric. This heel provides more space for the heel diagonal measure and may fit some foot shapes better. The gusset increases could also be placed at the center bottom of the heel instead of at the top sides of the heel. See my [video](#) about the Fleegle heel.

The next photo shows three toe-up heel-flap methods: on the left is a “cuff-down” heel flap worked toe up; in the center is a truer toe-up heel flap, and on the right is a Fleegle heel worked toe up.



Toe-up heel-flap methods.

For more heel options, be sure to check out my article on sock heels in the Spring 2021 issue of *Cast On*, and my [video](#) accompanying the article.

## Bind Offs

The bind off used for toe-up socks needs to be quite stretchy, to allow the sock to go on over the foot. Any bind off that is stretchy enough will work! I will talk a bout a few options here.

### Jeny’s Surprisingly Stretchy Bind Off

This bind off is aptly named, as it is surprisingly stretchy! It looks good in any stitch pattern but shines in ribbings.

To work: Process the first two sts (see process directions below), then bind off one. \*Process the next st, then bind off one; rep from \* until all sts have been bound off.

To “process” a knit st, work a reverse yo (bring yarn from behind, over needle to front, then back between the needles), knit the st, then pass the yo over the st just made.

To “process” a purl st, work a normal yo (bring yarn forward between needles, wrap yarn over needle to back, bring yarn forward between the needles), purl the st, then pass the yo over the st just made. See my [video](#) showing this bind off.

### Picot Bind Off

This is a decorative, but stretchy, way to bind off the tops of cuffs.

Directions for a 2/4 picot bind-off edge:

Using needles one or two sizes smaller than working needles, use the knitted cast on (knit into the stitch, slip the just-made stitch back to the left needle knitwise) to cast on 2 stitches. Knit the first 2 stitches and bind off 1 stitch. Bind off 3 more stitches in this way. Transfer the remaining stitch on the right-hand needle to the left-hand needle purlwise.

Continue in this manner, casting on 2 stitches and binding off 4, around all stitches. Bind off the last stitch by cutting the tail and pulling it through the prior stitch (not binding off that last stitch) and thread it through the first stitch bound off to close the gap. See my [video](#) showing this bind off.

### Other Bind Offs

A tubular bind off is a great choice for 1x1 ribbings, just make sure it is worked loosely enough to allow for the desired amount of stretch. There are increase bind offs that would be nice stretchy choices as well. Experiment to find the bind off you prefer for your socks!

### Pros and Cons

Some pros were already mentioned above. Some knitters find it easier to try on the socks as they're knitted when working toe-up. You can divide your yarn into two balls and knit each sock from one ball until you run out of yarn. Some stitch patterns look better when oriented toe-up. Heels can be worked that require no picking up of stitches. No grafting is required to close the toe.

There are some cons to this type of construction. It can be more difficult to determine when to start the heel, for example. Increases are needed at the toe, depending on toe choice, and these can be more difficult to work than decreases. The heel options available might not fit the foot as well as the cuff-down options, depending on your foot measurements.

### Conclusion

Knitting socks from the toe-up offers several compelling advantages that make it a popular choice among knitters. This method provides a practical solution for those concerned about running out of yarn, as it allows you to work until the yarn is fully utilized, ensuring minimal waste. The ability to try on the socks as you knit ensures a better fit, enhancing the overall satisfaction with the final product. Additionally, certain stitch patterns benefit aesthetically from being oriented toe-up, adding a unique and visually pleasing element to your socks. These benefits make the toe-up approach an efficient and versatile technique for sock knitting.

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