



Basic Tam

Snowflake Tam

1 "Heart" Tam

Spiral-Armed Galaxy Tam

Spiral-Armed Galaxy Tam

FASHION FRAMEWORK SERIES

Tam Lesson by Mary Forte

In the "Fashion Framework Series" we help you explore basic elements of pattern make-up and things to know before you knit. Each article in this series provides a lesson for a basic type of garment. The lesson describes in detail aspects of the garment, provides a basic pattern, and suggests ways to alter the pattern to customize the garment. This lesson is for Tams and Berets.

ABOUT TAMS AND BERETS

What's the difference between a tam and a beret? Look up the terms on the internet and you will find plenty of overlapping definitions. Fairchild's Dictionary of Fashion describes the beret as "1. a flat tam made of wool."

The beret/tam has romantic and literary roots. A Basque beret is a "round, flat, soft woolen cap worn by Basque peasants who inhabit the western Pyrenees region of France and Spain." A pancake beret is worn tilted to the side to indicate that the wearer is an artist. The Scottish tam o'shanter takes its name from the title of the 1791 poem by Burns.

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Perhaps the main difference is that beret is a French word, and tam (o'shanter) is Scottish.

Both terms describe a hat with a close-fitting brim and a disk-shaped top. The characteristic shape comes from a rapid increase right after the brim then a slower, flatter decrease at the top. Flat blocking accents the shape. Like most hats, a tam or beret consists of three main sections: the brim, the body, and the top decreases to form and close the crown.

COMPONENTS

Tams have the following components:
Brim – Working the brim a little smaller than the actual head circumference (negative ease) helps keep it snug on the head. A ribbed brim is a good choice, but folded up Stockinette is often used. Even I-cord can work if you carefully measure the head of the wearer.

Body – At the end of the brim section, a large number of increases, often one increase in every other stitch, is worked. This fast increase causes the hat to flare out immediately. The body is then worked evenly for a few inches. The longer this section is, the looser and larger the tam.

Crown Decreases – The decreases are evenly placed, often in a distinct spoke or swirl pattern. The decreases can also be placed more unobtrusively – the placement depends on the desired pattern and effect. The top decreases occur over multiple rounds, so the rate of shaping is much more gradual than in the shaping right after the brim.

Blocking – For blocking that emphasizes a flat top, many sources recommend using a dinner plate, but you can also use rounds of wood, cardboard, flying discs (such as Frisbees®), or tam blockers. If the flatness of the top is less important, light blocking to even out the stitches, perhaps over a bowl, or just flattened by hand will work.

HAND CRAFTING TIPS

The following knitting tips will help you give your hat that hand crafted look.

Choose appropriate yarn – Be sure to pick a yarn that will obey your blocking choice. Wool is good about holding its blocked shape. Acrylic or cotton may not retain the shape of a flat tam. Also pick a yarn that has enough body to maintain the elasticity of the brim while flopping around only as much as you want it to. Experiment with the blocking and elasticity on a practice swatch.

Choose a strong, stretchy cast on – Be sure to select a cast on that will be strong and stretchy. Long-tail, tubular, and German twisted cast on are all good options. If your cast on ends up too loose or the fiber stretches out and stays that way, you can later add thin elastic cord to the brim to tighten it up.

Avoid laddering – Laddering occurs when moving from dpn to dpn. Sometimes the stitches at the end of the old needle and start of the new needle are too loose and leave a long strand of running thread; it looks like the rung of a ladder. Over several rows, the ladder can become quite apparent.

To avoid laddering, on the second stitch of a new needle, pull the working yarn up snugly to close the gap between the needles. Some knitters instead work a few stitches beyond the gap before slipping them to the new needle.

Use smooth circular joins – Be sure to check that the stitches are all oriented the same way and not twisted around the needle(s). If the stitches are twisted you will get a moebius shape and you won't be able to close the top.

There are many options for joining the knitting into a circle. Some knitters cast on an extra stitch and knit it together with the first stitch of the next round. Others switch the first and last stitches of the round. The models for this article use a no-knot start (*Cast On*, August – October 2009, p. 66), slip the first stitch to the right hand needle, then start the first round. The tails are woven in to mimic the shape of the surrounding stitches as closely as possible.

TAM LESSON

The following pattern for a basic tam uses standard adult head sizes. The tam is knit in the round.

Needle Choices

This pattern lists 8" dpns, but you can use any needle combination that will let you

work in the round: 16" circular for body plus dpns for the smallest rounds, magic loop, and so on.

Basic Tam by Mary Forte

Sizes/Head Circumference:

Adult: S/20 (M/21, L/23)"

Yarn Symbol: Medium (4)

Level of Experience: Intermediate

Finished Measurements:

Circumference at Brim: 17 (18, 19)"

Materials:

Garnstudio DROPS NEPAL (1.76oz/50g, 82yds/75m, 65% Wool, 35% Alpaca):

2 skeins #0300 Beige Mix

Size 5 (3.75mm) 8" dpns, or size needed to obtain correct gauge

Size 3 (3.25mm) 8" dpns, or two sizes smaller than the needles used to get gauge

Safety pin style stitch markers

Tapestry needle

Special Abbreviations:

CDD = central double decrease: sl next 2 sts together k-wise (as if you were about to make a k2tog), k1, pass the 2 slipped sts (as a unit) back over the st just knitted

m = marker

m1 = make one increase: insert the LH needle under the running thread from front to back then knit into the back of the picked up strand

rnd = round

rem = remain(ing)

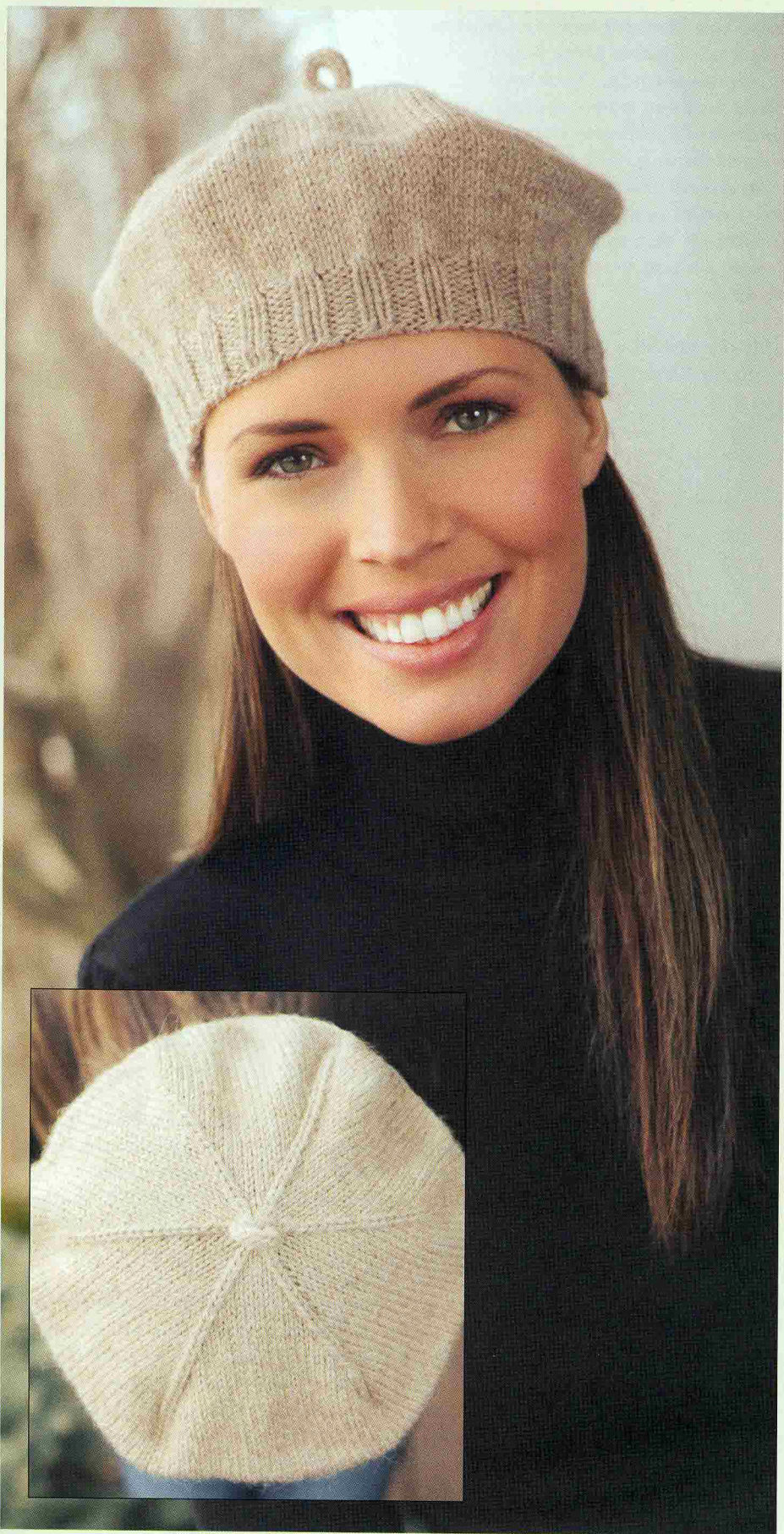
Gauge:

With larger needles in St st, 24 sts & 30 rows = 4"/10 cm. To save time, take time to check gauge.

Preparation – Getting Correct Gauge

As you probably know, it's important to check your gauge before you begin a knitting project. Even a slight discrepancy in stitches per inch can cause a garment to fit incorrectly

Knit a Gauge Swatch – the bigger your gauge swatch, the more accurate your calculations



will be. Most gauge swatches should measure at least 4" wide. Many people have a different gauge when knitting in the round; so it's a good idea to knit your gauge swatch in the round. In this case, aim for at least a 9" circumference so you will have plenty of room to make measurements. Also, be sure to knit the swatch on the same needles you plan to use for the project. A swatch is normally worked in pattern for 4", but you can stop before 4" if you see the width is way off after a couple of inches, and try different needles.

Count the Stitches – When the swatch is finished, block it and count the stitches and rows in 4". Avoid counting the selvages (in flat knitting), the cast on row, or the bind off row; their tension may vary. Your goal is to match the number of stitches listed in the pattern gauge over 4". The number of stitches should be exact, and not differ by even a half stitch.

Adjust the Needles if Necessary – If you do not count the same number of stitches in 4" as listed in the gauge for the pattern, you will need to knit a new one using different needles. Too many stitches per inch indicate you will need a larger needle size. Too few stitches per inch indicate you need a smaller needle size. Once you find the needles that will get the correct gauge, you can begin your tam.

Knitting the Brim

This basic pattern begins with a ribbed brim. For ribbing, many knitters use a needle one or two sizes smaller than the size used for the body. Try to get the stitch size in the ribbing to match that of the body. Once you determine which needles will give you the correct gauge for the body of the hat, you can switch to your smaller needles and cast on.

Brim

With smaller needles, CO 100 (104, 108) sts. Join, and mark end of rnd. Work k2, p2 Rib for 1 (1 1/4, 1 1/2)".

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TECHNICAL TIP

You can't place a marker between dpns, so move a stitch or two to the LH needle near the end of the round, or attach the marker to the running thread between the stitches in the round below.

Working the Increases at the Start of the Body

This pattern suggests using a left-leaning m1 increase; however, any increase will work. Experiment to see what style you like.

Body

Switch to larger needles and work the Inc Rnd: *K2, m1; rep from * to end of rnd – 150 (156, 162) sts.

Following Rnds: Work in St st until piece meas 4 (4 1/2, 5)" from CO.

Shaping and Finishing the Crown

This pattern uses double decreases to close and flatten the top of the hat. Central double decreases (CDDs) form a spoke pattern at the top of the hat. Depending on the look you want, other decreases could be substituted.

When all decreases have been formed, a short I-cord loop finishes the top of the hat. You could choose to omit this loop and just cut a tail about 6" long, thread it onto a tapestry needle, and draw it through the remaining stitches. Pull it up tight to close the hole at the top.

Crown Decreases

PMs every 25 (26, 27) sts.

Rnd 1: *CDD, k to marker, slip markers; rep from * to end of rnd. Move all markers one st to the right [12 sts dec – 88 (92, 96) sts rem].

Rnd 2: Knit to end of rnd.

TECHNICAL TIP

The end of the round moves along with the markers. Make

sure the distinct center stitches line up with the ones from previous rounds. Once you have worked a few rounds of decreases and you can see the ridge forming, you may wish to remove all the markers except the end of round marker. You can hook this marker onto the fabric so you won't have to keep slipping it.

Following Rnds: Rep Rnds 1 & 2 until 6 (12, 6) sts rem.

Last Rnd, Size M: K2tog until 6 sts rem.

I-Cord Top: Transfer rem sts to one dpn.

*Slide the sts to the tip of the needle opposite the edge working yarn is coming from. Knit the first st, pull the yarn tight so the fabric beg to form a tube and knit the rest of the sts. Rep from * until I-cord meas 2".

Finishing

Cut a 6" tail and draw it through rem sts. Tack end to base of I-cord to make a loop. Weave in ends and block.

DESIGNING YOUR OWN TAM

The tam offers many opportunities for creative exploration. Here are a few strategies for designing your own.

Color and Stitch Patterns

Tams make a great project for experimenting with various color and stitch patterns. Fair Isle, stripes, cables, and lace can all make your tam unique. Keep in mind that knitting in the round is actually an ongoing spiral. If you decide to use prominent stripes in your colorwork, you may find a distinct "jog" in the stripe at the color changes. To solve this problem, use the jogless jog technique or the slipping technique. (See resource list at the end of this article.)

Swatching and Measuring

Design your own tam by coordinating gauges, measurements, and stitch patterns. Begin by swatching your yarn; see Knit a Gauge Swatch above. Make sure your swatches include at least one complete stitch or color pattern repeat. When you have created a swatch with the desired density and drape, block and measure your chosen swatch to the nearest eighth of an inch, then calculate the gauges as follows:

GAUGE WORKSHEET

1. Convert the fractions to decimals:

1/8 = .125	1/4 = .25
3/8 = .375	1/2 = .5
5/8 = .625	3/4 = .75
7/8 = .875	

2. To calculate the stitches per inch of width, divide the number of stitches across the swatch by the width in inches. Round to the first two digits after the decimal. For example: 29 sts ÷ 4 = 7.25 sts/in.

3. To calculate the rounds per inch of length, follow steps 1 and 2 above substituting rounds (rows) for stitches and length for width. Once you have determined gauge, you can multiply those numbers by the desired tam measurements to calculate the stitches and rounds needed.

Brim Circumference and Casting On

Determine brim circumference by measuring around the top of the forehead where you would like the hat to be placed. Subtract 15 to 20% of that measurement to create the negative ease needed to keep the tam snug on the head.

Multiply the resulting circumference by the gauge to get the number of stitches needed in the band. For example, 17" x 6 sts/in = 102 sts.

Adjust the number to a multiple that will work for your brim style. For example, a hat with a 2x2 rib brim needs a multiple of 4. So you could use 100 or 104 stitches in your cast on.

Increasing

There are several methods for determining the number of body stitches. One method simply increases 1 stitch for every 2. If you started with 100 stitches, you would end up with 150. You may need to add a few stitches in the next round to make a multiple that will work with your hat style. (See "On Your Way to the Masters – Evenly Spaced Increases," November 2010 – January 2011

Cast On.) A hat with six crown decreases per round will need a multiple of six. A hat with seven crown decreases per round will need a multiple of seven. To double check your numbers will come out even, refer to the "Evenly Spacing Decreases" article on page 24.

Another method, good for Fair Isle tams, starts by working out the pattern for the top. You decide the number of repeats, typically between six and ten, work out your stitch or color pattern, and determine the total number of stitches needed at the widest point of the tam. You then determine how many stitches you will need for the brim, and then calculate how many stitches you will need to increase to have enough for your top design. *Alice Starmore's Book of Fair Isle Knitting* has a detailed explanation of this method.

Body Length

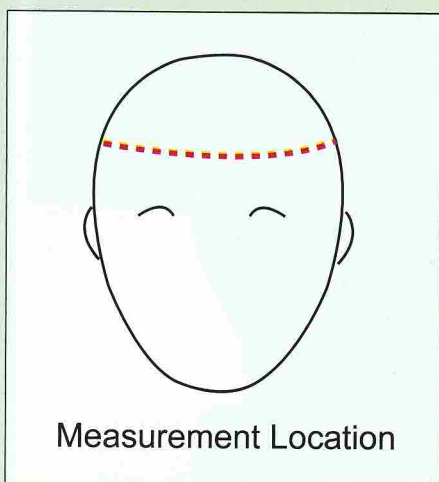
After the increases are determined, you can decide how long to make the body section. The longer this section is, the wider and deeper the top will be. Approximately 4" - 5" works for a small-topped adult tam.

Crown Decreases

The crown decreases at a rate that will allow it to lie relatively flat. If you are designing the top first, as for a Fair Isle tam, you have already chosen the number of decreases per round. Determine how often to work a decrease round by dividing the length of the decrease section (your choice or adult S = 3.25", M = 3.5", L = 3.75") by the rounds per inch of your gauge swatch. If the number does not come out even, add the extra rounds in between the lower decrease rounds.

Charting out the decreases is a good strategy. You only need to chart out one of the repeats. (For an example, see Snowflake Tam on page 34 in this issue.) If your stitch design reaches into the body section, be sure to add those rounds into your chart.

If you are simply working bottom-up, you can start by marking the decrease locations according to the multiples you selected when you made your increases. The decrease rate should be one stitch per decrease location (typically six or seven spokes) every round. However, you have a variety of choices for these decreases. If you want the decreases to form prominent straight ridges, stack central



double decreases (CDDs) on top of each other every other round. You might also use mitered double decreases (S11-k2tog-pss0), which are subtler, every other round. To create a swirl pattern, work aligned ssk or k2togs every round. Open yarnover increases can also make a pretty pattern. If you don't wish to draw attention to the decreases, stagger them instead.

Toppers

If you plan to add anything to the top, be sure to leave a longer tail at the end for attachment. Top treatments include pompons, I-cord, curlicues, buttons – anything you like. A fancy lacework or Fair Isle tam doesn't need a topper at all.

Felting – If you wish to felt your tam, be sure to use a yarn that will felt well and knit it a size or two larger. Wool is a popular choice.

Conclusion

Reminding us of Basque shepherds, artists and poets, the tam is the perfect project for a knitter. It is attractive as a quick, one-color hat or as an elaborate Fair Isle masterpiece. Have fun experimenting with this classic.

Resources

The following are some useful resources for learning more about tams and designing your own.

Tam Construction

Budd, Ann. *The Knitter's Handy Book of Patterns*. Loveland, CO: Interweave, 2002.
Rowe, Mary. *Knitted Tams*. Loveland, CO: Interweave, 1989.
Starmore, Alice. *Alice Starmore's Book of Fair Isle Knitting*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2009.

Express Yourself:

Knit up the classic romance of basque shepherds, artists and poets – or create your own design.

Michelson, Carmen, and Mary-Ann Davis. *The Knitter's Guide to Sweater Design*. Loveland, CO: Interweave, 1989.

Eliminating Color Jogs

Knitting Daily. "Jogless Jog (Meg Swanson's)" <http://www.knittingdaily.com/glossary/jogless-jog-meg-swansen-s.aspx>
Sauerwald, Cindy. "Smooth Transitions." *Vogue Knitting*. Spring/Summer 2000.
TECHknitting. "Jogless stripes – a new way" <http://techknitting.blogspot.com/2007/01/jogless-stripes.html>