

Gathering Summary: The Craft of Knitting by Carol Marie , February 15, 2012



Summary by Catherine Haug

(photo, right, of felted hat, knit scarf & mittens by C. Haug)

Introduction

Carol, of Witty Knitters in Bigfork, brought lots of samples of knitted, felted & needle-punched items, as well as tools used in working with yarn & fibers to view. Her friend Roxy demonstrated how to use a drop spindle to make yarn from roving (cleaned and combed wool batt). Several audience members brought in-progress and finished knit items.

There was no handout for this event.

Witty Knitters in Bigfork is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 AM - 6 PM. You can come in any day except Wednesday for help with your projects or to learn how to knit, at no cost except for your materials - Carol believes in passing it on. Wednesday is for socializing at the group table: food, fun, laughter.

Her yarns are mostly natural fiber, including local alpaca yarn from [Going to the Sun Fiber Mill](#) (GTS).

Carol is a fiber artist, with a Masters in Fine Art. She knits, crochets, felts, weaves, spins, dyes, embroiders, makes dolls - just about anything you can do with fiber.

Yarn crafts

There are many creative ways to use roving or yarn; Carol addressed of the following.

Knitting

Why knit?

- For fun, relaxation, creativity, to keep your brain and hands active, and you can take it anywhere.
- You can take something 'completely flat' and turn it into something you can use.
- It's utilitarian - you can make wearable clothes and useful household items.
- It has a reasonable cost and the tools (needles) are reusable.

Knitting today is different - you can find yarns made from every fiber imaginable; for example, sugar cane. There are washable yarns and yarns made by blending fibers. There is always something to learn; sometimes we learn by mistake.

While there are lots of different ways to knit, there is only one stitch: knit (purl is just a backward knit stitch). Yet using this one stitch in different ways, you can create an infinite number of patterns.

Crochet

Carol brought two items crocheted with a gigantic wooden crochet hook (made by a local person), and two shawl-like collars that she crocheted with the large hook.

Needlepunch

This is done with a special barbed needle poked into roving*, to make things like decorative bowls, children's toys (she showed a teddy bear as an example). Kits are available.

**Roving* is sheep's wool batt, after cleaning and combing, then attenuated with a bit of twist to a certain size (about wrist-thick), but before it is spun.

Felting

Most felting projects are made by knitting a very large version of the intended item, then washing it in hot water to make it shrink, making a very durable fabric that can be cut and it won't unravel. 100% wool must be used; its barbs along the fibers catch other fibers and stick together. You can also recycle old wool sweaters by felting. [Cat's note: those circular poodle skirts from the 1950s were made of felted wool.]

There's a bit of science or math involved, in determining the size to knit to get the desired end size after shrinking:

- Wool will shrink more in height than width.
- Water temperature, the type of fiber and many other variables affect the end result

In Russia, a slightly different method of felting is used to make very durable and waterproof boots. In this case, the wool roving is wetted, then pressed against a wood form of the foot & lower leg, in layers, rather like making *pâpier maché*.

Spinning with drop spindle

This technique was demonstrated by Roxy, using a drop spindle she made, and a bit of roving from Targhee sheep wool, dyed for her demonstration.

The spindle consists of two main parts: a flat part called a 'whorl,' and a shaft, with a hook or groove at one end that guides the roving onto the spindle. Roxy's whorl was a 5-point star shape, positioned near the top of the shaft. Other spindles can have the whorl positioned in the middle or the bottom of the shaft.

To start, run the roving or the leader through the hook/groove at the top of the spindle's shaft. A leader is a string attached to the fiber, making it easier to start the spinning. But Roxy prefers not to use that. Instead, she just pulls out a bit from the roving and hooks it onto the drop spindle.

Start the spindle to spin by turning it. Then "draft" or pull fiber from the roving, while the spindle spins, twisting the roving into thread or yarn. The spinner will spin on its own but will eventually stop if you don't keep it going.

The thread/yarn can have an 'S' or clockwise twist, or a 'Z' or counterclockwise twist. You can do either, but always use the same twist for one project. If you want to ply the thread (2 or more threads twisted together), spin the ply with the opposite twist as the original thread.

See below for a few instructional sites on using a drop spindle:

Resources & References

1. Going to the Sun Fiber Mill: www.gttsfibermill.com/
2. Wikipedia on spindles: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spindle_\(textiles\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spindle_(textiles))

Using a drop spindle

- Joy of Handspinning: [Spinning Yarn with a Drop Spindle](http://www.joyofhandspinning.com/HowToDropspin.shtml) (www.joyofhandspinning.com/HowToDropspin.shtml)
- YouTube video: [Drop Spindle Basics](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drXid5cToy8), 8 minutes (www.youtube.com/watch?v=drXid5cToy8)
- YouTube video: [Spinning Yarn on a Drop Spindle - Tutorial](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gXTWgMeMgI), 11 minutes (www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gXTWgMeMgI)

Related topics on the EssentialList

- [Gathering Summary: Using Natural Dyes for Fibers, with Joan Goldstein, Sept 22, 2010](http://essentialstuff.org/index.php/2010/10/16/Cat/gathering-summary-using-natural-dyes-for-fibers-by-joan-goldstein-september-22-2010/) (essentialstuff.org/index.php/2010/10/16/Cat/gathering-summary-using-natural-dyes-for-fibers-by-joan-goldstein-september-22-2010/)
- [Gathering Summary: Making Cloth, with Alpine Spinning & Weaving Guild, March 13, 2010](http://essentialstuff.org/index.php/2010/03/19/Cat/gathering-summary-making-cloth-march-13-2010/) (essentialstuff.org/index.php/2010/03/19/Cat/gathering-summary-making-cloth-march-13-2010/)
- [Fiber Arts: Spinning, Dying, Weaving, Knitting, etc.](http://essentialstuff.org/index.php/2009/08/29/Cat/fiber-arts-spinning-dying-weaving-knitting-etc) (essentialstuff.org/index.php/2009/08/29/Cat/fiber-arts-spinning-dying-weaving-knitting-etc)