

Easy Cuff-Down Worsted Weight Socks

The perfect introduction to sock knitting is a pair of socks in worsted weight wool. These socks knit up quickly and the instructions are chatty enough to answer most beginners' questions. After you have learned the basics, you can add color and texture to create your own fancy socks.

I've made over 50 pairs using this pattern, in all types of yarns and in many sizes. Betcha can't make just one!



Yarn: 220 yards of worsted weight wool. The socks pictured above were knit from Deluxe Worsted Magic yarn by Universal Yarn Company in color 901, shades of orange. 220 yards will be plenty to knit a pair of Women's Medium socks with a 9 ½" leg and a 9 ½" foot. If your feet are larger you will need more yarn. If they're smaller, rejoice in your good luck and know that you'll have yarn left over.

With yarn of this weight the socks will fit in Birks or loose shoes or other sandals, or just wear them around the house - it all depends on how loose you wear your shoes.

Gauge: 5 stitches per inch with a US #3 bamboo needle.

A personal note about needles: I prefer a wood or bamboo needle to knit socks. They are warmer to my always-cold hands, and they "give" a little as I knit, making them more comfortable.

These instructions assume that you are familiar with DPN needles and that you know how to knit and purl. I place the stitches on three needles and knit with the forth, using the fifth needle of the set for a short time while decreasing for the gusset.

Cast-on 45 stitches onto a single needle. Put a point protector on the end away from the last cast-on stitch to keep them from sliding off. Start the first row of ribbing: Knit 2, Purl 2 until there are 14 stitches on another DPN needle (needle 1). Start the 2nd needle Purl 2, Knit 2 until there are 20 stitches on the second DPN needle. Start the third needle Purl 2, Knit 2 until there are 10 stitches on the needle. There will still be one stitch left on the 4th needle. Put this last stitch on the beginning of the 1st needle so that when you join in the round you will Knit 2 together for the first stitch. If you are familiar with DPN's you will be able to visualize this when you get there. Knit the first 2 stitches from needle 1, so that needles 1 and 3 have 12 stitches each, and needle 2 has 20 stitches.

Join in the round, being careful not to twist. Starting each needle with a Purl stitch will help to eliminate the "ladders" that can form when knitting in the round on DPN needles.

Knit 20 or so rounds of Knit 2, Purl 2 ribbing, or however much you like at the top of your socks, or until you're tired of it. Some people like to knit the whole leg in ribbing, but I find this boring and tedious, so I prefer only a little ribbing at the top, and then stockinette for the rest of the leg. Remember that you are working with a limited amount of yarn, so be a little conservative on the rib and leg. You can always use a contrasting color for the rib, heel, and toe if you experience any YSO (Yarn Shortage Anxiety)

Knit about 30 rounds stockinette, or as many rounds as you like. Rearrange the stitches on the needles so that there are 22 stitches on needle 2, and 11 stitches on needles 1 and 3.

Now for the heel -

I like the feel of a "Dutch" heel. In order to get to the heel, we have to knit a flap. I like to use a "heel stitch" for the heel flap because it makes a firmer fabric, and it pulls in, making the heel flap narrower. I have a narrow heel, so this fits me just right. If you have no problems with a narrow heel, you can work stockinette stitch for the same number of rows, instead.

The heel flap is knit on half of the foot stitches - 22. Leave the other 22 stitches alone or put them on a holder.

To knit the heel stitch -

Row one - * Slip 1 stitch, Knit 1 stitch* repeating from * to * across.

Row 2 - Slip the first stitch and Purl across.

By slipping the first stitch of each row, you will make a series of loops on each side of the heel flap which will make it easier to pick up stitches for the gusset.

Repeat these two rows 10 times, or about 2.5 - 3". It will depend on how deep you need your heel flap. Measure from your anklebone to the floor to get a rough idea of how far you need to knit. The only sure way to know is to knit a sock and try it on, but this guesstimate is a good place to start.

Now to turn the heel: It sounds scary at first, and confusing, and illogical, but if you follow the instructions blindly, without letting your brain argue, and have faith that everything will turn out fine, you'll be able to do it with little or no hair pulling. You will be working with the stitches of the heel flap - 22 stitches.

It goes like this -

Row one - Slip the first stitch, Knit 14, Knit 2 together, turn.

Row two - Slip the first stitch, Purl 7, Purl 2 together, turn.

Row three - Slip the first stitch, Knit 7, Knit 2 together, turn.

Repeat rows two and three until there are 8 stitches left on the needle. You will not be knitting every stitch on each row - you will be creating short rows that will form a cup that will follow the shape of your heel. The stitch count will decrease with each row.

End on a RS row, which means you will have to Purl across to finish where you need to be.

Knit these 8 stitches. With a crochet hook, pick up one stitch in each of the slipped stitches on the sides of the heel flap. The number will vary, and that's okay. It's always good to "fake it" and pick up a couple of extra stitches at the beginning and end of the heel flap - this will help eliminate any holes.

I picked up 15 stitches on the first side of the heel flap, knit across the stitches previously neglected on the third needle (the instep stitches), then picked up another 15 stitches on the other side of the heel flap, and knit across the heel stitches to the beginning.

This brought my total stitch count to 60 stitches. This may vary, so don't be too worried about it. The important things are these:

1. Its always better to pick up more stitches than fewer - this way your socks won't have gaps at the sides.
2. Be sure that you pick up the same number of stitches on each side of the heel flap. If you can't, it's not a big deal, just make sure that you decrease on the side with more stitches in the first round, so that the numbers end up even.

Now for the gusset decreases: Knit one round even - this will even out the picked-up stitches and make the decreases easier to perform - picked-up stitches sometimes are tight and don't like to be knit together.

Put the stitches on four needles: The picked-up stitches on the left side of the gusset on needle 1, the instep stitches on needle 2, the picked-up stitches on the right side of the gusset on needle 3, and the heel stitches on needle 4.

Next round:

Knit to the 3rd stitch from the end, Knit 2 together, Knit the last stitch on needle 1.

Knit the instep stitches even.

Knit 1, Knit 2 together, knit to the end of needle 3.

Knit even across needle 4 to the end.

Next round: Knit even.

Repeat these two rounds until you reach 44 stitches, alternating a decrease round with an even round. This works for most feet. If you have a narrow heel or foot, you may need to do two decrease rounds, followed by one even round until you reach the number of stitches you need. Knitter's choice. If your socks are regularly loose around the ankle, you may want to try this way, if not, consider yourself lucky and continue on to the foot.

Rearrange the needles so that there are 22 stitches on needle 2, and 11 stitches on needles 1 and 3.



After the gusset decreases are done, its time for the foot. This is just endless rounds of stockinette stitch, around and around. It helps to make a mark on a scrap of paper or use a row counter if you are as anal as I am about making the socks identical. That way you only have to measure one sock, and the second becomes very meditative - just stockinette stitch and marks on the paper.

Stop knitting when the sock measures 1 1/2" less than the length of your foot from the back of the heel to the tip of your longest toe. Measure the sock from the back of the heel flap to the bottom of the current round of stitches to check your progress. This may vary slightly depending on your row gauge. If you measure how far 11 rows is, you can subtract that from your foot measurement, and calculate how soon to start the toe decreases.

Once you reach this point, it's time for the toe decreases.

Needle 1 - Knit until 3 stitches from the end, Knit 2 together, Knit 1.

Needle 2 - Knit 1, Knit 2 together, Knit until 3 stitches from the end, Knit 2 together, Knit 1.

Needle 3 - Knit 1, Knit 2 together, Knit to the end.

Next round - Knit even around.

Repeat these two rounds 6 times - 20 stitches remain.

Knit across needle 1. Put the stitches from needle 1 and 3 onto one needle. Graft the two together, run in all the loose ends on the inside of the sock, and you're done!

There are many sites on the web for the Kitchner stitch, and every good knitting reference has instruction and pictures, so I won't include them here. If you're in a hurry and not too picky, a 3-needle bind off works just as well and doesn't require a needle.

Put the sock on and see if it fits. If it's a little off, that's okay - make the appropriate changes on the second one.

Put your foot up on a coffee table or low stool, and admire your work. While the heady feeling of making your own sock is still with you - and before you get up to do anything else (some arcane superstition, but I still do this ;-)) cast-on for the second sock.

Send me a picture, and I'll post it on my website - with credit to you, of course.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have via e-mail – just drop me a note at catmccall@gmail.com.

Happy Knitting!

Mary in South Beach, Oregon

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