



Tips and Tricks for Working with Lace

by Sandi Rosner

Spring is the time when we turn to light and airy knitting. The delicate openwork of lace is what many of us crave with the return of warm weather and as a result many of the designs in this issue feature lace as an all-over pattern or focal point.

But knitting lace can be tricky. Most patterns rely on charts. Troubleshooting mistakes can be a challenge. And ripping back hours of work to fix a problem can send the most intrepid knitter screaming from the room.

In this issue, we'll share some simple techniques that will keep you happily knitting lace all summer long.

Chart Your Progress

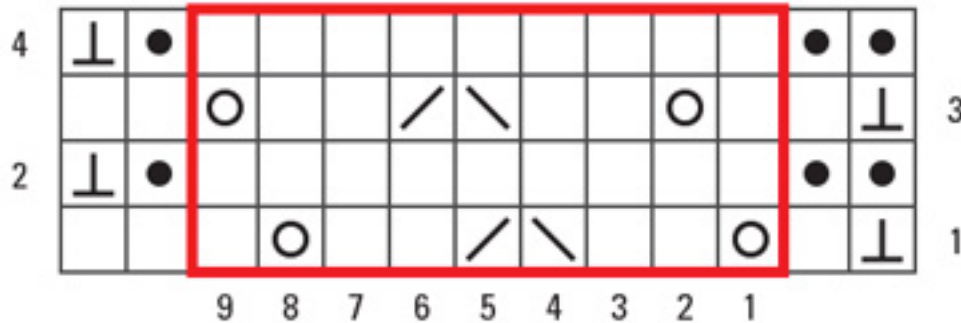
Most lace patterns are presented as charts. This is particularly helpful when knitting lace, because the chart provides visual representation of the knitting, allowing you to easily see how the stitch you are working relates to the stitches in the rows below, as well as how it fits into the overall pattern.

If you are new to charts, here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. Study the chart's key before beginning to knit. This handy little graphic defines each symbol used in the chart, explaining which stitch it represents. Most charts use standard

- symbols with which you'll quickly become familiar. Be sure you understand any symbols that are new to you.
2. Charts are drawn as if the right side of the knitting is facing you. The symbols on each row show you how the row will look after it is complete.
 3. In most charts, each square represents one stitch in one row. Some charts show right-side rows only. In these cases, there will be a note telling you how to work the wrong-side rows—usually purling all the stitches or knitting the knits and purling the purls as they appear.
 4. Row numbers will appear at the side of the chart where the row begins. When working in the round, all rows will be numbered on the right-hand side of the chart, since all rows are worked from right to left. When working back and forth in rows, the odd-numbered rows are usually (but not always) right-side rows and appear on the right-hand side of the chart. The even-numbered rows are usually (but not always) wrong-side rows and appear on the left-hand side of the chart. If the odd row numbers are on the left-hand side, they are wrong-side rows.
 5. Pay attention to notations at the margins of the charts. You'll often find important information about how many times a pattern is to be repeated.
 6. Find a method you like for keeping track of which row you are knitting. I use a sticky note placed just above the current row, so I can see the rows I've already finished, but not the rows yet to come. Metal clipboards with magnetic strips and highlighter tape are other good options.

Vine Lace Chart



knit on RS, purl on WS



yo



purl on RS, knit on WS



k2tog



slip with yarn in front



ssk



pattern repeat

Stitch Markers Are Your Friends

Stitch markers are very helpful for keeping your lace design on track. The pattern may call for markers to divide a garment into sections, or to mark shaping points. You can choose to add markers between each repeat of your lace pattern. If you find that your stitch count is off at the end of a row, markers can help you isolate the area where you went astray.



If you are using more markers than called for in the pattern, try using different colored markers for different purposes to avoid confusion.

I'd Like To Use A Lifeline

Many knitters have preserved their sanity with the judicious use of lifelines. In knitting, a lifeline is a strand of waste yarn run through the stitches at a point when you know your knitting is error free. If you make a mistake and need to rip back, the knitting will not unravel past the lifeline. You'll be able to follow the lifeline as you re-insert your needle, and begin knitting again knowing you're back on track.

Twist Collective

Last Updated on Friday, 12 April 2013 22:32

Published on Tuesday, 12 March 2013 13:27

Use a smooth yarn for your lifeline, thinner than your working yarn and in a contrasting color. Don't use anything fuzzy or bumpy— you want to be able to pull it out easily without leaving fibers behind. Fine crochet cotton works well. Some knitters use dental floss; it is inexpensive and easy to carry in your knitting tool kit. Just avoid the waxed or minty varieties—you don't want to leave residue in your knitting.

To create a lifeline, cut a strand of waste yarn a yard or so longer than the knitting is wide. Thread it on a tapestry needle, and then use the tapestry needle to feed the lifeline through the stitches alongside your knitting needle. This is most easily done with circular needles, where you can push the knitting off the tips and onto the thinner needle cable. Be careful to go around, not through, any stitch markers; you don't want your markers caught on the lifeline.



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Some brands of interchangeable circular needles have a small hole in the connector fitting which is intended for tightening the join. If you are using this style of needle, you can skip the tapestry needle. Just thread your waste yarn through the little hole. As you knit the row, the lifeline will be carried through the row along with your needle. One brand has recently introduced the "lifeline cord." The cables of these circular needles have a little slit near the end into which you can insert your lifeline. The lifeline is then carried through your stitches as you knit the row. But you'll have to remove any stitch markers or they'll be caught in the cord. Just place them again, in the following row.

When you've fed the lifeline through a row of stitches, simply leave the ends hanging on each side and move on to the next row. Don't worry about whether or not you are knitting into the lifeline as you make your new stitches. As long as it is a contrasting color, it won't confuse your stitch counts.



If you need to rip back your knitting, just remove the needle and start unraveling. You won't be able to unravel past the lifeline.



Follow the path of the lifeline as you insert your needle through the stitches. You'll be good to go in no time.

Many knitters insert a lifeline after each correct pattern repeat. If you are really struggling with a pattern, there is no law against putting in a lifeline after every row.

Troubleshooting

Despite your best efforts, the time will come when you make a mistake. You'll notice that the pattern looks wonky, or your stitch count will be off.

Here's how to get back on track:

First, count the stitches in each pattern repeat and compare it to the chart to find out where along the row the mistake was made. Here is where those markers between each pattern repeat will come in handy.

Once you've identified the section (or sections) where the numbers don't match up, examine the knitting closely. Compare each stitch to the chart until you find the problem.

Many times, there is no need to rip out your work. If you have a yarn over as the first or last stitch of your pattern repeat, it may simply be that your stitch marker has migrated under the yarn over, giving one too many stitches in one repeat and one too few in the next. Simply push the marker back where it belongs. Using larger stitch markers can minimize this issue. I like to use markers embellished with small beads—they're pretty and they stay where I put them.

Perhaps you have missed putting in a yarn over. In the following row, just knit to the spot where the yarn over should be and use your left-hand needle to pick up the strand running between the stitches. Voila! Yarn over made. As long as you don't try this more than once or twice in a row, no one will be the wiser.



Did an extra yarn over sneak in where it doesn't belong? In the next row, just drop that yarn over off the needle and continue with the rest of the row. Again, as long as you don't do it more than once or twice in a row, any little bit of looseness from that dropped yarn over will work its way into the surrounding stitches.



If your mistake is more significant and you do need to rip back your work, take a moment first to congratulate yourself on having a lifeline in place. Then pull out the needle and start unraveling. We've all been there.

Sandi Rosner is a knitter who wears many hats: designer, technical editor, writer and teacher. She loves the little details that elevate a knitting project from homemade to handmade. Follow Sandi's blog at <http://www.knittinginwinecountry.blogspot.com>.
