

Amy O'Neill Houck

At my local knitting group, a shift seems to have happened, or maybe it is more of a convergence. Three years ago, when I had just arrived, I was somewhat of a novelty as someone who crocheted much more often than I knit. Quietly, slowly, more new members who crocheted arrived and knitters found reasons to pick up hooks. One night Lisa asked me to teach her how to make granny squares. Emily and Heidi joined the group around the same time. They switched effortlessly between hook and needle and would wow us with their crocheted inventions. Hannah learned to crochet a scarf at a charity event. Last winter when even Jennifer couldn't resist the urge any longer and made a crocheted hat, I knew that change was in full swing.

What might push you as a knitter over the hump and prompt you to pick up the hook? It could be the allure of a specific project—the desire to make that lacy scarf or the pair of baby booties that keeps catching your eye. Maybe you've got granny square fever, or ripple blanket mania. Maybe you've crocheted edges on your knitting for years and you're finally ready to learn more.

If you are willing to expand your mind and your creativity to the possibilities of crochet, you'll discover a medium that works both sides of your brain a bit differently than your knitting, and a medium that allows you to take your yarn in new directions, literally. When I design in knitting, I often do much of the work on paper before I knit a stitch. Knitting's linear qualities make it very easy for me to plan things out and then stick to that plan. With crochet, I often design with hook and yarn in hand. Crochet's inherent sculptural qualities mean that I can change direction at any moment, work up or down any edge of my work and create unusual shapes with ease. The stability of the crochet stitch makes changing colors simple, and the ability to add any number of chains (spaces) between stitches at any point opens up a world of lace possibilities.

Whatever your reason for trying crochet, beginning anything new can be a bit daunting and takes the right motivation. Pick a project that really inspires you. Even if that project is not the first thing you stitch, having that goal will keep you going.

Just as you are happiest knitting when yarn and needle combine to make your yarn seem to flow effortlessly into fabric, you will have more success crocheting with the right tools and fiber.

- **Choose a yarn you love:** for learning, make sure it is light in color, smooth and medium weight.
- **Play with hooks:** find a shop (or a friend) that has a nice selection of hooks to try out.
- **Change styles:** experiment with materials and sizes until you find one that feels right to you. Keep in mind that as in knitting, crochet has no “right” way.
- **Learn different ways to hold your hook and yarn:** experiment until you find what works for you.
- **Find a teacher:** find one who understands your learning style, and ask for help when you

need it.

Learning to crochet is a bit like learning to knit all over again. If you've been knitting since childhood the change will feel quite awkward. Go slowly. Think like a kid. To a child, learning something new is part of everyday life, and that beginners' mind, that openness to new sensations, and that willingness to make mistakes, makes the process more enjoyable.