

By Clara Parkes

*Knitters talk about how certain yarns are ideal for lace, others for ribbing; how some yarns will give you magnificent drape, while others will hug you tight. This is fine if you're working a pattern that has only one such quality throughout. But what about those patterns that throw the whole kitchen sink at us?*

That's precisely why I chose to swatch [Colette](#). It has snug, body-hugging ribbing around the waist. But it also has a band of lace openwork around the middle and smooth stockinette up top. Adding to the yarn challenge is a summer styling that demands warm-weather fibers—which aren't known for their bounce or elasticity.

The pattern itself calls for Classic Elite Wool Bam Boo, which contains equal parts wool and bamboo that have been intimately blended and spun into a fairly springy and pearlescent multiple-ply yarn. It's a fine choice for this project because the bamboo provides excellent evaporative cooling abilities and a silky shimmer while the wool pulls the fibers together.

Margrit Sage told me she'd envisioned silk as she was designing Colette, so I set out to find a suitable silk blend. I say "blend" because silk, although exquisitely soft and luminous on its own, lacks the bounce necessary to keep that ribbed bodice snug. On its own, silk could easily get too heavy, causing the garment to stretch awkwardly at the shoulders and widen at the bottom, making the wearer feel a little bit like a human bell.

Nothing rectifies an elasticity problem quite like wool, so that's where I began. I found Sublime Cashmere Merino Silk DK, a yarn nearly identical to the Wool Bam Boo but with more merino (75%

extra fine merino) blended with 20% silk and 5% cashmere.



While I consider the cashmere mostly symbolic (it's hard to feel anything at only 5%), the 20% silk is enough to give a telltale shimmer while the merino still keeps all the stitches plush and snug. This is one of many multiple-ply wool blends you can try. This kind of yarn produces round, clean stitches and gives both the ribbing and the lace a high-relief, three-dimensional quality.



What if you want to enjoy the well-rounded elasticity of a multiple-ply wool blend but you don't want any actual wool in the mix? Many such yarns exist, too. Particularly notable is Berroco Comfort DK. Made of completely synthetic materials (50% super fine nylon and 50% super fine acrylic), this yarn is cable-spun—i.e., the composite strands are twisted together in one direction to form plies, and then plied together in the opposite direction to complete the yarn. (Brown Sheep Cotton Classic is also spun this way.)





The result is a soft yet extremely strong, slightly elastic, and well-rounded yarn that performs as equally well on the ribbing as it does in the lace and stockinette. It can be tossed in the washer and dryer, and it doesn't have an ounce of wool in it.



Although nylon and acrylic are both extremely strong, nylon lacks good moisture uptake and can feel a bit clammy against your skin if, say, you find yourself walking through a rain forest. If you really need this top to have evaporative cooling, I have two possible yarn routes: one that keeps the elasticity, and one that kicks it out the door and cranks up the A/C.

The first option is well-represented in O-Wool Balance, a certified organic 50/50 blend of cotton and wool. These two fibers actually become better when blended together, each offsetting the other's shortcomings. O-Wool has spun the fibers into a woolen-style two-ply yarn.



Knit up, it creates a mossy, decidedly earthy fabric surface that renders plump ribbing, full stockinette, and a very textural lacework. The yarn's 50% wool content and its jumbled woolen preparation also make it extra forgiving of irregular stitch tension, which might come in handy for some of us.





If that 50% wool still worries you, you have one more option: Abandon all hopes of bounce or elasticity and go for a yarn that will keep you cooler than any animal fiber-based blend could. The only caveat is that the yarn should be light enough to hold the ribbing without sagging. An unsung hero in this category is Elsebeth Lavold Hemptathy, a fine, firm, and extraordinarily cool-wearing blend of 34% hemp, 41% cotton, and 25% modal, made from the reconstituted cellulose from beech trees.



While the hemp and cotton provide extraordinary air-conditioning abilities, the modal has a delicious hint of shimmer that occasionally sparkles through the fog of the other fibers.





Or you could try something entirely different and surprise me. Go ahead, swatch and see!