

Knitting

BY JULIA SMILLIE



You've probably noticed how popular knitting has become recently, but you may not realize that this fun pastime dates back thousands of years. Exactly when—and where—knitting began is a topic of much debate. However, most historians agree that it was likely in ancient Egypt, although perhaps with different techniques from those we use today.



Knitting—which sometimes gets a rep (unfairly!) for being a “girly” endeavor—was actually invented and popularized by men.

Historians believe it was developed by fishermen to make their nets and then was spread around the world by sailors traveling from Arabia.

By about the 5th century, knitting was well established in Europe, but it wasn't yet something people did for fun. In fact, for centuries, knitting was practiced only by skilled male artisans. They produced mainly luxury items, such as stockings, for the very wealthy—kings, queens, and other royalty.

Over the next few hundred years, knitting spread to the masses. Adopted by women and children, knitting was a task of pure necessity. Because clothing wasn't mass-produced, people knit their own socks, sweaters, hats, and scarves. Sometimes knitting was taught to the poor as a way to earn money by knitting and selling items.

By the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution introduced machines that could mass-produce knit garments. Knitting remained a hobby for some, and those who could not afford to buy clothes in the shops still made their own.

During World Wars I and II, civilians knitted socks and other supplies for troops in combat. Afterward, many continued to knit as a hobby or out of necessity. However, it had become faster and cheaper to buy clothes, and knitting dropped in popularity with younger generations.

Now knitting is back, with a vengeance! Why? It seems people are rediscovering crafts and the joys of being creative with your own two hands. Plus, in the last ten years designers have created cool, modern patterns—and there are so many more types of fun yarn, all at affordable prices. Yarn shops have popped up all over the country, along with books, magazines, websites, and TV and radio shows about knitting. There's never been a better time to take up your needles and put a very modern spin on this ancient craft.



How to get started (-:)

The best way to learn how to knit is to get someone you know to teach you. Many yarn and craft shops offer classes, too. There are also some great books that can help you get started on a variety of terrific projects:

Knitrrrl: Learn to Knit with 15 Fun & Funky Projects

by Shannon Okey
Clear instructions and projects that include standards (hats, scarves) as well as wristlets, a faux fur stole, leg warmers, and more. (If you love it, check out *Knitrrrl 2* for more.) Grades 5 & up.



Girls' Best Book of Knitting, Sewing, and Embroidery

by Virginie Desmoulins
This book uses colorful illustrations and step-by-step lessons for beginner level projects to introduce you to the world of knitting. The best part, the book comes with perforated embroidery cards, patterns for tracing, and a pop-out cardboard doll. Grades 5 & up



Teen Knitting Club: Chill Out and Knit

by Jennifer Wenger et al.
Features teen girls and boys knitting. Covers the basics and offers 35 cool projects. Bonus: a section on starting your own knitting club and tips from teen knitters. Grades 5 & up.

