

Knitting with and Caring for Alpaca Yarns

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Yarn Preparation

- ☞ Wash alpaca yarn in a top-loading washer before using it. This removes residual spinning oil and brightens the yarn.
- ☞ Make sure the skein is twisted into a hank. Use mild soap or shampoo. Set washer on SPIN, fill with very warm water, and allow hanks to soak for 5-10 minutes. Turn the machine back on to SPIN. Repeat soak and SPIN until water runs clear.
- ☞ To dry, untwist the hank and hang the skein to air dry. Shower curtain hangers make great holders for skeins.
- ☞ NEVER allow yarn to agitate in a washing machine. NEVER use a front-loading washer. You'll end up with felt.
- ☞ If a top-loading washer is unavailable, follow same process in a sink. After the final rinse, roll the skeins in a towel to remove the excess water. Again, take care not to agitate the yarn!

Characteristics of Alpaca Fibers

- ☞ Fine alpaca fiber feels wonderful when worn next to the skin. Stronger (higher micron) fiber is better used for outerwear or felting.
- ☞ Use lighter-weight alpaca yarns, such as Sportweight, DK and Medium Worsted. Fine yarns have more twist and will be less likely to shed.
- ☞ Double up the strands of light-weight yarns to accommodate patterns that call for bulky yarn and larger needles. Be aware that alpaca is 7 times warmer than wool. Bulky garments are best worn for outdoor wear.
- ☞ When knitting with alpaca yarn, check to see if it is made of US alpaca. Local breeders focus more on crimped fiber, which adds "memory" to yarn.
- ☞ Blending alpaca with other fine fibers, like merino, can add memory to yarn.

Techniques for Working with Alpaca

- ☞ Garter stitches tend to stretch. Cable and other specialty stitches will keep the yarn more contained.
- ☞ When winding a skein into a pull-from-the-center ball, hold both ends and slide your fingers along the strands back from the ends to feel or see which strand is going "with the grain." That's the one that you want to start winding and knitting for more even stitches.
- ☞ Use patterns that call for knitting pieces, not in the round, as the seams will help the garment hold its shape.
- ☞ Knitting garments sideways will help them maintain their structure, as stretch tends to happen in length and not width.
- ☞ Finished garments should be blocked every time they are washed. Like cotton, once alpaca stretches, it is unlikely to go back to its original shape, even if blocked (unless it is blended with wool).

Needles Well Suited for Alpaca Yarn

- ☞ Tighter stitches on smaller (#0-6) needles will hold their structure better than loosely knit stitches.
- ☞ Larger needles will give a lacey effect. Airy, lacey alpaca scarves, shawls and sweaters are still remarkably warm!
- ☞ Using wooden needles rather than metal or plastic gives alpaca yarn more resistance and grip.
- ☞ ENJOY knitting with and wearing this soft, lustrous, LUXURIOUS fiber!