

Make a Pair of Swedish Mittens with Your Icelandic Yarn

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Although I love our Icelandic sheep and the country they come from, I cannot boast a drop of Icelandic blood. Instead, my ancestors are Swedish. And not so long ago (just two generations), my family was farming the mid section of Sweden. So, when I first saw a pair of Lovikka mittens while traveling through Sweden during college, I felt an instant connection to them and I purchased them on the spot. Years later, my Swedish heritage collided with an Icelandic sheep raising hobby and I realized that knitting a pair of these lovely mittens with a single ply, somewhat chunky Icelandic yarn was really the perfect combination.

The Story of the Lovikka Mitten

Lovikka mittens are known for being extra thick with turned back embroidered cuffs and a soft fuzzy appearance. The story goes that the first Lovikka mitten was knit in the late 1800s by a Swedish woman commissioned to make a pair of extra thick mittens by a local woodsman. She spun an extra thick yarn for the mittens, but when the woodsman saw them, he thought she had ruined the wool. Attempting to rescue her project, she washed the mittens several times, added embroidery to the cuffs and brushed them both inside and out to soften them. The new mitten was a hit and its popularity spread throughout Scandinavia.

In researching this further, I found that the technique of knitting with loosely spun, soft, thick yarn and brushing up afterward has been used widely in Iceland as well. It makes the fabric more durable, firmer, and warmer for the wearer.

Making the Mittens

If you haven't made a pair of mittens before, these are probably the simplest mittens to make. With relatively few stitches, big needles, and very little shaping, these mittens are a perfect first mitten project. If you need a little more encouragement, you should know that my Swedish friend tells me that these mittens are knit as a third grade project!

Choosing the right yarn is important when making these mittens. A good sturdy yarn is needed if you intend to brush up the mittens after making them. I used a chunky single ply Icelandic yarn that was spun by Taos Valley Woolen Mill. The yarn is slightly heavier than the commercial Lopi yarn by Reynolds.

Size:

The mitten is sized to fit a small (medium) women's hand.

Supplies:

Yarn: Chunky weight Icelandic single ply
Needles: Size 10 double point needles or size needed to obtain correct gauge.
Notions: Yarn needle and dyed wool embroidery yarn for embellishment

Gauge: 6 sts and 9 rows equal 2"/5cm before fulling

Directions:

Right Mitten

*Cast on 28 (32) sts. onto 3 double point needles. Join to make a round.

Purl 2 rnds.

Knit 10 (11) rnds. Turn the mitten inside out so that the wrong side of the cuff is facing out.

Knit 17 (19) rnds.**

Put 5 (6) sts on a holder for the thumb.

Cast on 5 (6) sts above and knit to end of round.

Knit 18 (20) rounds.

K1, ssk, k 9 (11) sts, k2tog, repeat.

K 1 round.

K1, ssk, k 7 (9) sts, k2 tog, repeat.

K 1 round.

K1, ssk, k 5 (7) sts, k2 tog, repeat.

K 1 round.

Cont to decrease in manner above **every round** until 8 sts remain. Cut yarn, draw through loops and pull tight.

Thumb

Transfer 5 (6) sts on holder to one needle and pick up an additional 7 (8) sts with the other two needles.

Knit 11 (12) rounds.

Ssk, k2 (3), k2 tog. Repeat to end of round.

Knit one round.

Ssk, k 0 (1) k2 tog, repeat to end of round.

Cut yarn, draw through loops and pull tight.

Left Mitten

Make mitten from * to **.

Knit across first 9 (10) sts. Put next 5 (6) sts on a holder. Cast on 5 (6) sts above and knit to end of round.

Cont as for right mitten.

Finishing

Note: These instructions assume a top-loading machine. Front loaders can also be used, but are more difficult in interrupt and may take more cycles for the fabric to felt.

Set the washing machine for a hot wash/cold rinse, low load and the longest cycle. Use a small amount of laundry detergent. Place the mittens in a small laundry bag and add a few clothing items such as old towels, jeans or t-shirts to the load to increase the friction and promote the felting process.

Start the washing machine and stay nearby. It is important to check the mittens often. After the first wash cycle (but before the rinse cycle), open the machine and check the size of the mittens. Adjust the machine to continue washing, if needed. Continue to check the mittens every few minutes. When the mittens are the desired size, take out of machine and rinse by hand. Avoid using the spin cycle as this tends to create folds in the fabric of the mittens which are often hard to reverse. After rinsing, squeeze and roll up in a towel to soak up excess moisture. Lay the mittens on a towel in a warm place to air dry. At this point, you can also stretch and manipulate the project to make sure that lines are straight and the mittens look the way you want them to look.

For a final finishing, use a hairbrush to brush up the mitten both inside and out avoiding the cuff. The cuff can then be embroidered with colorful yarns.

Sources:

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