

Guide to Vegan Knitting: 10 Tips to Terrific Knits!



1. View your Veganism from Another Angle

Hello fellow knitting friend! You may be asking yourself, “What IS vegan knitting?”. These 10 tips will help you (*or anyone who loves to knit*) to figure out the materials you’ll need to enjoy your craft without using any yarn, tools or supplies that contain animal products. It’s so easy to do once you know what to look for!

As a knitter of long standing (*over 18 years!*), but also a relatively new vegan (*only 4 years...and counting!*), I know that I was entirely caught off guard when someone asked me about my knitting habits as a vegan. It didn’t even occur to me that I would change anything regarding my craft but, once I thought about it for a minute, it made **so** much sense! We’re basically using animal hair to knit up garments to wear on our bodies, much like we would wear fur or leather as a coat or belt. I asked myself, do I truly want to be doing this? My answer was firmly no. I want all of the stunning creations that I spend many, many hours knitting (*and wearing*) to be free of pain and suffering.

From that moment on, I decided to figure out a way to make my craft full of only the joy of knitting, the beauty of yarn and the power of PLANTS (*just like my delicious food*)!

2. Discover the Difference between “Normal” & “Vegan” yarn

As you may know, most “normal” or commercial yarns are made of either synthetic or animal fibers. (*Sometimes, there is a mixture of the two.*) Luckily, there are also yarns that contain **only** natural plant fibers, too. Both synthetic and plant based fiber yarns could classify as “vegan” yarn. **Yay!**

When I first looked into this, I know that I was surprised to find out what some yarns were made of! It's something I took for granted ("*yarn is just yarn*") or something I never really thought much about. How wrong I was! It's fascinating to discover where yarn comes from and, at that time also being a spinner, I only had experience with animal fiber and very little knowledge about plant fibers.

Here are some examples of synthetic, animal and plant fibers that you may be familiar with and some that might be new to you.

Synthetic Fiber:

Acrylic, microfiber (*a polyester based*) and nylon (*polymer based*), all of which are basically made up of plastic with a petroleum / chemical base

Animal Fiber:

Alpaca, angora (*rabbit*), bison, camel, cashmere (*goat*), llama, mohair (*goat*), qiviut (*musk ox*), silk (*silkworm*), vicuna, wool (*sheep*), yak

Plant Fiber:

Bamboo, cotton, hemp, linen, tencel (*cellulose or eucalyptus*)

Now that you know the difference between the three types of yarn, it will be super simple to choose the cruelty free option for your next project!

3. Abolish Animal Fibers & Furs

Although animal fiber yarn is warm, light and also biodegradable, the suffering that it causes the animals FAR outweighs the positive attributes. We have an in-depth article (www.worldofvegan.com/wool) that explains everything you need to know. Simply put, fiber animals do not just "get a haircut", but they are placed into very stressful and painful situations so that their overgrown (*unnatural*) hair covering can be sheared off. The process is FAR from cruelty free and it's best to be aware of the situation so you can avoid being part of more animal suffering.

4. Ponder the Pros & Cons of Natural fiber & Synthetic yarns

Once you know what should avoid knitting with, you can concentrate on the good stuff - **WHICH** amazing plant fibers to knit with! This chart might help to choose the right yarn for the right project:

FIBERS	PROS	CONS	SUITABLE PROJECTS
Synthetic	Inexpensive, easy to find, colorful/patterned, saturated colors and hard wearing	Possible scratchy texture, not breathable, not biodegradable, plastic-y feel	Baby clothing, baby blankets, accessories, pet items, rugs, quick gifts, outdoor gear
Bamboo	Beautiful shine, saturated colors, blocks and drapes well, silky soft, biodegradable, breathable, lightweight	Can be expensive, hard to find and a little bit slippery to knit with at times, especially in laceweight.	Lightweight shawls, scarves, sweaters, cowls, baby blankets, baby clothing and, when combined with cotton, socks.
Cotton	Soft, strong, blocks well, biodegradable, breathable, hard wearing, easy to find, usually inexpensive	Heavy, can be difficult on the hands when knitting for some people, colors not as saturated	Washcloths, blankets, baby items, socks, cowls, scarves, household items, tops, summer items and rugs
Hemp/ Linen	Durable, somewhat lightweight, blocks well, biodegradable, softens over time, drapes well	Can be scratchy to knit with at first, may be hard to find in stores, a little bit pricy, colors not as saturated	Shawls, scarves, towels, kitchen or bathroom items, sweaters, socks and warm weather clothing
Tencel	Absorbs moisture and releases quickly, great shine, soft, biodegradable, bacteria resistant, airy, lightweight, good for sensitive skin, strong, drapes well	Harder to find, colors not as saturated, may be a little more expensive, does not block well	Any warmer weather items, skirts, tops/sweaters, cowls, socks (when combined with cotton), lightweight gloves/mittens

5. Know your Knitting Needles & Notions

To get started, grab your knitting bag(s) (*we all know we have many! lol*) and all of your needles and notions. If you have a knitting notebook, get that out too. It'll be the best time to catalog the items you might need to find or purchase later on. Also, find a box for items you might want to swap or sell and a small bag for trash. Now, let's go through everything and see what you have! *Exciting!*

NEEDLES:

We know that needles (and hooks) are usually free of animal products (*please check that none are made out of bone*), but it's good to go through them all and determine what material they are made of, whether you have too many (*or not enough*) and which ones may be broken, etc. It might even be the best time to decide if you want to keep only wooden and bamboo needles or just metal (*or plastic*) ones. Look through them all carefully and place the ones you love in your needle holder and sort the rest into swap/sell or discard. It feels awesome to actually see what you have - you'll most likely find that you have four size 8 needles (*I always have too many because I keep losing them!*) or maybe none at all! Make a note of which needle sizes you need to purchase or replace.

NOTIONS:

This is the **most** fun for me, but I know some knitters despise it. To me, it's like clearing out your purse and feeling fantastic that it's super organized, clean and free of unnecessary items. (*You may even find some bonus cash! Woo!*) I love my notions bags and I truly need two - one for blocking/sewing/pom pom makers/etc (*things that I don't need often*) and one for everyday essentials (*scissors, stitch markers, tapestry needle, measuring tape, pencil, notebook, cable needle, pattern tape, etc*).

6. Shop Smart for Savvy Supplies

Luckily, you can find "vegan" knitting supplies anywhere you find your usual knitting supplies.

- **Craft stores** carry both plant fiber (*mostly cotton*) and synthetic yarns, as well as bamboo, wood, plastic and metal needles.
- **Specialty/local yarn shops** will offer a larger variety of plant based fiber yarns, less synthetic yarns and a greater number of choices for accessories. I find that local yarn stores are also very willing to help you find what you need. Just let them know that you're vegan and looking for non-animal fiber yarn. They can easily point you in the right direction and are usually happy to do so! This type of store may also have more animal based accessories (*leather, suede, silk, bone, fur, etc.*), so be careful when making your purchases.
- **Online yarn shops** may be your best bet, especially if you have something specific in mind. Most online yarn shops have either a search engine which you can look for items like "linen" or "bamboo needles". If you're lucky, the website will also offer a more personalized search that allows you to not only narrow down the type of fiber, but also the thickness - like worsted or laceweight.
- **Online craft shops** (*like Etsy*) are also super helpful and you might just find incredibly unique and beautiful knitting related items that you didn't even know existed! I've found gorgeous, ceramic yarn bowls, handmade wooden knitting needles and hand spun bamboo fiber with the most sensational shine! The only problem you may encounter is the "time suck" factor where you've completely forgotten what you were originally searching for and you now have \$250 worth of amazing pieces in your cart - *whoops!*

No matter where you choose to shop (*or if you shop in multiple places*), there are WAY more wonderful options than there have ever been before...and, hopefully, more in the future! Not only will you be making more careful and cruelty free choices to save the animals, but you'll also become more mindful about how and where you want to spend your money. If you can support a local, vegan friendly artist/store/creator, all the better!

7. Substitutions are Simple(ish)

That's the great thing about knitting - you can alter a knitting pattern just as easily as you can a meal recipe, just substituting vegan options instead. Choosing a plant based (*or synthetic*) yarn is not as difficult as it sounds. The only two things you need to consider are yarn weight and knitting gauge.

- **Yarn Weight:** If the pattern calls for a worsted weight (*4, medium*) yarn in an animal fiber yarn, you can substitute any worsted weight, plant based fiber yarn for it. Keep in mind that some yarns are meant to create a lightweight, drapey fabric (*as in a shawl*) while others are meant to create a firm, durable fabric (*like a sturdy hat or heavyweight sweater*). If you know the purpose of the knitted item you want to make, you can find the most suitable yarn for the purpose. Here are some suggestions to help you along, but you are not limited to these...use what you think is best and give it a try! You can always rip out the swatch and try something else. (*Highly recommended!*)
 - Best yarns for a **lightweight and airy texture** that drape well (*for shawls, thin blankets, berets, finely knit mittens and socks*) - bamboo, tencel, linen
 - Best yarns for a **heavyweight, sturdy texture** that hold up well (*for thicker sweaters, cozy socks, warm blankets and everyday mittens and hats*) - cotton, hemp or a mixture of cotton with another lighter weight yarn from above
- **Knitting Gauge:** I know that many knitters despise knitting up a gauge swatch (*and, you know, sometimes I do too!*), but it is **essential** when you're substituting a different yarn for one that it calls for in the pattern. The designer has specifically chosen that yarn for its structure and finished appearance. If the yarn you are substituting is too thin or too thick, your finished project will not look or wear at all like what the designer intended - or what you dreamed of wearing. Take the time to knit a 4"x4" swatch with the needles and yarn you intend to use. Examine the finished fabric (*Is it too open and loose? Too tight and overly firm?*) and also the texture (*Can you see the pattern you're creating? Does the fabric lay the way you want it to?*) If you're happy with the feel, texture and look of your swatch, then knit away! If not, don't give up and try a new yarn and/or needle size until you get the perfect "Goldilocks" fit!

8. Embrace Eco Friendly Options

If you're also a vegan that cares about the environment (*and who isn't?*), you might also wish to consider more earth friendly options when shopping for new stash or supplies.

- Choose **plant based fiber yarns** whenever possible and pass over synthetic versions.

- Consider purchasing only **digital patterns** or, if you find it easier to knit from a paper copy, use 100% post recycled paper when printing (*or reuse one side of already printed papers you aren't using*).
- Buy **bamboo or wooden** straight needles or double pointed needles (*dpns*), which can easily biodegrade in the compost.
- For circular needles, choose cables that are made out of **metal instead of plastic** or, even better, choose **kits** which offer interchangeable cords and tips to save not only time and money, but also additional materials that might end up in the landfill.
- Discard your plant based yarn scraps in the **compost** instead of throwing them in the trash...or perhaps make a **cute pet toy** with your leftovers!
- Search for stash options at **thrift stores** instead of buying new or **trade with friends** who are looking for something new (*make it into a party where you swap patterns, needles, yarn and accessories!*)
- Before purchasing new stitch markers, consider **making your own** out of yarn scraps or finding ones made out of recycled metals or wood/bamboo. You might even be able to make your own if you're handy with woodworking tools!
- In search of more yarn? Maybe it's time to **clear out your closet!** If you have sweaters or t-shirts that are no longer fit well or are too worn out to wear, either unravel the sweaters for "new" yarn or cut up old t-shirts to make great cotton jersey "yarn"!(*search YouTube for helpful tutorials*)

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9. Study your Stash Situation

You may be wondering, "What should I do with my current stash of animal fiber yarns, spinning fiber and other accessories?" In my mind, this is a very personal position that you'll have to decide for yourself. Most people find it easier (*and less painful, especially if there is a favorite yarn or fiber to consider*) to finish knitting up or using the animal fibers/ accessories they have and gift the finished projects to friends and family who aren't vegan. From that moment on, you'll commit to avoiding a purchase of any new animal based yarns/ fibers/ items for your knitting stash.

Other people find it easier to sell or give away all of their non vegan yarn and items on ebay/etsy/etc or share with knitting friends or their knitting group. You could also do a mix of the two. Sell some items you aren't that attached to and use up the ones you would find it difficult to sell or give away. This is totally up to you with **no judgment**. Becoming vegan is a process and no one should tell you that you're "doing it wrong". My only loving advice is to be careful in the future of which items you purchase and how they are made/ where they come from. Sometimes, yarn or accessories can have tiny additions of leather, suede, wool (*and felt!*), fur or bone. Just be mindful and curious :)

10. Really Great Resources:

These helpful websites offer vegan friendly options in the way of accessories, yarn, fiber and support. *(If you come across any other fantastic finds, let us know so we can add them to the guide!)*

- Vegan Yarn (<https://www.veganyarn.com/>)
- Knit Picks (https://www.knitpicks.com/yarns/knitting_yarns.html)
- WEBS (<https://www.yarn.com/categories/yarn-by-fiber>)
- Lion Brand (<http://www.lionbrand.com/yarn>)
- That's My Color Yarn Shop (<https://www.etsy.com/shop/ThatsMyColorYarnShop>)
- Eco Butterfly Organics (<https://www.etsy.com/shop/EcobutterflyOrganics>)
- Flora Fibres Yarn (<https://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/FloraFibresYarn>)
- Etsy (<https://www.etsy.com/search?q=vegan%20yarn>)
- Darn Good Yarn (<https://www.darngoodyarn.com/collections/vegan-yarn>)
- Specific vegan yarns (<https://www.gathered.how/knitting-and-crochet/knitting/5-of-the-best-vegan-yarns/>)
- Hearthside Fibers (<https://www.etsy.com/shop/HearthsideFibers>) - choose "plant based" option
- Beesy Bee Fibers (<https://www.etsy.com/shop/beesybee>) - choose "plant based" fibers
- Ravelry Groups: <https://www.ravelry.com/groups/vegan-knitters-and-crocheters> and <https://www.ravelry.com/groups/vegan-yarn-brand-fan-club>

My wish is that this guide has helped you to get a better understanding of vegan knitting and how to approach your old, wonderful craft with new, compassionate eyes. There's not much to it, but the simple and conscious choices you make will make a HUGE difference in the life of a fiber animal and also the planet. **Happy Vegan Knitting!!**

*Feel free to contact me at gina@worldofvegan.com for any vegan knitting questions! You can also find me here:

Instagram @ginahouse

Facebook www.facebook.com/SleepyEyesKnits

Website www.ginahouse.net

Ravelry @sleepyeyes

