



Tip of the Month

Understanding Cotton



When people say they crochet with cotton, many people associate this with using thread and making fine items such as doilies and table cloths. We've come a long way and cotton is now found in all weights – eg 4ply and 8ply. Cotton is a brilliant fibre to use for making summer wear. Cotton, as a natural plant fibre breaths and conducts heat away from the body – making it perfect for warmer weather. This is because cotton has durability and absorbency up to 27 times its own weight.

Are you familiar with the different treatments applied to cotton and how they change the cotton and affect your finished item? Knowing this can help you select the right cotton and match the cotton to the right patterns when substituting yarn.

Much of the cotton yarn available on the market is mercerized. This means that it has undergone a particular type of finishing process – given a sodium hydroxide bath then neutralized with an acid bath. This strengthens and softens the fibres, increases the lustre and ability to take dye and helps it become more resistant to mildew. It is also less likely to shrink when washed. This cotton is also referred to as 'pearl' or 'perle' cotton. At Crochet Australia, all of the cotton we sell is mercerized cotton.

Unmercerized cotton on the other hand, while super absorbent, is not as shiny or soft. It has a slubby appearance – giving it a home spun look.

Gassing is another process that is applied to cotton after being mercerized whereby the thread is passed over an open flame. This incinerates any stray fibres that exist and improves the appearance. The Lizbeth thread we sell at Crochet Australia is gassed.

Cotton, unlike most other yarns lacks elasticity. If the project you are making needs this, cotton may not be the best yarn to use. The stitches also stand-alone and don't snuggle next to one another as with other fibres, so the gaps between stitches can be more obvious with cotton. This factor also means the stitches are distinct and so fancy patterns are enhanced using cotton. For example, cables take on more depth and popcorns are more stable.