



Tip of the Month

February 2016—Swatches



With almost all patterns - particularly for garments - you should always prepare a swatch before beginning your article. Why? Each pattern is written based on a specific type of yarn and size of hook and the tension of the pattern writer. It is not always possible to purchase the exact yarn used, and in my case, I always find a different yarn that I want to use. Nor do we all crochet with the same tension. However, a swatch has many more uses that has made me give more importance to this step with any project. I have noted down a few of the other reasons I have come across for spending time on preparing a swatch.

- To see if you like the look of the stitch pattern with the yarn selected - In my early years I started many garments with lots of stitches only to find that by the time I'm halfway through I don't like the look of the pattern with the yarn I had chosen.
- To see if you like working that stitch at all - I've made some where I was so frustrated with the stitch after three rows I decided I couldn't continue with it to make the whole garment.
- If substituting yarn, you can see how the created fabric feels against the skin in places it will touch the skin. For example if making a turtle-neck jumper, lay/rub the swatch against your neck for a while to see how it feels.
- If you are going to wash the finished item, then wash the swatch to see what happens to it - does it lose its colour, shape, stitch definition?
- If using a variegated yarn, it helps to see exactly how long the colour changes are and whether it will give the colour effect you are after.
- To see if you get right drape or lacy effect you want.

So....how do you make the swatch? I always find making a swatch of at least 15cm square (larger for bulk yarn) gives you ample to see the drape and the stitch pattern and is larger than needed for the gauge—as you don't want to measure from the ends anyway. To measure the gauge lay your swatch flat, but do not stretch it! I find pinning it on a board works, and if it is a fancy pattern, eg shells, placing a pin at the beginning of the stitch and at the end of the indicated number of stitches helps to identify where to measure.

If you find you don't like the stitch for the pattern, or the gauge is not correct, don't pull it undone. Finish off or just change your hook or stitch marking the change so you can see the contrast.