



blue bee studio

swatching for lina and colina

If you are new to working with Sparrow, you may find that it handles a bit differently on the needles than a similar weight woolen yarn. Linen fiber is slightly 'toothy', so the stitches don't compress horizontally the way that they would in wool—until the fabric has been washed.

After washing and drying a few times, the fibers relax, and Sparrow becomes incredibly supple and drapery. For this reason, stitch patterns that tend to spread laterally (like garter stitch), can have a very different working gauge from the finished fabric gauge.

As you can see from the photos, the unblocked garter stitch swatch has as completely different aspect ratio from the blocked one, which has been washed and dried twice, then steamed.

Because Lina and Colina's bodices are all garter stitch, it's essential to swatch—and to wash and dry the swatch several times before measuring gauge—so that you can be sure of the size of your finished garment.

swatch instructions

Pre-blocking gauge: 24 sts and 60 rows = 4" [10 cm] in garter stitch, worked flat, on US 2 [2.75 mm] needle.

Post-blocking gauge: 27 sts and 44 rows = 4" [10 cm] in garter stitch, worked flat, on US 2 [2.75 mm] needles.

Cast on 32 stitches, using the long-tail cast on. Knit 72 rows (36 garter ridges). Bind off loosely.

Measure and make note of the pre-blocking gauge.

Tie a couple of knots in your ends, and wash the swatch by hand. Put it into the dryer on low. Repeat the washing and drying process.



unblocked swatch: 32 sts x 54 rows. 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 3 $\frac{5}{8}$ ".
Gauge: 24 sts x 60 rows = 4" [10 cm]



blocked swatch: Same swatch, washed and dried in the dryer twice, then steamed. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ ".
Gauge: 27 sts x 44 rows = 4" [10 cm]

Steam the swatch, focusing on getting as much length as possible, since this is what will happen as the garment is worn. If you don't have a steamer or steam iron, wet-block the swatch and pin it out to dry.

Measure and note the post-blocking gauge.

Adjust needle size as necessary to obtain gauge.

blocking a work in progress

As you work Lina or Colina's garter stitch bodice, it may seem alarmingly wide. If you've measured your gauge swatch before and after blocking you'll know how much the garter fabric changes once it has been washed. But if you are concerned about the size you've chosen or about your gauge, try blocking the work in progress.

Before blocking, you'll want to support the last row of stitches. This will keep them from becoming distorted by the blocking process and creating a line between the blocked work and the rows that follow it. Here's how:

Wait until you have at least 4" [10 cm] of the back worked, then, leaving the working yarn attached, knit one row with a similar-weight waste yarn. Bind off on the next row. Soak and block the piece just as if it was a swatch, gently patting out or pinning as needed and allow to dry. Once you've verified your gauge, undo the provisional bind-off and return your stitches to the needles.

tips for working with linen

Due to the linen fiber's 'toothiness', a center-pull ball is not ideal. Work from the outside of the ball.

If you find that your stitches are a little wobbly, try using wooden needles. The slight grab between wood and fiber can help to even things out.

When joining yarn, leave tails at least 10" long. Join new yarn at edges of piece when working flat, and at sides when working in the round.

The tumble dryer is a great tool for softening up your swatch so that you can preview the eventual hand of the fabric, but depending upon your machine, it may cause a little color loss. You'll need to decide—based upon your swatch—whether or not to use it for the finished garment.

Stockinette fabric in linen can be ironed using an ordinary steam iron and a damp pressing cloth. This will enhance the beautiful luster of the fiber.

A small hand-held steamer is a fantastic tool for working with linen (and wool!). A steamer need not be expensive. The Conair GS23 Extreme Steam is one that I have used extensively—but there are others. If purchasing a steamer to use on your knitwear, make sure that it can be used in both a horizontal and vertical orientation, and that any brush attachment can be removed.