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Irena Felomena Juškienė



BEADED WRIST WARMERS *from* LITHUANIA

63 Knitting Patterns in the Baltic Tradition

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www.trafalgarbooks.com

First published in the United States of America in 2018 by
Trafalgar Square Books
North Pomfret, Vermont 05053

Originally published in Lithuanian as *Riesinės*.

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English translation © 2018 Trafalgar Square Books

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ISBN: 978-1-57076-904-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018954578

This book includes additional photographs courtesy of
Zita Baniulaitė and Sigita Jurkonienė.

Summary: Laimutė Zabulienė, Gražina Vasiliauskienė,
Liudmila Plytnikienė

Charts for wrist warmers: Giedrė Brazytė, Živilė Kazlienė,
Jūratė Veteikytė

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Cover design: RM Didier

Printed in China

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

| CONTENTS |

Introduction	6
Wrist Warmers	9
What are “Riešinės”?	9
A Short History of Wrist Warmers in Lithuania and Europe	10
Lithuanian Wrist Warmer Styles	13
Knitting Beaded Wrist Warmers	17
Beading Cheats and Knitted Samples	22
Appendix 1: Other Wool Wrist Warmers in Museum Collections	150
Appendix 2: Linen and Cotton Fingerless Gloves	172
Contributors	176
Stories from Contributors	177
Sources	184
References	185
Abbreviations	186
List of Wrist Warmers Organized by Ethnographic Region	186
Translator’s Notes	194
Finishing Techniques	196
Yarn Information	199

| INTRODUCTION |

Lithuanians cherish our culture. We often say that Lithuanian and Baltic culture is ancient, important, interesting, and nourishing to the soul, just like our language and our treasured woven sash patterns. Our cherished artifacts serve as a valuable lens through which to view our traditions, and we want to share our cultural treasures with people from other parts of the world. Simple objects can be appreciated by researchers and collectors from anywhere and everywhere. I believe and hope that this book, with my thorough presentation of one aspect of Lithuanian ethnographic culture, will expand the circle of appreciation.

This work is not a scientific catalog or publication. It is the result of my leisure activities, and I believe the material here will be fascinating to other people interested in ethnographic heritage.

I have been interested in studying and knitting wrist warmers for over 20 years. This is the story of how I “got to know” them:

When the folk ensemble “Ula,” of which I was a member, was founded, the group needed costumes to wear when performing. At that time, the leader of the ensemble, Aldona Ragevičienė, taught us not only songs and dances, but also about the traditional clothing that comprises the Lithuanian national folk costume. I remember visiting the exhibits in the Lithuanian National Museum (formerly the History and Ethnography Museum), where ethnographer Stasys Bernotienė showed us wrist warmers, which we had never seen before. She explained how and when they were worn. Then Aldona Ragevičienė said, “I don’t understand why Lithuanian girls don’t wear wrist warmers any more. After all, they do parade around like princesses.” These words inspired me to take a deeper look at traditional wrist warmers, to knit reproductions of the examples that were still in the museums, and to try to create a pattern book with practical tips for knitters.



At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, women and men, adults and children, all wore wrist warmers. These knitted cuffs were worn both because they were practical for keeping warm, and because they were beautiful. At the time, wrist warmers were very popular, but they fell out of fashion in the middle of the twentieth century. Today, they've been reborn as popular, decorative, gorgeous accessories. According to one doctor in Vilnius, "Every self-respecting woman should wear wrist warmers. They are both beautiful and warm."

In this book, I've tried to showcase all of the remaining antique wrist warmers in Lithuanian museums, as well as those in private collections. Most are in good shape. Over time, however, some began to deteriorate and fall apart, while others, perhaps those that were worn less often, are still in excellent condition. In the main sections of this book, I've focused on the beaded wrist warmers that are in museums, private collections, and vintage publications. I've also included knitting techniques and illustrations, along with instructions and charts for making the wrist warmers shown in the photographs. Wrist warmers that were made without beads are included in a separate appendix, organized by the Lithuanian ethnographic region where they were made. And finally, I've included a selection of knitted and crocheted fingerless gloves that are made from cotton and linen. I hope you will find all of these sections interesting.

I sincerely thank all those who contributed to the publication of this book from the Ministry of Culture. For moral and nongovernmental support, I thank: the Birzai Sėla Museum, the Kaišiadorys Museum, Lithuanian Art Museum, the Open-Air Museum of Lithuania, Lithuanian National Museum, Marijampolė Regional Museum, Mažeikiai Museum, M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art, the Panevėžys Regional Museum, the Šiauliai Aušra Museum, Antanas and Anastasia Tamošaitis Gallery "Židinys," the Upyna



wrist warmers, neither in winter nor in summer!

Wrist warmers weren't only worn for working outdoors. They were also worn to keep warm when sitting indoors, and for dressing up, when it was important for their highly-decorated edges to peek out and be visible from under your coat sleeves.

A Short History of Wrist Warmers in Lithuania and Europe

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in Europe, especially in Scandinavia, wrist warmers knit from wool yarn were widespread. They were worn in Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Poland, the Czech Republic, Finland, Scandinavia, Germany, and England. Some Nordic countries, such as Iceland and Greenland, have kept up the tradition of wearing wrist warmers. The Danish National Museum displays wrist warmers in an exhibit on the national costumes of Greenland. And knitters in America make wrist warmers with musk-ox wool that are inspired by traditional Alaskan Inuit designs³.

On the Shetland Islands (the Scottish archipelago between Great Britain and Norway), people often wore wrist warmers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries⁴. Later, fingerless gloves became more popular. As early as the sixteenth century, the inhabitants of the Shetland Islands traded extensively with Baltic and Scandinavian countries, as well as with Germany and the Neth-



3



4



5

³ Druchunas, Donna. *Arctic Lace: Knitting Projects and Stories Inspired by Alaska's Native Knitters*. // Nomad press. Fort Collins, Colorado, 2006, page 122.

⁴ Carol Rasmussen Noble. *Knitting Fair Isle Mittens & Gloves: 40 Great-Looking Designs*. // Lark Books, Asheville, North Carolina, 2002, page 11.

⁵ Kirsten Rømcke and Nina Granlund Sæther. *Perler på pulsen*. // Norges Hus idslag. 2004, page 9. Example of wrist warmer from of Raimonda Narbutienė's personal collection.

⁶ Elzbieta Piskorz-Branekova. *Polskie stroje ludowe*. // Sport i Turystyka-Muza Sa. // Warszawa. 2005, pages 36-41.



Lithuanian Wrist Warmer Styles

In Lithuania, knitted wrist warmers were anywhere from 2–7½ inches (4.5–19 cm) long. Everyday wrist warmers were made out of whatever wool yarn was available, often handspun. Sometimes old, faded garments were unraveled and the yarn was re-used. These casual accessories were knitted with thick needles out of heavy woolen yarn. Some were also crocheted. They were made to fit snugly, and were knit in a single color, either length-

wise or sideways. There are also examples of wrist warmers made in a “hit-or-miss” pattern, where it seems like the knitter used all of her leftover scraps of yarn, changing colors randomly.

Holiday wrist warmers were made using high-quality, fine wool yarn—usually a special commercially-spun yarn called *lučkai*. Some were made in stockinette stitch with stranded colorwork patterns, and knit in the round. The most decorative wrist warmers were knit back and forth, sideways, in garter stitch (knit on both right-side and wrong-side rows) creating a stretchy rib pattern. White beads, or less frequently colored beads, were knit in to create the pattern. These wrist warmers were worn because of their beauty, not for practical reasons.

There are two unusual pairs of wrist warmers with the bead patterns worked in embroidery. One example from Druskininkai is in The Open-Air Museum of Lithuania. The wrist warmer is





common. The wrist edge of the piece was also often decorated with beaded trim.

In the Suvalkija region (southwestern Lithuania), all women wore wrist warmers in the winter. The most popular color for yarn was blue-violet, and beads were typically white. The patterns are similar to those in other ethnographic regions.

In Žemaitija (northwestern Lithuania), wrist warmers were also very widespread. They were found in the districts of Akmenė, Kelmė, Kretinga, Mažeikiai, Plungė, Raseiniai, Skuodas, Šilalė, Tauragė, and Telšiai. The background was usually knitted in stripes of two contrasting colors, such as red and blue, purple and green, or black and green, but there were also three- and four-colored wrist warmers

decorated with patterns of white beads. Solid wrist warmers in Žemaitija were made dark colors, including black, brass, dark brown, and purple. They were decorated not only with white beads, but also with colored beads.

Wrist warmers were also made in the region of Klaipėda. From the surviving examples it is possible to judge that the most popular patterns were diamond lattices, made in various colors for everyday wear. There are no holiday wrist warmers from this region surviving in museum collections. I knitted the sample in this book using black wool with white beads, following an illustration I found in the book *Gloves of Lithuania Minor*. (*Lietuvininkų pirštinės* Lithuanian Ethnology, 3, by Irena Regina Merkienė, Marija Pautieniute-Banionienė. Vilnius: Žara. 1998, pg. 191).

Mitts and fingerless gloves in Lithuania were sometimes knitted and crocheted from linen and cotton thread (figure 50, page 171). Appendix 2 contains examples of fingerless gloves and cotton mitts¹³ with thumbs that vary from ½–1 inch (1.5–2 cm) long, as well as one example with half-fingers. Most of these are from Žemaitija; one is from the Klaipėda region. These gloves were knitted or crochet in lace patterns to be worn on special occasions by brides (figures 6 and 174) and flower-girls (figure 1, 172, p. 5, 173). Other gloves, made in stockinette stitch, were made to wear as gardening gloves in summer, to protect the wearer's hands while working outdoors.



¹³ The words in Eastern Lithuanian dialects are *pirštinės pirštas* (gloves with fingers), *su pirštikais pirštinės šaltos* (gloves with cold fingers) in Švenčionys, and *pirštinės trumpas pirštikas* (gloves with short fingers), and *kumštinės pirštinės nykštys* (mitts with thumbs) in Rokiškis. *Lietuvių kalbos žodynas*, Volume 10, Vilnius, 1976, page 32.



From the personal collection of Onutė Martinaitienė (beaded collar, left; table centerpiece, right).

Instructions

Before starting, you need to know how many beads are needed for one wrist warmer. Two to three hundred might be enough for a simple pattern, whereas a complicated pattern can sometimes take up to 1200 or 1500 beads. (The number of beads needed for each chart is listed on the page with the chart. Always string on extra beads in case you miscount. Seed beads are sold by weight, so you will have to check the number of beads per gram for the beads you select.)

Tip: To make the process quicker, count the first hundred beads, and then measure the remaining beads you thread on against this

| 2. | AUKŠTAITIJA (NORTHEASTERN LITHUANIA)



| 13. |

Embellished wrist warmers / *rankovėlės*

Early 20th century

Knit by O. D. Aleknienė.

Made in the village of Rinkušiai, Biržai District,
Biržai County, Lithuania

ČDM E 1550/a, b



Skill Level: Intermediate

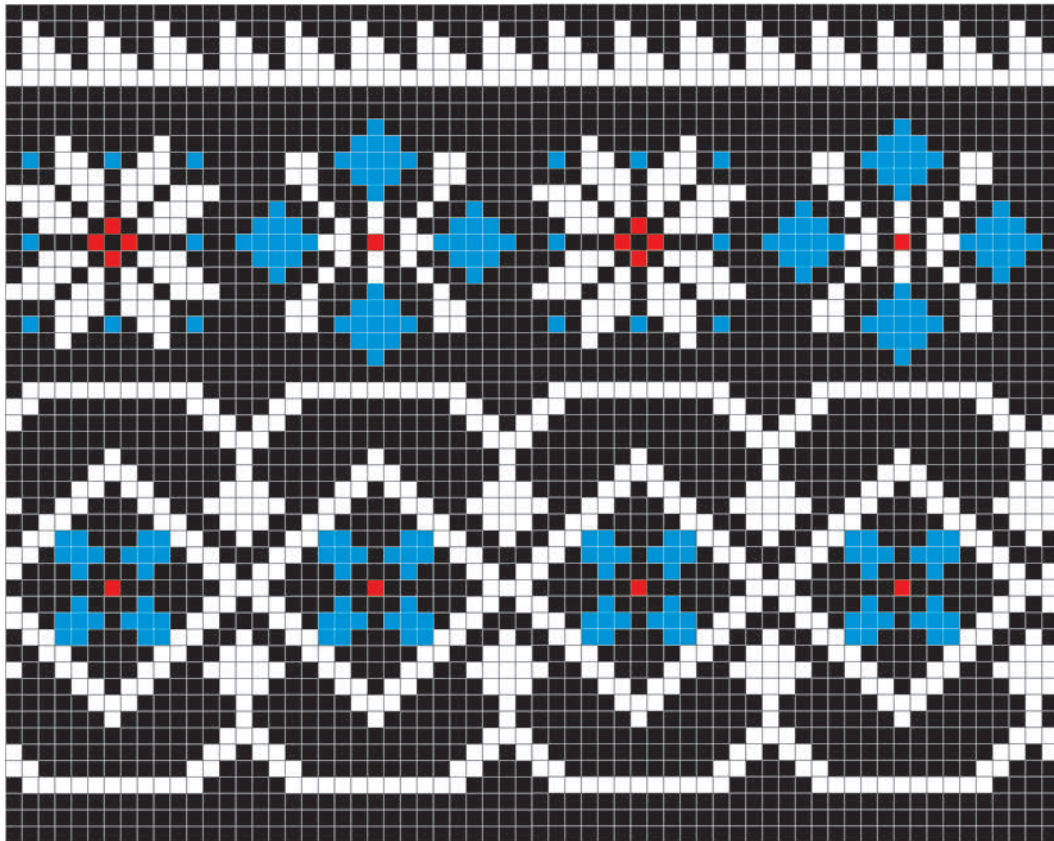
Beads: 800 white, 312 red, and 380 blue

String beads onto yarn following chart. Cast on 40–50
sts for desired length.

Knit all RS rows. On WS rows, work all sts of the bead
chart, then knit to the end of the row. Work all rows of
chart once. BO, then sew CO and BO edges together.
Make a second wrist warmer the same way.

| 15. |

Men's wrist warmers / *runkauka*
Late 19th century
Made at the farmstead of Kvietkeliai,
Biržai County, Lithuania
LNM EMO1601



| 20. | AUKŠTAITIJA (NORTHEASTERN LITHUANIA)



Skill Level: Intermediate

Beads: 1424 white

String half of beads onto yarn. Cast on 40–50 sts for desired length.

Knit all RS rows. On WS rows, work all sts of the bead chart, then knit to the end of the row. Work all rows of chart once. BO, then sew CO and BO edges together. Make a second wrist warmer the same way.

| 28. | AUKŠTAITIJA (NORTHEASTERN LITHUANIA)



| 34. | AUKŠTAITIJA (NORTHEASTERN LITHUANIA)



| 64. | DŽUKIJA (SOUTHEASTERN LITHUANIA)



| 74. | SUVALKIJA (SOUTHWESTERN LITHUANIA)



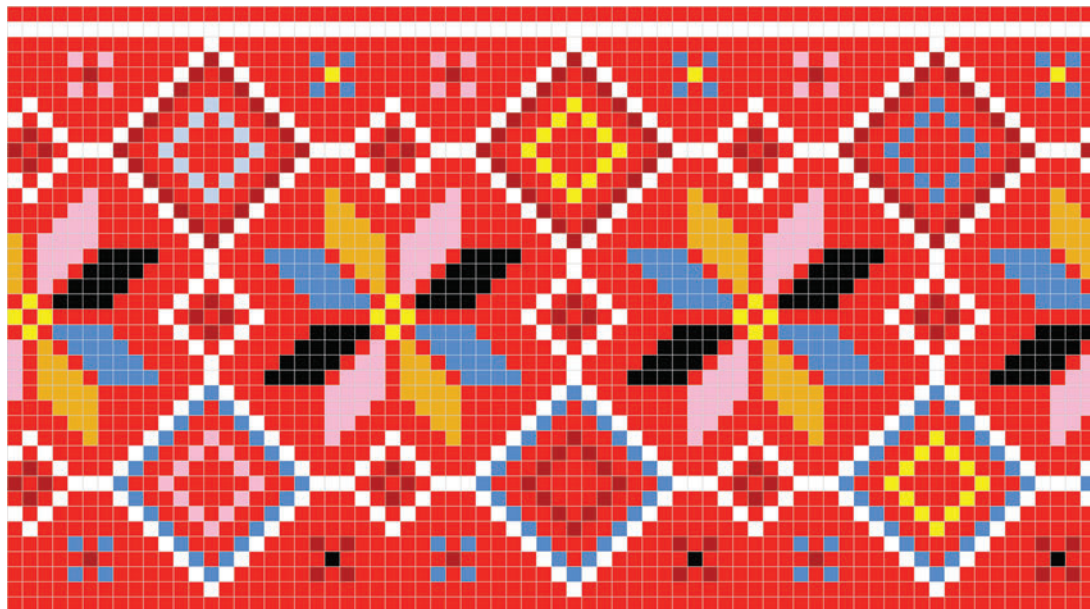
| 77. |

Wrist warmers

Late 19th century

Made in Būtingė, Lithuania

Palanga Traditional Textiles Education Center*



Skill Level: Intermediate

Beads: 378 burgundy, 760 black, 1008 blue, 700 white, 80 yellow, 870 pink, 815 gold
String beads onto yarn following chart. Cast on 40–50 sts for desired length.

Knit all RS rows. On WS rows, work all sts of the bead chart, then knit to the end of the row. Work all rows of chart once. BO, then sew CO and BO edges together. Make a second wrist warmer the same way.

* Photo on the right is from the Palanga Textiles Education Center archives.

| 95. |

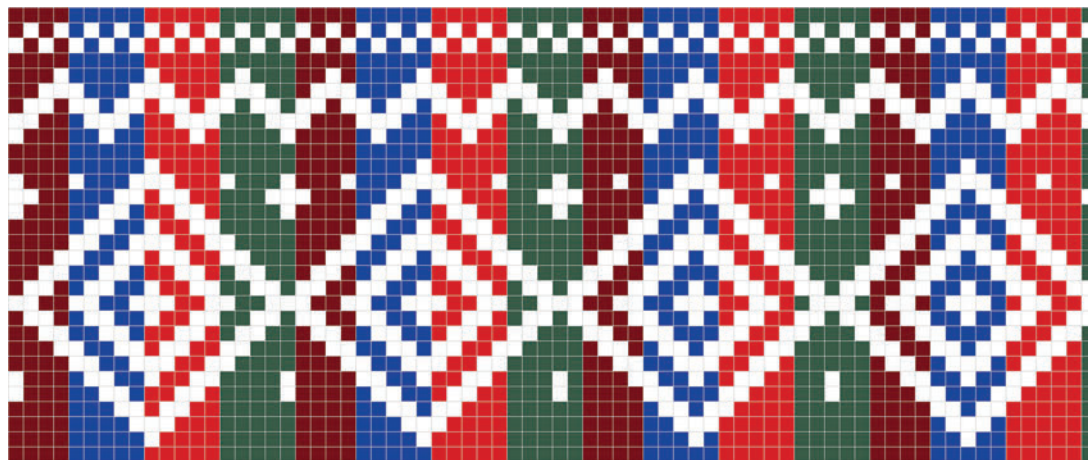
Wrist warmers / *rankelkos*

Early 20th century

Made in the village of Vaitimėnai, Mažonai County,
in the region of Tauragė, Lithuania

Upyna Folk Art Museum (Šilalė county)

Exhibit nos. 1061 and 1062



Skill Level: Experienced

Beads: 1280 white

Yarn Colors: Red, blue, burgundy, and green

String one-quarter of beads onto each color of yarn.

Cast on 40–50 sts for desired length.

Knit all RS rows. Change colors as charted on RS (plain) rows. On WS rows, work all sts of the bead chart, then knit to the end of the row. Work all rows of chart once. BO, then sew CO and BO edges together.

Make a second wrist warmer the same way.

| 96. | ŽEMAITIJA (NORTHWESTERN LITHUANIA)



| 124. | ORIGIN UNKNOWN





| 3. |

Wrist warmers
Late 19th or early 20th century
Made in Pasvalys, Biržai County,
Lithuania
ČDM E 1542 /a, b

| 4. |

Glove
Early 20th century
Made in the village of Liepiškiai,
Šiaulėnai District, Šiauliai County,
Lithuania
ČDM E 1557



| 5. |

Wrist warmers
Late 19th or early 20th century
Made in Pasvalys, Biržai County,
Lithuania
ČDM E 1548/a, b



| 14. |

Wrist warmers
20th century
Made in the village of Kunigiškiai,
Balbieriškis County, in the region
of Prienai, Lithuania
LDM LA 4107/a, b



| 15. |

Wrist warmers
Late 19th or early 20th century
Knit in ribbing with bead embroidery
Made in Druskininkai, Lithuania
LBM P-206/a, b



| 18. |

Wrist warmers
Early 20th century
Made in the village of Trakiškiai,
Trakiškiai County, in the region of
Marijampolė, Lithuania
MKM GEK Nr.984/a, b



| 19. |

Wrist warmers
Early 20th century
Made in Šunskai, Šunskai County,
in the region of Marijampolė,
Lithuania
LDM LA 2190/a, b

STORIES FROM CONTRIBUTORS



1. Živilė Jurevičiūtė-Ramelienė (born in Vilnius in 1950) recounted her mother's memories. Rosalia Poželaite-Jurevičienė (1919-1995) was born in Linkuva, Pakruojis District. She later lived in Vilnius, but always considered herself a "Linkuvian." Her mother (Živilė's grandmother) Elena Pašakinskaitė-Požėlienė (1870- 1944, Pakruojis District) told her, "Both men and women wore wrist warmers every day, especially in the cold weather, while working in the fields and in the forests. At the time, shirts and blouses had wide sleeves, and wrist warmers were used to gather the sleeve in at the cuff so it would be warmer while working or driving horse-drawn carts. Everyday wrist warmers were knitted in stockinette stitch or ribbing. Some were monochrome but others were made in colorwork with diamonds, lattices, and other patterns. Holiday wrist warmers were decorated with glass beads. I didn't wear wrist warmers," Živilė's grandmother said. "The times changed—fashion changed." (Written by the author in 2002.)

2. Janina Biriėtienė (born in 1933 in the region of Anykščiai, and living in Biržai since 1979) described the following:

"My aunt Eleana Audickienė, who lived in Anykščiai, was born in the village of Mašinka in Troškūnai District. In 1908, she remembers people wearing wrist warmers when going to church or having celebrations with their neighbors. I was a child of about 6 years old, and I was very intrigued by the wrist warmers, because the beads would sparkle from under people's sleeves. Who knitted them, I don't know." (Written by Snieguolė Kubiliūtė in 2003.)

3. Around 1937 Ona Ažunarytė-Vileišienė (born in 1917 in Mieleišiai, and now living in Biržai) saw "beaded wrist warmers peeking out from under coat sleeves." She remembers that "around 1930-1934 in the village of Mieleišiai, Jozas Kuccinskas's sister, Joana

Stories are presented by date, in the order in which they were recorded.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

It's been an honor to translate this book from Lithuanian into English so Irena Juškienė can share her passion for wrist warmers with a wider audience. I've added a little extra information to the knitting instructions to help English-speaking knitters. The following sections provide tips on pronouncing Lithuanian words, understanding the many Lithuanian words for "wrist warmer" in regional dialects, and understanding Lithuania's five regions and the organization of municipalities. Thank you to Sonata Eidikiene for reviewing and giving me feedback. Any mistakes that remain are my own.

Pronouncing Lithuanian Names and Words

I'm always asked how to pronounce Lithuanian words because, while it uses the Latin alphabet like English, there are different diacritical marks and sounds that are unique to Lithuanian. I can't provide a full lesson here, but these few tips may help you with the words and names in this book.

Consonants that are different from English:

c—ts as in cats

č—ch as in chicken

j—y as in yacht

š—sh as in sheep

r—rolled lightly (similar to Spanish)

ž—s as in pleasure

Vowels are also different from English, although the nuances are often difficult for English-speakers to hear. This is a basic list.

a, ą—as in car and father respectively

e, e, é—as in eat, man, and chair respectively

i—i as in sit

j and y—as in machine or as in meet

o—as in more

u, ū—as in put and loot respectively





FUN TO KNIT AND EASY TO WEAR

In Lithuania, beaded wrist warmers are an essential part of the traditional folk costume, with their origins in practical necessity: keeping sleeve cuffs securely closed against the Baltic weather. Considered a piece of ordinary outdoor clothing at first, over time wrist warmers became more and more highly decorated, worked in bright colors, stripes, and patterns, and eventually, with beads. Here you'll find an inspiring collection of traditional Lithuanian knitted wrist warmers and beading designs: striking to look at, easy to customize, and so quick to work you're done before you know it.

\$24.95 USD
ISBN: 9781570769047

