

I C E L A N D I C
MITTENS

25 Traditional Patterns Reimagined



Guðrún Hannele Henttinen

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25 Traditional Patterns Reimagined



TRAFALGAR SQUARE
North Pomfret, Vermont

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INTRODUCTION

My love of mittens is longstanding, and I'm always quick to take notice when someone is wearing a beautiful pair. The primary purpose of mittens is, of course, to keep your hands warm, but the way they look matters, too. A pair of well-knitted, beautifully patterned mittens made from good yarn is a treasure to be used and enjoyed for years. All sorts of needlework treasures are hidden away in the Textile Museum in Blönduós, which is where I found the mittens in this book—all 25 beautiful and interesting pairs. I'm forever grateful to Museum Director Elín S. Sigurðardóttir for her co-operation. The book contains photographs of the original mittens, which are followed by patterns that have been adapted to suit fingering weight yarn for needles US size 0 to 1.5 (2 to 2.5 mm). The mittens are also shown in different colours for inspiration.

I have tried to ensure a diverse range of mittens in my selection, both in terms of knitting techniques and patterns, to include mittens that are suitable for beginners as well as seasoned knitters. In many people's estimation, stranded knitting produces characteristically Icelandic mittens. But the technique can be used in all sorts of different ways—for patterns on the backs or palms of mittens, the same pattern for the whole body of the mitten, mittens with ribbed or two-coloured or lace pattern cuffs, afterthought thumbs, thumbs attached on the palm or on the side, and mittens with or without thumb gussets. I also added two pairs of solid-colour mittens with lace patterns and two pairs of gloves. Everyone should be able to find a knitting project of interest to them.

Putting together a book like this is a marathon project, and many people have lent a helping hand. The brainstorming for the book started in good cooperation with Cindy. Her contribution and encouragement has been invaluable. The book would not have been made without the help of Elín at the Textile Museum in Blönduós. I also had the assistance of several talented knitters: Guðný, Margrét, Rannveig, and Sonja. Cindy also knitted a pair of mittens. My sincerest thanks to all of you!

Much credit goes to Gígja, the photographer, who took all the photographs. Thank you for your artistic eye, Gígja!

I thank models Elín Eva and Lamie for their hard work. My daughter Elín Eva deserves special thanks for taking on the role of stylist and doing it so well, and for being patient with her mother during all the photo shoots.

And, of course, I thank editor Oddný S. Jónsdóttir, graphic designer Alexandra Buhl, and technical editor Kirsten Pedrosa for their essential work on this project.

Last but not least, I must thank my husband Karl for supporting me in this endeavor, as well as my whole family.

Happy knitting!

Guðrún Hannele Henttinen



A BRIEF HISTORY OF KNITTING IN ICELAND

It's thought that knitting came to Iceland with merchants from the Netherlands, England, or Germany in the first part of the 16th century, and that Icelanders may even have learned to knit earlier than other Nordic peoples. The oldest knitted garment that still exists today in Iceland is a mitten. It was found during an archeological excavation at the Stóra-Borg Farm in South Iceland, and is thought to date back to the early 16th century. The mitten was knitted in stocking stitch in the round with four or five double-pointed needles in a small adult size. Finding it was a stroke of luck because garments made of wool and other textiles are short-lived—they are made to be used, they fray and wear out, and then the yarn is reused as long as possible. Because people saw no reason to preserve everyday knitted garments, we have very few clues to help us trace the history of knitting in Iceland.

We know that Icelanders throughout the country were quick to take up knitting, which was much simpler to master than the weaving widely practiced at the time. Compared to weaving, knitting is easier to learn, the necessary tools are much simpler, and it takes up less space. It is also faster than *nålebinding* or “knotless knitting,” a technique that Icelanders had previously used to make mittens.

In the beginning, Icelanders only used knit stitches, as the mitten from Stóra-Borg indicates. Later, in the 18th century, people started to make use of purl stitches as well. Garments were mostly made from yarn in all the natural colors of the Icelandic sheep.



THE TEXTILE MUSEUM IN BLÖNDUÓS

The story of the Textile Museum in Blönduós dates back to the 1970s, when it was established thanks to the collaboration of local Women’s Association chapters in the region. In 1976, the museum formally opened to the public—at the time, housed in an old barn and cowshed belonging to the Blönduós Women’s Domestic College. However, the museum soon outgrew its humble accommodations, and in 2003 a new and larger museum connected to the original building was opened. All of the original mittens on which the patterns in this book are based are preserved in the Textile Museum’s permanent collection.

CUFF



CAST ON

Where stitches are cast on and knitting starts.

CUFF

Different names are used for different parts of the mittens in the instructions. At the bottom or covering the wrist is the cuff. The cuff is either worked in a rib stitch or with a two-color or lace pattern.

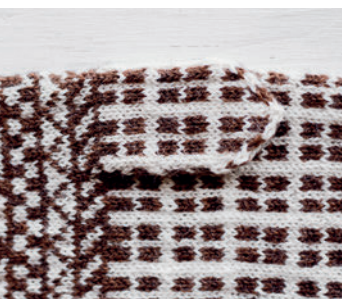


THUMB

Afterthought thumb

While working the body of the mitten, an opening for the thumb is made by first knitting the thumb stitches (the width of the thumb) with a piece of scrap yarn of a contrasting color. Then these stitches are worked with the main color on the next round of knitting. When the body of the mitten is complete, the scrap yarn is pulled out and the live stitches placed on at least three DPNs. An alternate method is to thread the DPNs through the stitches before the scrap yarn is pulled out. Be aware that there will be one stitch less on the top of the thumb opening created in this way than on the bottom, since it is actually the spaces between stitches that are being picked up from the top of the opening. This is resolved by picking up one extra stitch next to the top stitches, which makes the number of stitches equal on the top and bottom of the thumb.

AFTERTHOUGHT THUMB

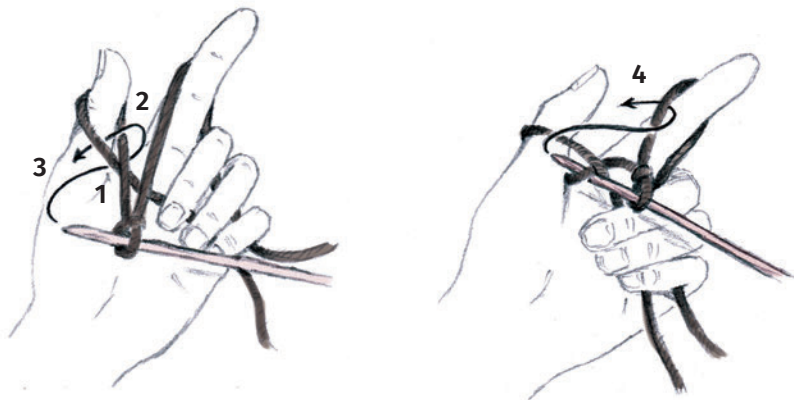


Thumb with a gusset

Mittens usually have the thumb gusset on the palm side of the mitten or on the side of the hand. The gusset is triangular and is usually worked straight after the cuff, at the beginning of the body of the mitten. The thumb is worked from the live stitches at the top of the gusset. A gusset adds more width to the part of the mitten below the thumb.

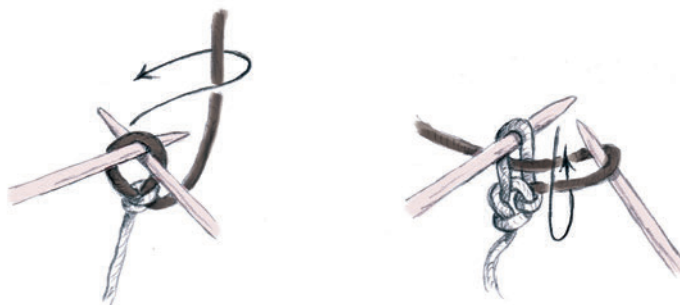
CAST ONS **Twisted German cast-on**

This method is highly recommended when casting on mittens. It produces a thick, strong, elastic edge.



Knitted cast-on

A simple cast-on which is useful when the cast-on edge needs to be finer and only one strand of yarn is available. Good for casting on stitches behind the thumb opening.



These methods are demonstrated in videos on the website:
reykjavikknittingcompany.com

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Round 20: Ssk, k5, [ssk, k6] x 2 = 20 stitches.

Round 21: Ssk, k4, [ssk, k5] x 2 = 17 stitches.

Round 22: Ssk, k3, [ssk, k4] x 2 = 14 stitches.

Round 23: Ssk, k2, [ssk, k3] x 2 = 11 stitches.

Round 24: Ssk, k1, [ssk, k2] x 2 = 8 stitches.

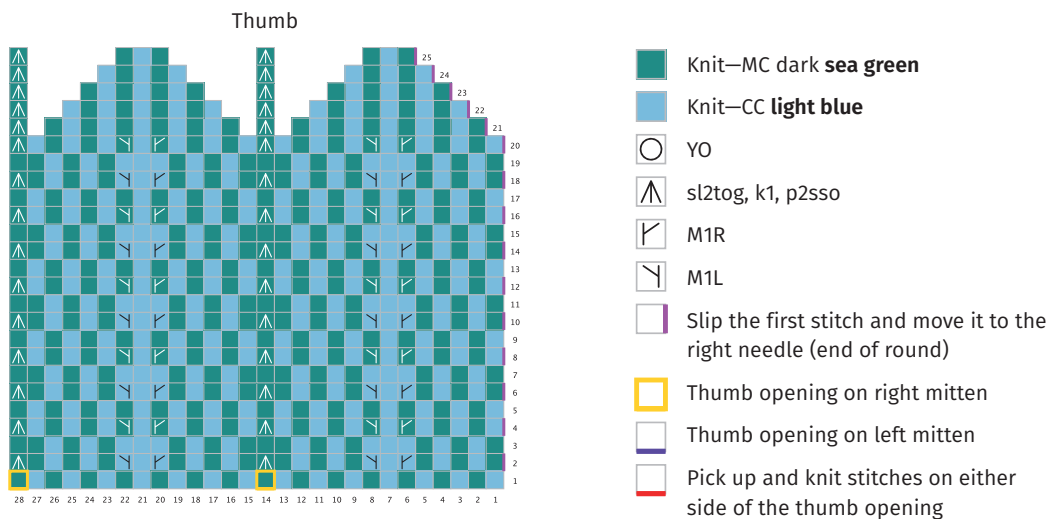
Round 25: Ssk, [ssk, k1] x 2 = 5 stitches.

Close the top of the thumb in the same way as the top of the mitten.

FINISHING

Weave in all ends. Wash and block both mittens, patting them gently to get the right size and to even out the stitches.





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VALA

These stranded mittens knitted in brown and white wool are from Halldórustofa in the Textile Museum. The brown cuff is knitted in twisted knit stitch (knitted through the back loop). The mitten pattern consists of white vertical lines with a zigzag pattern between them. Twisted knitting is also incorporated into the body knitting. Stitches are increased after the cuff for the thumb, and a gusset is also added.

Round 23: K1tbl, ssk, k4, k2tog, k1tbl, k1, ssk, k4, k2tog, k1 = 16 stitches.

Round 24: K1tbl, ssk, k2, k2tog, k1tbl, k1, ssk, k2, k2tog, k1 = 12 stitches.

Round 25: K1tbl, ssk, k2tog, k1tbl, k1, ssk, k2tog, k1 = 8 stitches.

Round 26: K1tbl, k2tog, k1tbl, k1, k2tog, k1 = 6 stitches.

Close the top of the thumb in the same way as the top of the mitten.

FINISHING

Weave in all ends. Wash and block both mittens, patting them gently to get the right size and to even out the stitches. As both mittens are the same, lay the right mitten flat with the thumb on the left side and the left mitten flat with the thumb on the right side. When this is done, the fold at the top of the mitten will be in the right place.



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Left and right mittens



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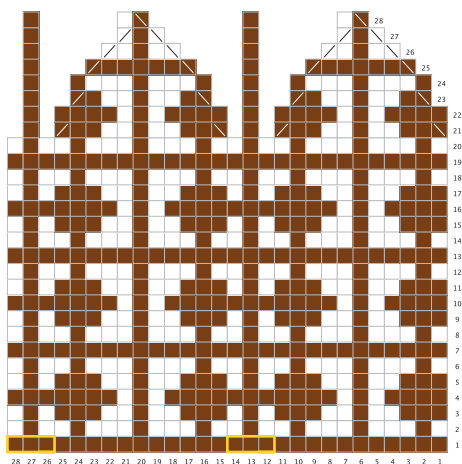










SIZE	Women's medium
FINISHED MEASUREMENTS	11 in/28 cm long (incl. 3 in/7 cm ribbed cuff) and 7 in/18 cm around palm circumference.
YARN	CYCA #1 (sock/fingering/baby) <i>Pirkkalanka Ohut</i> (100% wool, 437 yd/400 m / 100 g) Main color (MC): dark brown, 50 g. Contrasting color (CC): white, 50 g. CYCA #1 (sock/fingering/baby) <i>Rowan Fine Tweed</i> (100% wool, 98 yd/90 m / 25 g) Main color (MC): dark blue, 50 g. Contrasting color (CC): light blue, 50 g. Or similar fingering weight wool.
NEEDLES	Size US 0/2 mm set of 5 DPNs for the cuff. Size US 1/2.5 mm set of 5 DPNs for the hand. Adjust needle size if necessary to obtain the correct gauge.
OTHER MATERIALS	Scrap yarn and tapestry needle.
GAUGE	36 stitches and 36 rounds in stranded colorwork, on larger needles, after blocking = 4 in/10 cm. If the gauge is not correct, the mittens might not fit properly.
PATTERN NOTES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• See the section beginning on page 30 for special techniques concerning yarn dominance, decreasing, increasing, and finishing.• All stitches are knit stitches unless specifically noted otherwise.• These mittens have a thumb gusset. The beginning of the gusset is marked with a yellow line on the chart where the separate thumb chart should be followed for the gusset.• The chart is read from right to left. The thumb is worked at the beginning of the round on the right mitten and at the end of the round of the left mitten.
CUFF	With smaller needles and MC, cast on 57 stitches. Arrange stitches on the needles: 12+15+15+15 stitches and join into round. Work 27 rounds of k2, p1 ribbing (approximately 2 in/7 cm), following the instructions below for color changes: Rounds 1–8: MC. Rounds 9–10: CC. Round 11: MC.

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Thumb



-  Knit—MC **dark brown**
-  Knit—CC **white**
-  Purl
-  Thumb opening on right mitten
-  Thumb opening on left mitten
-  K2tog
-  Ssk
-  Pick up and knit stitches on either side of the thumb opening



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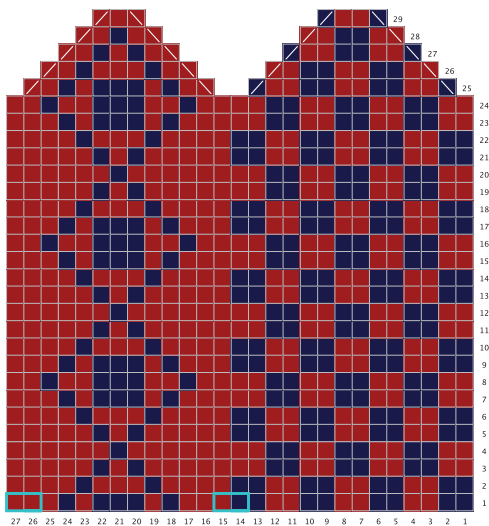
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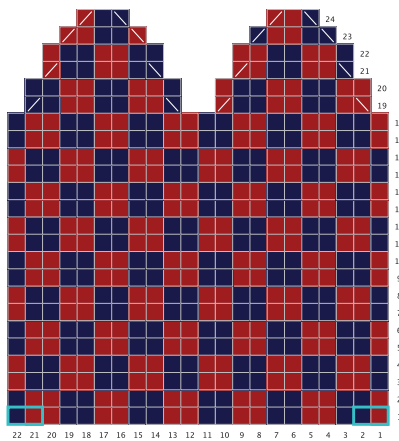
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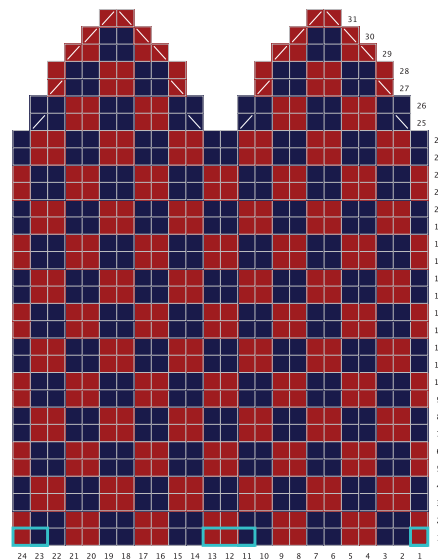
Thumb—right glove



Little finger



Ring finger



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REINTERPRETING THE RICH KNITTING TRADITIONS OF ICELAND



The Textile Museum in Blönduós, located in northern Iceland, houses a unique and fascinating collection of hand-knitted Icelandic mittens, dating back centuries. Drawn by the weight of history and the wealth of traditional motifs on display in their beautifully preserved one-of-a-kind catalog, Guðrún Hannele Henttinen, an expert with a degree in textile studies—and the owner of a yarn shop located in Reykjavík—has reconstructed patterns and charts based on those historical examples, and breathed new life into a stunning selection of mittens and gloves for the modern knitter. In a variety of colors and styles, constituting a master class in multi-color stranded knitting and in a wide range of stitches and techniques, this collection doubles as design showcase and inspirational guide to these overlooked gems of Nordic knit tradition.

— Warm, wearable mittens and gloves in a variety of colors and styles —

— Full-color photographs and step-by-step instructions —
to aid both novice and veteran mitten-knitters

Guðrún Hannele Henttinen has been the owner and manager of Storkurinn, a yarn shop in Reykjavik since 2008, and is a teacher of various knitting classes, a pattern designer, and a technical editor for knitting patterns. She resides in Reykjavik, Iceland.

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