

A FIELD GUIDE TO CATHERINE LOWE YARN

washing and blocking CL Yarn during fabrication

This washing and blocking technique sets the finished gauge, shape and dimensions of the knitted fabric as well as allowing for a manipulation the fabric to impart specific characteristics of hand, drape and texture. Garment-specific directions for blocking may vary if the stitch pattern should not be stretched out, if the garment cannot be blocked flat, or if construction makes a two-step blocking process impossible. However, whether washing swatches, garment pieces or the finished piece, the directions for washing the fabric are always the same. Please note that CL handknits should not be dry cleaned; nor should they be blocked using steam or and iron.

Pre-testing

The washing method and cleaning agent must be tested before washing the gauge swatch, the garment pieces or the finished piece itself. Catherine Lowe, LLC cannot guarantee satisfactory results using any specific cleaning agent or particular method for washing and cannot accept responsibility for any damage to CL Yarn or pieces made with it caused by mishandling or improper treatment during fabrication – while swatching, knitting, washing or blocking – or during subsequent cleaning and care.

Only by pre-testing using a generously sized swatch will you be able to gauge how the knitted fabric is likely to respond to a cleaning agent, water and washing method. To pre-test, work a generously sized swatch using the same yarn, stitch pattern and gauge as the garment. Hand wash only using lukewarm, not cold, water and a gentle cleaning agent with a neutral pH. Do not use a non-rinsing wool wash or Woolite. Soak the swatch for several hours, preferably overnight or longer; do not rub or twist the knitted fabric or agitate the swatch in a washing machine. Rinse the swatch well several times in lukewarm water, changing the water each time until it remains clear when the piece is submerged. Press or squeeze out as much water as possible without twisting or wringing the knitted fabric and dry the swatch flat, blocking it to the finished gauge given for the stitch pattern used for the swatch. Allow it to dry thoroughly and naturally. Examine the dry swatch carefully, paying particular attention for evidence of color loss, shrinkage, loss of shape, fulling, pilling or other damage to the fiber. If necessary, repeat this procedure, varying the cleaning agent and the washing method, until the results are satisfactory. Once the cleaning agent, water and washing method have yielded satisfactory results, use this same combination of cleaning agent, water and washing method for all subsequent washing and blocking of the garment. Do not use the gauge swatch for this preliminary test at the risk of damaging the swatch and/or producing inaccurate results regarding the finished gauge.

The Gauge Swatch

Following the washing method described above, wash the gauge swatch using the pre-tested cleaning agent. When blocking the gauge swatch, calculate its finished dimensions based on the finished gauge of the stitch pattern and the number of stitches and rows in the swatch itself. Pin it to the blocking surface at intervals of 1"/2.5 cm to a length and width 105% of the finished dimensions. Once the swatch is thoroughly dry, unpin it from the blocking surface and remove any blocking wires that may have been used to block the swatch. Do not move the swatch, but leave it unpinned on the blocking surface and allow it to relax 24 hours or more. This enables the fiber that has been slightly stretched by the blocking to recover its natural loft and to reach its finished gauge. The gauge the swatch attains after it has relaxed is its finished gauge. This is the gauge that should be compared with that required by the pattern directions.

Initial Blocking

Whenever possible, the separate sections of a CL handknit are washed and blocked before they are assembled and finished. Blocking at this stage of the fabrication sets the shape of the pieces before they are constructed and makes construction easier and more precise. After the pieces have been constructed, a second washing and blocking sets the final shape of the finished piece.

Follow the predetermined method to wash the garment pieces, allowing the knitted fabric to soak until all loose dye, residue and any dirt that may have accumulated during the knitting or construction and finishing have been released from the yarn. As with the swatches, do not rub or twist the knitted fabric or agitate it in a washing machine. Rinse in lukewarm water several times until the rinse water is clear. Do not twist or wring the fabric, but squeeze it to remove as much excess water as possible and take care to support the wet fabric completely when rinsing it or moving it to the blocking surface. Block the pieces to 105% of their finished dimensions. Measure carefully and secure the pieces to a solid, horizontal blocking surface at intervals of 1"– 1.5"/2.5 cm – 3.75 cm. Make sure that all corners needing to be squared are pinned at right angles and that all vertical and horizontal edges are parallel. Allow the pieces to dry thoroughly before unpinning them from the blocking surface. Once dry, leave them on the blocking surface to relax 24 hours or more before proceeding with construction and/or finishing. It is extremely important that the pieces be allowed to dry naturally, without additional heat or hot air directed at them, and that they rest on the blocking surface unpinned for a minimum of 24 hours.

If after relaxing, the fabric has not retained its blocked shape, repeat the procedure to set the shape completely. If the gauge swatch has been worked correctly and the knitting gauge has been maintained during fabrication, the knitted fabric will retract slightly to its finished gauge after it has been allowed to relax from its blocking dimensions. This blocking technique also helps minimize any loss of shape and dimension as the completed piece is worn and cleaned and makes re-blocking after subsequent cleaning easier and accurate.

As the knitted fabric is pinned to its proper dimensions, it should be stretched evenly and along its grain lines. It is crucial that it not be pinned off-grain, since any bias blocked into the fabric initially may remain permanently. We strongly advocate the use of blocking wires and blocking templates to ensure that the fabric is blocked to the proper shape, in the correct dimension and on-grain.

If blocking wires are used, they must be inserted into the knitted fabric before it is pinned to the blocking surface. Weave them along the vertical edges of the garment pieces at intervals of one or two rows using the running threads between the selvedge stitch and the pattern stitch next to it as guides. Along the cast-on and bind-off rows, weave the blocking wires at intervals of one or two stitches. Pin the pieces as directed above, pinning inside the blocking wires so that the wires sit just outside the finished dimensions or on the outline of the blocking template and form a frame that evenly tensions the knitted fabric.

Final Blocking

The same steps used for the initial blocking should be followed for the final blocking, including a minimum of 24 hours for the piece to relax unpinned on the blocking surface before wearing or storing it. Critically, however, during the final blocking, the piece is blocked to 100% of its finished dimension, not to 105%.