

Design-as-you-go Garter Stitch Vest

©Joan Dyer

This vest was designed using Tess' Silky Locks, but any of her boucle or textured yarns would work as well. The vest is knit vertically starting at one front edge, working around the back, ending at the other front. When the body has been completed, the shoulders are joined (no side seam stitching required). The sample shown is a cropped waist-length vest, with a crew neck and some stripes (the photo on the left is the front). This version has a three-button closure: two buttons on the bottom to adjust width, one at the neck.



BOOK KEEPING: You will be composing your own pattern as you knit, and it is important to keep an accurate record of the number of rows knit and the number of stitches increased or decreased for the first quarter of the work since these numbers create your pattern. Once you have the flavor, I urge you to play with yarn and yarn combinations. The front half that you knit first determines the size, with some adjustment possible when all is almost complete. Find your desired width and ease by measuring around a body or a nicely fitting piece of clothing. Take $\frac{1}{4}$ of this number for the width of half the front. Divide this width into parts: use approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ for the shoulder area, the rest for a small amount of underarm (about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches) and the remainder for the front neck and neckline curve. Round off your numbers shamelessly! The knitted fabric will be garter stitch which is quite adaptable and stretchy.

Record these measurements (for example, use the schematic to record your number, in inches, for the half front. Then put in the number for the shoulder area. Allow $\frac{1}{2}$ inch for each sloped area C and I, another $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to get halfway through the flat underarm area labelled J, and the remainder for the neck area B. Look at your initial measurements and decide if you want a wider neckline; if so, just add a bit to B. At this stage, all your numbers are in inches.

I generally use a neckline depth of 2" (**D** on the schematic) and an armhole depth of 7" (**H**) plus $\frac{1}{2}$ " for the slanted section (**I**).

The sketch indicates the direction of knitting (arrow). Here are the basic instructions; you will fill in numbers as you go.

- A) Cast on the number of stitches you would like for **A inches**, choosing the vest length you want (cropped, hip, tunic). Mark one edge as the bottom edge (this is arbitrary). You will work a gentle I-cord hem as you go, in the following manner:
 - as you knit towards the bottom edge, stop leaving 2 stitches unworked. Flip the yarn from back (knit position) to front (purl position) then slip the remain 2 stitches purlwise
 - knit back normally
- B) Count the rows as you work them in garter stitch; stop when you have 1 inch and record this number. Don't stretch since this vest should be relaxed to show off the yarn texture, not stretched taut when worn. This is the number of

ROWS you need for 1 inch (your row gauge). From now on you are going to convert inches to rows when writing your pattern. Save the number **ROW GAUGE: 1"= ___ rows** (and check again after a bit more of the front has been done). Don't fuss too much; garter stitch is squishy and has lots of give. Now determine how many rows you need to get the number of inches you need for the flat portion of the neck and record this number as **B rows**. Continue in garter stitch, with I-cord at the bottom, for **B rows**.

- C) Work approximately ½ inch, increasing one stitch at the start of the neck edge every other row, working to the end, then working back. Usually 2 increases (4 rows total) will suffice. Write down, as **C rows**, the number of rows you've worked (and also record the number of stitches increased).
- D) Determine the number of stitches you need to equal **D inches** by measuring your knitting, (I usually choose 1 or 2 inches). Record this number as **D stitches** and cast on **D stitches**.

You have already determined your desired shoulder width, in inches. Convert this number to rows. Now divide the number of rows into three parts (you can approximate), and round up so that each number is even. Record the three numbers as **E, F, and G rows**.

- E) Work **E rows** even.
- F) Cast off one stitch at the shoulder edge then work the next rows even for a total of **F rows**
- G) Cast off one stitch at the shoulder edge then work the next rows even for a total of **G rows**

Measure down along your knitting for the number of inches you want for armhole depth, less about 1/2", and count the number of stitches. Record this number as **H stitches**.

- H) Cast off **H stitches**, work to bottom edge, turn and work back (2 rows)
- I) Cast off one stitch at armhole, finish row, work back (1 stitch gone, 2 rows worked). Repeat for 1/2", using the same number of rows (and decreases) as you did rows (and increases) at step **C**.
- J) Convert your desired underarm width into rows, use this number for **J**, and work these rows (I usually use no more than 1").
- K) Work the same as step **C**: cast on one stitch at armhole, finish row, work back (1 stitch added, 2 rows worked). Repeat for as many rows as you worked at **C**.
- L) Cast on **H stitches**, work to bottom, work back (2 rows worked)
- M) Work **G rows** (to match step **G**)
- N) Cast on 1 st at shoulder and work a total of **F rows** (to match step **F**)
- O) Cast on 1 st at shoulder and work a total of **E rows** (to match step **E**)

I like to put in a small bit of shaping for the back neck; this is optional.

- P) Cast off 1 stitch at neck edge, finish row, work back and repeat once (2 stitches gone, 4 rows worked)
- Q) and q) The back neck width is typically about 1/3 of the total back, or twice the number at **B**. Convert this number to ROWS, and work half the rows then stop and inspect the yarn you have left.

You have just completed a bit less than half the vest (allowing for some yarn for final finishing of front and neck edges, and shoulder seams). If you have used half the yarn or more, now is a good time to think about inserting stripes. You will want to place them (back sections o, n, and m correspond to e, f, and g on the front) so that back stripes match front stripes but you may, instead, prefer to do something random

Now work the second half of the back neck.

From now on, use the letters on the schematic to help you pair up the remaining instruction with the ones already given "Cast off" and "Cast on" get switched, "increase" and "decrease" also switch, and you will be working the instructions from mid-back towards front.

- "p" matches "P", changing to "cast on" from "cast off"
- "o" matches "O", changing to "cast off" from "cast on"
- "n" matches "N", changing to "cast off" from "cast on"
- "m" matches "M"
- "l,k,j,i,h" are the second armhole "H,I,J,K,L"
- "g,f,e" are the second shoulder shaping (like "M,N,O")

“d” matches “D”, changing to “cast off” from “cast on”
 “c” matches “C”, changing to “cast off” from “cast on”
 “b” matches “B”

Knt one more row if necessary to end at the bottom edge. Do not break yarn yet. Pin both shoulders together (do not sew yet) and determine whether you like the shape or want to make some adjustments. If **no** adjustments are needed, finish off the vest as follows:

I-cord Finish: Use the 3 stitches at the bottom edge for an attached I-cord, worked as follows:

K 2 stitches, SSK last stitch with stitch either picked up along the edge or else worked together with a live stitch on the needle.

Slip all 3 stitches to left needle (or slide to other end of double point) and continue up the front, around the neck, and down the initial cast on edge.

You can work this somewhat tightly if you want to firm up the edges.

Closure: Finish off with one clasp or frog at the top edge, or anything else you'd like!

Adjustments:

1. Neckline too large: pick up around neckline and work back and forth for a while until the neck is as desired; remember to decrease raglan style so that the added rows lie flat.
2. Neckline too large AND armhole deep: instead of sewing shoulder seams, overlap the shoulder edges to decrease the circumference of both neckline and armhole.
3. Too short: pick up from where you are, work a few rows back and forth or else work any back-and-forth edging that will attach to the vest hem
4. Too wide at bottom: you can run yarn into the I-cord hem to tighten, or else continue the I-cord edging around along the bottom, working with smaller needles or at a tighter tension or by not picking up so many stitches.
5. Width: you can make a belt and belt loops!

