

Hints and Tips

#2 – Blocking your finished garment

Knitted lace needs blocking to show off the design to its best advantage. I recommend wet blocking rather than steam pressing, as pressing can flatten the knitting too much and destroy all the character of the yarn. Here's how I do it:

- Weave in yarn ends but do not trim yarn until after blocking.
- Soak in cool water with a suitable gentle liquid wash (eg Eucalan or Soak) for up to 15 minutes. Rinse if required, then gently squeeze out excess water and wrap in a towel, but leave damp.
- Block your shawl on a flat surface, eg towels on a bed or carpet, or on a blocking board. I use the foam yoga or play mats that look like giant jigsaw puzzle pieces, which slot together and make as large an area as you need.
- You can use blocking wires and 'T'pins, or use large glass-headed pins. I tend to use wires for triangular shawls and pins for crescents, but that's my personal preference.

Triangular Top Down Shawls (Abbey, Forest Flowers)

- 1) The garter stitch selvages (the left and right hand edges of your knitting) become the top neck edge and should be pinned into a straight line. In both of my designs you have a yarnover three stitches in from each edge, so you can weave blocking wires in and out of these to give you a nice line. Use T pins to hold the wires in a line, or just use pins if you don't have wires. (Pic 1)
- 2) The cast off edge forms the left and right hand sides of the shawl, with the centre stitch and yarnovers either side forming a vertical "spine" down the body of the shawl. Spread out the shawl roughly into shape, keeping the centre stitch as straight as you can, and pin out the section at the bottom edge in line with the spine (Pic 2).
- 3) Stretch the knitting gently into shape and start to pin the sides roughly into place. Once you have the whole edge pinned, go round again, continuing to adjust your work around the lower edge, gently stretching the points out as far as they will comfortably go (Pic 3) - this may take two or three trips around the edge. If the design is symmetrical, use a ruler/tape measure to check that both sides match.

*From the top:
Using T-pins to hold wires (Pic 1);
Pin the bottom edge in line with spine (Pic 2);
Going around the edge, gently stretching (Pic 3)*



Crescent Shaped Top Down Shawls

(Megan, Highland Heather, Spring Equinox, Mountain Mist, Eilidh)

- 1) The garter stitch selvages (the left and right hand edges of your knitting) become the top neck edge. As this edge will be curved on a crescent shawl, I put a couple of pins at the centre of the top edge only - where the garter stitch tab was formed (Pic 4).
- 2) Starting with the centre of the bottom (bind off) edge, stretch the knitting gently into shape and pin out a small section directly below the top section you pinned at the start (Pic 5).
- 3) Continue working to each side of the centre, stretching and pinning out the bottom edge to give a crescent shape. Use blocking wires if you prefer, allowing them to curve with the shape of the edging (Pic 6).
- 4) Allow the narrow ends of the shawl to curl round and pin out the points, stretching the edge as required (Pic 7). Once you have the whole edge pinned, go round again, continuing to adjust your work around the lower edge, gently stretching the points out as far as they will comfortably go - this may take two or three trips around the edge. If the design is symmetrical, use a ruler/tape measure to check that both sides match.
- 5) The top edge will not usually require pinning, as it will stretch into shape naturally. Remove the pins from the centre of the top edge once you've finished stretching the bottom edge, which allows it to settle naturally into its own curve.

For either shape:

- The final size will depend on the elasticity of your yarn, your tension and - to some extent - how brave you are!!
- Depending on the design, you can stretch and pin out the points quite vigorously if you want a sharp pointed edge - blocking wires may help with this, but you can use pins alone. If you prefer a more ruffled, fluted edge, don't stretch the points so much.
- Leave to dry completely (overnight or for 24 hours, depending on the yarn), then unpin and trim yarn ends.
- Your shawl is ready to wear!

From top:

A couple of pins around the garter stitch (Pic 4);

Pin out a small section directly below the top (Pic 5);

Pin out the bottom edge in a crescent (Pic 6);

Pin out the points, stretching the edge as required (Pic 7)

