

## Hints and Tips

### #4 – Shawls - Getting Started with the Garter Stitch Tab

After last month's look at gauging whether you have sufficient yarn remaining, Julie turns her attention to getting started on the shawl. Apparently, she does not have any Irish ancestry ... !

Lots of people come onto our exhibition stand attracted by the sample shawls on display and are keen to tackle one with our beautiful yarns, but often they don't quite know how to get started. Problems seem to stem from the fact that the starting point for these shawls is so different from what most people are used to when knitting garments. I'm often asked if I do workshops - it's something I'm seriously considering (let me know if this is something you or your knitting group would be interested in) - but in the meantime I thought it made a good topic for this section of the newsletter.

All of my shawls are worked from the top down and start with what has become known in the shawl knitting community as the "Garter Stitch Tab" - a term



Left to right: Fig 1 - 3

which seems to frighten or confuse lots of new lace knitters. This is a short section of garter stitch worked over just a few stitches, which becomes the foundation on which you build the structure of your shawl. Top down triangles are popular and quite easy to knit, and are the first shape that most knitters attempt (including me!). I'll use the instructions for my Abbey's Shawl design as an example of the technique.

Cast on 3 stitches quite loosely and work 8 rows in garter stitch, slipping the first stitch purlwise fairly loosely on each row, ie:

Rows 1-8: Slip 1 purlwise, k2. This gives you a nice chain edge on both sides. (**Fig 1**)

Now to turn this strip of garter stitch into the "tab":

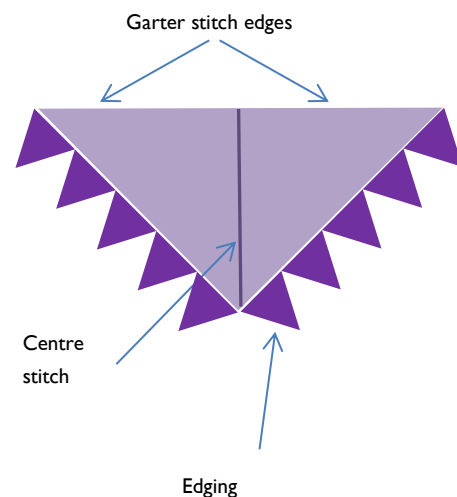
Row 9: Slip 1 purlwise, k2, then turn your work clockwise through 90 degrees so you are looking at the left hand edge of your knitting (**Fig 2**). Now, working through the slipped stitch chains at the edge of your tab, pick up and k4 sts along the left hand edge (**Fig 3**). 7 sts on the needle. Now turn your work clockwise another 90 degrees and pick up and k2 sts from your cast on edge (**Fig 4**). 9 sts on the needle.

This small piece of knitting forms the "Garter Stitch Tab" and this becomes the basis for the top edge of your shawl.

For most top down triangles, you will now increase one stitch at the right hand edge of the knitting, one either side of the centre stitch (often called the spine stitch), and one at the left hand edge, ie a total of 4 sts increased, on every right side row. The right and left edges will form the straight neck edge at the top of the shawl and the centre spine goes right down the centre back, forming a point at the bottom edge. For those of you who remember your school geometry, you are basically creating two small right angled triangles which are joined at the centre back by a vertical spine to form one larger right angled triangle, as per the illustration at right.

To set up for working these increases, work the next row as follows:

Row 10: Slip 1 purlwise, k2, p1, place a stitch marker on the needle, p1, place a marker, p1, k3 (**Fig 5**).



The single stitch between the stitch markers is your centre spine stitch, which is worked with a yarnover increase either side of it on every right side row.

From this point onwards, all rows are worked as follows, forming a border of 3 stitches of garter stitch at either side of your work and the sections between asterisks \* to \* representing the stitches shown in the chart or written instructions and repeated on either side of the centre spine stitch:



Left to right: Fig 4 -6

Right side rows: s1pwise, k2, \*work sts as per chart/instructions\*, sm (slip marker), k1 (centre spine stitch), sm, \*work sts as per chart/instructions\*, k3

Wrong side rows: s1pwise, k2, \*p to marker,\* sm, p1 (centre spine stitch), sm, \*p to last 3 sts,\* k3



Left to right: Fig 7 - 9

So, if we follow this format, the first few rows are worked like this:

Row 1: s1pwise, k2, \*yo, k1, yo,\* sm, k1, sm, \*yo, k1, yo,\* k3. (13 sts - **Fig 6**)

Row 2 and following alternate rows: s1pwise, k2, \*p to marker,\* sm, p1, sm, \*p to last 3 sts,\* k3.

Row 3: s1pwise, k2, \*yo, k3, yo,\* sm, k1, sm, \*yo, k3, yo,\* k3. (17 sts)

Row 5: s1pwise, k2, \*yo, k5, yo,\* sm, k1, sm, \*yo, k5, yo,\* k3. (21 sts - **Fig 7**)

Row 7: s1pwise, k2, \*yo, k1, yo, s1k1pssso, k1, k2tog, yo, k1, yo,\* sm, k1, sm, \*yo, k1, yo, s1k1pssso, k1, k2tog, yo, k1, yo,\* k3. (25 sts - **Fig 8**)

In **Fig 9** I've shown the work stretched over the cable of the circular needle so you can see more clearly the structure of the design. The garter stitch edges become the straight top edge of the shawl, and the centre spine stitch between the stitch markers is clearly visible.

You continue in the same way, increasing on every right side row and following the pattern instructions, until your shawl is the size you want before commencing the edging.

I hope that's enough to get you started with your triangle shawl.