



SUBSTITUTING YARNS

Has the yarn been discontinued for the design you want to make next? **Debbie Tomkies** explains how to replace it...

Rummaging through old patterns and pattern books in local charity shops might give you a great collection of vintage designs. Not surprisingly though, the yarn used in these patterns has often been long since discontinued, which means that an alternative yarn has to be found.

Perhaps you've found a pattern you love, but you know the yarn will make you itch like crazy, or thought: "I like this pattern but it could do with spicing up a bit." Although substituting yarns can seem a little daunting, not only is it much easier than you may think, but it can even be fun.

Yarn substitutions fall into two main categories: Like For Like (replacing one

yarn with another similar one, of the same weight and with similar properties) and All Change (a total exchange of fibre weight and type). Like For Like substitutions are much easier, so it's best to start here.

LIKE FOR LIKE

First you need to find out the yarn weight used in the pattern, such as 4 ply, DK, aran or chunky. Most patterns should tell you this – if not, you may need to research the yarn listed first to discover what weight it was. The yardage can also provide a clue, for example if the yarn is 200m to 50g, then it's likely to be 4 ply.

Once you know the weight used in the pattern, you can look for a similar yarn

weight to replace it with. When you're looking to buy yarn, most yarn should state the weight on the ball band. However, if you're planning on using old or handspun yarn and don't have much information to go on, there is an easy way to find out the weight.

Take one of your yarns that looks similar to the pattern yarn. Wrap the yarn closely around a ruler until one inch has been covered. Count how many times the yarn is wrapped around the ruler to give you the 'wraps per inch' or WPI. **1** This yarn measures 12 wraps per inch, which is broadly the same as a DK yarn. For thick yarns, it may be necessary to cover 2in and divide the number of wraps by two to get

the WPI measurement. Use the table below **2** to decide which is the closest yarn type to your yarn. If this is the same as the yarn in the pattern, you're on your way.

Once you know the WPI, you'll need to crochet a tension square. Wash and block it before measuring. If your washed square is exactly the same tension as stated in your pattern, you can go ahead and start. If it's not quite the same, try making another swatch with a smaller or larger hook. If it's completely out, you may have to consider changing yarn, or working out more drastic adjustments.

HOW MUCH YARN

The amount of yarn you need for a project is called the yardage (even if you work in metres). Even when yarns are the same tension, you may need a different amount of yarn to make the same design. For example, DK cotton is quite a heavy fibre and may only give you 50 metres (55yds) of yarn per 50g ball. But DK wool is lighter and may give you 100m (109yds) per 50g. The length of yarn per 50g determines the amount of yarn you'll need to crochet a pattern. For example, if a pattern needs 200m (219yds) of DK yarn, you'd only need 2 balls of DK wool, but 4 balls of DK cotton.

If you don't know the yardage of your yarn, weigh one ball. Wrap the yarn once around a book without stretching it, measure it and note the length. Wind off the whole ball, by wrapping it around the book. Count the number of wraps and multiply by the length you noted – this will give you the total length of the whole

ball. Compare this to the total metres per ball as stated in your pattern. If your yarn has more metres per ball, you should need fewer balls. If your yarn has fewer metres per ball, you'll probably need more balls.

Here's an example: your pattern states that you need 8 balls of yarn, and that yarn weighs 50g and measures 100m (109yds). Multiply the number of balls (8) needed by the length of the yarn (100m/109yds) to get the total yardage required – 800m (872yds) in total. But you want to use a new yarn for the pattern. One ball of this yarn weighs 50g and measures 80m (87yds). So divide the total yardage required (800m/872yds) by the length of one ball (80m/87yds) and you get 10. So you'd need 10 balls of the new yarn to crochet the pattern.

If you want to use a yarn that weighs 100g instead of a yarn that weighs 50g, make the calculations using half the numbers of the 100g yarn, or double the numbers of the 50g yarn. That way, you will be comparing like for like.

If you're planning to make adjustments to the way you crochet the pattern, you'll also need to adjust the yarn amounts you buy. For example, if your pattern is for a treble crochet jumper and you're adding textured stitches or a lace pattern, you may need approx 10–20% more yarn. If you're adding stripes or other colourwork, you could need up to 50% more yarn.

BUYING SUBSTITUTE YARN

If you're buying yarn to make a specific pattern, it may not be possible to make a tension square before you buy. Most yarn

manufacturers recognise this and provide lots of useful information on their ball bands. For example, the ball band **3** should give tension details, showing how many stitches and rows you can expect to crochet with that yarn, in cm or inches, usually worked over double crochet using a recommended hook size or range of sizes.

Clearly, this information will not be as accurate as making your own tension squares, and it doesn't allow for more complex pattern stitches. Nonetheless, if you choose a yarn that has a range of hook sizes and a tension measurement close to that stated in your pattern, you should be able to adjust your hook size to achieve a good tension match.

You can compare the tension effect of different yarns in **4** – each swatch uses a different yarn weight with the hook size recommended for that weight, and yet each one is crocheted with 10 treble stitches and 5 rows.

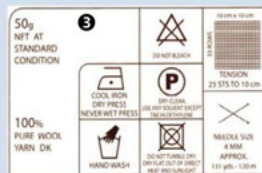
A NOTE ON FIBRE

When substituting yarns, you'll also need to bear in mind the qualities of the fibre used. For example, wool yarns are usually more stretchy than cotton, so you might find that patterns originally designed using wool may not work well crocheted in cotton, because it has little 'give'. So when you're new to substitutions, it's best to replace a yarn with one that has a similar fibre content. Once you're more confident, you can try a total exchange of fibre (All Change) on small projects, to see how they work out. **5**

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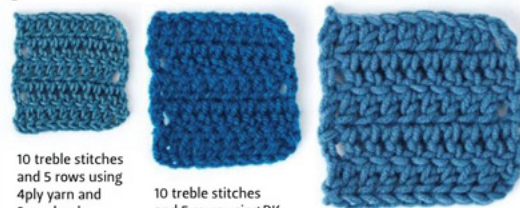
2 YARN WEIGHTS

WPI	UK	US	Needle size
16–18+	1ply, 2ply & 3ply	Lace weight or light fingering	2–3½/mm
14–16	4ply	Fingering Sport	3–4mm
12–14	Double knitting Aran	Light worsted Fisherman or Worsted	3½–4½/mm
10–12			4–5½/mm
8–10	Chunky	Bulky	5½–7mm
8 or less	Super chunky	Super bulky	7–12mm



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10 treble stitches and 5 rows using 4ply yarn and 3mm hook.

10 treble stitches and 5 rows using DK yarn and 4mm hook.

10 treble stitches and 5 rows using chunky yarn and 5mm hook.