

WATERSPUN PONCHO

A knitting method discussion

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This is a working method description, not really a pattern with quantities and gauge. That's because making one of these is dead-simple.

Here is the whole thing:

1. Make swatches until you get a fabric that you like.
2. Figure out your gauge.
3. Measure how big a neckline you need to go over your head.
4. Multiply that measurement by your gauge, then round that number up to the next multiple of four.
5. Cast on that number of stitches, placing 4 markers evenly spaced.
6. Knit 6 rounds.
7. On the 7th round, K1,make one, knit to one stitch before the next marker, make one, K1. Repeat this three times.
8. On the 8th round – knit
9. Repeat steps 7 and 8 until your poncho is as long/wide as you like it.
10. Bind off, or work one or more rounds of attached i-cord to finish. (more on attached i-cord below)
11. If the neck is too wide, pick up purl bump stitches at the base of the rolled collar (more on this below). You should have the same number as you cast on. Put 4 markers in your work evenly spaced. Then work one round starting with k2 tog, (k1, p1) until you have two stitches left before the next marker, ssk. Repeat between the other markers. Then work a K1, P1 round continuig ribbing as established. Continue

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this way, alternating decrease rounds and plain ribbed rounds for about 6-8 rows. Bind off VERY LOOSELY, making sure you can still get your head through the hole.

As to what yarns are suitable, what number to cast on given a particular gauge, what size needles to use, how much yarn you'll need – this is all up to you. Experiment! Here are some thoughts to keep in mind:

What yarn is suitable?

Look at your candidate yarn and think about these things:

- Will it feel good when worn?
- Is it hand-wash only, otherwise hard to clean, or a light color? If so – are you prepared to care for it when it gets dirty?
- Is it loosely or tightly spun? Loosely spun yarns are more prone to pilling, catching and looking “used.” On the other hand, they're often softer with a more luxurious drape and sheen.
- Is it heavy? A poncho is a big thing – larger than a lap blanket. Lift about 10 skeins worth. Can you envision yourself dragging around that much weight (or more)? Will the yarn stretch under its own weight when used in a large quantity? Cottons are heavy yard for yard and are infamous for this. Wool is less weighty per yard or meter. Wool/acrylic blends are lighter still.
- Is the color/texturenot only attractive on its own, but will it look good on you? A puffy or furry yarn will add bulk and increase the size of your silhouette. A giant-gauge or shiny yarn will make a garment look larger than it really is. Some colors and textures look fantastic as accents, but applied over an entire garment may not be as appealing on every wearer.

Decide what's important to you and choose accordingly. Remember, you can always buy one skein to try out before you commit for the whole project. If that yarn doesn't work out for a poncho, one skein might make a nifty hat or scarf.

What needle size to use?

When swatching with a new yarn, start with the needle size recommended by the yarn maker. Do up a good size swatch in your chosen texture stitch or colorwork design.

- Do you like the feel and drape? If so, measure your gauge – you're good to go.
- Does the swatch feel too stiff and tight? Try again on a size larger needle.
- Is the swatch too drapery and holey? Go down a needle size and try again.

You'll know when you've hit the best combo. If you're combining several yarns of different weights or textures, be sure to swatch them as you will use them, using the stitch and needles you intend for the



Poncho mid-block on blocking wires, laid out on towels on top of an area rug.

final project, even if that means making a VERY large swatch with multiple stripes.

Once you do get the look/feel you like, make a note of your needle size and FINISH YOUR SWATCH. You'll need it to do both gauge measurements and yarn consumption estimates. (I'm not good at keeping paper notes, so I make knots in my dangling tail end to help me remember what needle size I used to make my swatch. For example, four knots = US #4 needles.)

How many to cast on?

Simple math. If your gauge is 4.5 stitches per inch, and you've decided that a 24 inch neckline is big enough, you start with $4.5 \times 24 = 108$ stitches. That lucks out because 108 is a multiple of 4, and you don't need to round up.

How much yarn will you need?

You can figure out roughly how much yarn your gauge square took for that number of square inches or centimeters. Draw out a diagram of your project (in this case – a big square), and estimate how big you want the thing to be when it's done. Figure out its total area and divide that area by the area of your swatch.

Got a 6-inch square swatch? Want to make a piece that's 4 feet on a side? $4 \text{ feet} \times 4 \text{ feet} = 48 \text{ inches} \times 48 \text{ inches} = 2304 \text{ square inches}$. $6 \text{ inches} \times 6 \text{ inches} = 36 \text{ square inches}$. $2304/36 = 64$. It will take you about 64 times as much yarn to knit your 4-foot square piece than it took to knit your six inch square. Ravel back your swatch and measure, or weigh it (more on weighing below) to determine the amount of yarn you used. Now do the math.

Hint for weighing the swatch – home scales aren't sensitive enough. Even post office and deli counter scales aren't sensitive enough. I go to a local pharmacy in a non-rush time and ask them to weigh

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the thing. Their scales work down to the hundredth of a gram. My happy, polite requests outside of heavy use hours have always been entertained.

Running out of yarn and hiding a new dye lot

It happens. I ran out of the final color for the blue stripe, so I bought an additional skein but the dye lots didn't match. I had already knit the final blue stripe, but I ripped it back because I wanted to alternate rounds between the new and old blue yarns in order to make the different dye lots less evident. (You can still see some minor striping thanks to the wonders of flash photography. In person the difference is less noticeable). I kept going, alternating yarns until I ran out of my old yarn. I finished up using every scrap of the new yarn.

One interesting effect I got from using more or less the same quantity of each color (until the blue) was that with the increasing circumference of the piece, the width of the color stripes changed. I didn't have more teal than pink, more pink than green and so on. That's just the way the piece worked out. Had I used only the blue I had on hand, the final stripe would have been proportionally smaller. Adding the yarn I did is why it breaks the established progression of diminution. I'm pleased though. I ended up having a blue strip that's about twice the width of the previous one. Although it is wider, the proportions aren't all that bad.

Attaching multiple rounds of i-cord

The last step was adding two rounds of four-stitch i-cord edging in plum onto the live blue stitches. I used US #9(5.5mm) needles, the same size employed for the body. I attached the edging by working the last stitch of the I-cord row as a SSK along with a live blue stitch. I'm doing this at a 3:4 ratio – three attached rows of I-cord, followed by one "free" unattached row. This kept the I-cord from bunching up the poncho into a gathered edge. (I could make a ruffled bottom by increasing the number of free I-cord rows.) I'm handling the points by working four unattached I-cord rows at the corner tips.

The first round of I-cord edging was applied to live stitches. Instead of binding off my last row of the poncho body, I left its stitches on the circs. Using a DPN and a half-hitch cast on, I cast on four stitches and knit one row of I-cord. On the second row, I knit three stitches, then did an SSK, working the last stitch of the I-cord together with one stitch of the poncho body. I worked this way, doing three rows of attached I-cord, followed by one round of "free" I-cord. This 3:4 ratio of attached rows: total rows kept the edging from being either gathered or ruffled. When I got all the way around my piece and had incorporated all of the body stitches, I grafted the live stitches at the end of my I-cord to its beginning.



Working the first round of i-cord onto live stitches.



Attaching subsequent rounds of i-cord. Later rounds are worked into earlier ones

On the second round of I-cord I was not working with live stitches. Instead, I was picking up stitches along the outer edge of an established row of 4-stitch I-cord. On the previous round of cord one stitch was "eaten" by the attachment row. That left three to form the rounded edge. I used the centermost of these three as my line of attachment. To do this round of edging, I again cast on four stitches using half-hitches, and knit one row of unattached I-cord. Then I began working it onto the established round of edging. On the next row I knit two stitches, then did a SSK and picked up a stitch under both legs of the designated spot on the previously finished I-cord. In this shot you can see the knit two, the SSK (under my thumb), and the needle thrust under the stitch of the existing I-cord, ready to do the pick-up.

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Picking up stitches on inside of rolled stockinette collar, through the purl bumps on the reverse.

Rescuing a too-wide neck

My neckline ended up being way too wide. 100 stitches as cast-on would have worked for an adult, but for a tall Kindergartener (size 8), it's too big. If I were to begin again, I'd probably go with 80 stitches, tops. Instead of ripping everything back and starting again, or unpicking the top and knitting in the opposite direction, I fudged it, producing a detail that looked as if I planned it (I hope)..

I preserved the original rolled collar as a welt detail, but filled in the loose-fitting neckline with a contrasting texture. Using plum, I'm going to pick up stitches in the purl bumps of the last row of the rolled collar, just before I switched from plum to the teal and began the body increases:

I used the i-cord method described above. size US #6 (4mm) needles and my new blue yarn, picking up 100 stitches around the inside of the neck edge. I placed a marker at the point corresponding to each corner in the poncho body. I worked nine rows in K1, P1 ribbing. Every other row I started each between-marker section with a SSK, and ended with a K2tog. Because I was decreasing 8 stitches every other row I ended up binding off 68 stitches.