

Chapter 1

Hooking into a Life of Crochet

In This Chapter

- ▶ Getting fringe benefits
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You don't have to be an expert to take advantage of crochet's many beneficial qualities. The soothing rhythm of creating stitches can calm even the most frazzled nerves. If you're one of those people who can't stand to be idle, crochet is a wonderful way to let your body get a bit of rest and not feel like you're wasting time. If your family is always clamoring for you to sit down and watch a TV show or a special movie at night, go ahead, but bring along your hook and yarn.

Crochet is also a wonderful take-along project. You can crochet on trains and planes as well, although these days, you'll have to use plastic hooks when using public transportation.

If you don't believe us, maybe you can believe the psychological studies that have been done on the benefits of crochet! The focus needed to create something takes your mind off the bazillion little things hollering for your attention and gives your brain some much-needed downtime. Crochet also serves as an outlet for your creativity and provides a sense of satisfaction when you complete your design and can look at it and say, "I created this myself."

Crochet has physical benefits as well. People suffering from various forms of arthritis have used it as a form of physical therapy. The constant movement required helps keep the hands limber and the joints from stiffening up. So you see, the reasons to enjoy this craft are many. We hope that at least one of these reasons is enough to get you on your way.

This book may start you on the path to an addictive hobby, so be warned.

Starting with a Hook and Skein

One of the greatest things about crochet is that you don't need to invest in many fancy, new materials or create a new room in your house to house a bunch of equipment. With just a simple hook, a skein of yarn, and a nice, comfy place to sit, you can begin enjoying the benefits that this craft provides. If you're like most people these days, finding the time to figure out something new can be a challenge. With crochet, you can pick it up when you have some time, put it down when you don't, or take it with you on the run. No mess to clean up and nothing to babysit. And you can easily find hooks and yarn in your local discount or craft store as well as the many specialty yarn stores that have cropped up in many towns — no need to wait while you special order some obscure item.

Gathering all your tools

All you need to get started are a couple hooks, preferably from different manufacturers so that you can find a style you're comfortable with, and a skein of yarn. The other stuff that you need, such as a pair of scissors and a bag to keep all this stuff in, you probably have at home.

Chapter 2 gives you the skinny on the various types of hooks and yarns, as well as on some of the other crochet gadgets available. As with any new undertaking, understanding the basics about the materials that you're working with is important.

Practice makes perfect

You don't learn to walk or ride a bike in a day, and the same is true with crochet. It takes practice, but probably not as much as you think. Start with the basic chain stitch (see Chapter 4) and practice until you're comfortable with the motions your hands must make, and then move on to another stitch. Each successive stitch, which we walk you through step-by-step in Chapters 4 and 6, builds on another, so try not to skip any of them, at least in the beginning. We don't want you to get frustrated and throw your work down. Believe us, in no time at all, you'll be moving right along.

The majority of the book deals with techniques from a right-hander's point of view, but we don't forget you lefties. All the information contained in this book (and there's plenty of it!) applies to you as well. Chapter 4 gets you started on the basics by giving you equal time with the righties. And then we give you a few tips to help you work your way through the rest of the book from your perspective.

Mastering Basic Crochet Techniques

Aside from figuring out the basic stitches, you need to understand a couple other techniques, all quite easy, in order to create your masterpiece. Adding and subtracting stitches, changing color, working in a circle, and reading those funny-looking patterns are all included.

Crocheting from a pattern

Even crocheters with years of experience work from patterns, so knowing how to read them is important. Chapter 5 tells you what the abbreviations and symbols in patterns mean and how to decipher the instructions. To ease you into the language of crochet, we provide an explanation beneath each line of instruction, although we urge you to take a stab at reading the “normal” instructions because this is the way all other crochet publications present them.

To help you get used to all the abbreviations and symbols, we include them in parentheses every time we introduce a new stitch or technique (which we fully explain in plain English, by the way). However, in the project patterns at the ends of the chapters, we slowly wean you from the English translations after Chapter 5. And you can always flip back to Chapter 5 if you don’t remember something. The Cheat Sheet at the front of the book is also a handy reference guide to crocheteese.

Adjusting tension

Making sure that your finished projects end up being the correct size is important. After all, who needs a doily the size of a coaster or a waist-length sweater that covers your knees? How about an Afghan that can double as a slipcover for your sectional couch?

Gibberish, anyone?

A while back, we had an experience that shows just how funny crochet instructions can look to one who’s not familiar with the terminology. A young girl was leafing through a crochet magazine looking at the pictures, or so we thought. When we started to pay attention to the noises she was making, we both laughed so hard that

our sides split. She was reading the instructions phonetically (*ch 3, dc in next sc, sc in next dc*). Try this with one of the patterns at the end of the chapters, and you’ll see what we mean. It can really look like a bunch of gibberish. Don’t worry, though; crochet terminology is pretty simple.

By using some simple math and working a gauge swatch (see Chapter 3), you ensure that your stitches are the right size and tension for your design. So don't skip over the stuff at the beginning of the pattern directions — checking your materials and your gauge keeps you out of trouble.

Round and round you go

Because crochet stitches are so easily manipulated, you can go where other forms of needlework cannot, such as in circles. While the first few chapters have you going back and forth in rows, Chapter 8 throws the door to the world of crocheting wide open. All sorts of great projects, like doilies, Afghans, and sweaters, are worked in rounds. This basic variation is easy, so don't be afraid to try the projects in this book that are worked in rounds.

Color it in

Crochet is by no means monochromatic. Yes, we've all seen homes with white doilies scattered on every surface or the hat and scarf sets made in a single, dull color. But just wait until you walk into your local craft store or yarn shop. Your senses may be assaulted by the multitude of color and texture that's now available.

Changing color, carrying colors, and working with texture are all variables you can take into consideration to turn a ho-hum design into a work of art (and Chapter 9 shows you how to do this).

Adding New Stitches and Techniques to Your Crochet Vocabulary

After you have the basics down, you can move on to even more fun stuff. New techniques and stitch combinations add up to some creative works of art.



Many so-called specialty stitches (see Chapter 11) are nothing more than the combination of a couple of different basic stitches, just with a new name. So don't be intimidated if a new technique or stitch seems too complex. Broken down, it's nothing more than the basics you know.

Having fun with new stitches

You can do many things with your hook. Who says you have to work stitches in only one place? Because crochet is just a bunch of interlocking loops, you can stick your hook in myriad places to create stitches that are flat or textured, square or round — the variety is nearly endless. Chapter 12 has more on working your yarn in different spots.

Creating funky fabrics

Two types of crochet that create unique fabrics are filet crochet (see Chapter 14) and the Afghan stitch (see Chapter 13). You work them by using very specific stitch placements and by following a chart. Both of these techniques are easy to work, and the designs you create make you look like you've been a master for years.

Finishing Your Work: Taking Pride in What You've Made

More goes into finishing your work than weaving in that last end of yarn. You may need to sew pieces together, add a pretty border, or tack on a tassel. Often, after all that handling, your new creation looks a bit misshapen and you need to block or shape it. And although you may not have spent a fortune on materials, time's a pretty valuable commodity these days, so you don't want to waste it by ruining that new sweater on the first wash.

Putting the pieces together

Many crochet designs comprise several pieces that you need to put together to form the whole. Chapter 15 walks you through the various methods for joining, whether you sew pieces together with a yarn needle and yarn or use your hook and crochet the separate pieces together.

Final details

When you're finished crocheting, make sure that the piece looks its best. Does it need any special finishing touches? What about some pockets? Or maybe a fringe? (See Chapter 17.)

You may need to block or starch (see Chapter 18) your work to get it into shape. Blocking is a simple process that requires water, maybe a little heat, or some starch to help coax your design into place. Don't leave out this step. The instructions may not mention blocking, but if your piece looks a little off kilter, whipping it into shape by blocking it is probably all that's needed.

Taking care of crochet

Finally, you're finished. Now that you have this wonderful new piece, whether it's wearable or a home decor item, you want to take certain measures to ensure that it stands the test of time. If you care for it properly (see Chapter 18), you can pass down your crocheted work for generations, and hopefully, inspire new generations to take up this timeless craft.

A Few Tips to Keep You Going

Inevitably, you'll have highs and lows while you work to master a new skill. We hope your highs are more plentiful than your lows. Here are a few tips that may help make your journey to crochet mastery a happier one:

- ✔ **Hold the hook and yarn the way that feels the most natural and comfortable to you.** We've illustrated the most common ways, but you may feel better using a different method.
- ✔ **Always read the stitch descriptions at the beginning of each pattern.** Other publications may use different names for stitches. Crochet isn't standardized, so you may come across names that you're unfamiliar with.
- ✔ **Check to see whether you're working from a British or American pattern before you begin.** Patterns published in Great Britain or Canada use different terminology for even the basic stitches. For example, they call the American single crochet a *double crochet* and the American double crochet a *treble crochet!* You can end up crocheting something completely different from what you intended.
- ✔ **Pick a place to work where you have few distractions.** As when mastering any new skill, being able to focus is important.
- ✔ **Practice each new stitch or technique by working a swatch.** Crochet stitches often build on each other, so make sure you're comfortable with the stitch before moving on to the next one. Don't throw away your swatches — they can come in handy when you need something on which to practice making borders or buttonholes.

- ✔ **Put your hook and yarn down and come back later if you start to feel frustrated with a new stitch.** Sometimes, a little distance can clear up a previously difficult section.
- ✔ **Find an experienced crocheter to help explain a new technique that you're having a hard time with.** If you don't know anyone who crochets, try your local yarn shop. You can usually find someone there who's well versed in the craft and who'd be more than happy to help someone with a new skill.
- ✔ **Mark the pages of the books that you feel are most important or helpful to you.** That way, you can easily find the reference that you're looking for.

Getting Started

If you bought this book ten minutes ago and are already at the yarn shop, you probably just want to get a cheap hook and some yarn so you can start practicing stitches right away. You can read all the details about hook sizes and yarn content in Chapter 2. But here's what you need to get started (for less than \$5):

- ✔ **A size H-8 U.S. crochet hook.** This size hook is comfortable to work with, and the size of stitch that it creates is easy to see.
- ✔ **A light and solid-colored, worsted-weight yarn, preferably made of acrylic fibers.** If the yarn is too dark or multicolored, you may have a hard time seeing the stitches, and the acrylic yarns are great for practicing with because they're inexpensive.

