

Crafternoon Treats

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Get it blocking right!

These notes accompany a special episode of my crochet podcast:

- [Episode 9: Get it blocking right!](#)
- View the [podcast notes online](#)
- Subscribe to my [YouTube channel and view more episodes](#)

What the heck is blocking?

You've maybe heard the term but have not idea what it means. Or you have actually done blocking but didn't know it was called that...

Blocking means using water, heat or both to reshape or resize something you have crocheted or knitted

Why you might block

- A knitter will steam individual pieces of a garment to the size shown on the pattern before sewing them together.
- Knitters might also wash a finished garment and stuff it with plastic bags filled with paper to block it into a 3D shape (good if the armholes are tight apparently).
- A crocheter will want to wash a blanket then pin and dry it so that it is a perfect rectangle or square with no wobbly edges.
- If you are making bunting, blocking using steam will make your bunting lie flat and you can make all the triangles the same size.
- A lacy crocheted or knitted shawl looks crumpled when its hot off the needles. Pinning it out and then blocking to the right size and will open up the lace pattern.
- Blocking granny squares sharpens up the corners, makes them all the same size and eases joining.
- Putting socks on sock blockers gives them a perfect shape for photographs on Instagram!

Three basic methods of blocking

Deciding which method to use can be quite a headache - it depends on the type of yarn your item is made from (see the next section).

But the three basic methods used are:

- **Spritz blocking:** pin the item out to the size and shape you want and spritz with clean water at room temperature. Leave pinned out and flat until completely dry (this can take 2-3 days for a large shawl or blanket).
- **Wet blocking by washing:** wash the item in suitable detergent, rinse and blot or spin gently to remove excess moisture. Pin out into the size and shape you want and leave to dry flat as above. Some wet blocking can be done by washing in the washing machine BUT only some types of yarn as suitable and you need to be careful!
- **Steam blocking:** pin the item out to the size and shape you want and then apply steam from a steam iron or other steam device. Allow to cool completely (and dry completely in the case of yarns made of natural fibres).

Choose your blocking method carefully

Different yarns need to be blocked in different ways or disaster can strike...

- Wool can felt (become dense and matted if agitated and heated when wet...
- Acrylic can melt if heated too much...
- Cotton and silk streeeeetch very easily when wet...
- Oh, and the colour can run (eeeeeeek)...

Cautionary blocking tales

Two nightmare tales from shawl makers (I recommend you are sitting down when you read on...)

- I saw on a recent podcast by [Sharon of the TV Knitting Podcast](#) that she washed a very large shawl made with three colours of yarn before blocking it. One of the colours washed out completely, leaving it all cream with a navy border. The large central section had lost its colour. She's pulling it out and redoing it with a new third colour and was very calm about it. I'm not sure I would be the same. If you dare to watch, the link above takes you to the episode - the horror starts 16 minutes in.
- One of my friends at my local crochet and chat group made a shawl recently in a 4ply wool yarn that said it was machine washable on the ball band. It came out of a wool wash cycle completely felted and she was completely gutted. So many hours of work....

Preparation is key – make test samples

Please do use the washing instructions on the ball band as a guide, but then always be more cautious and try out a small sample first.

I recommend making a small crocheted or knitted square out of spare yarn (or use your tension square) and wash that. Make another and handwash it. Steam block a third and spritz block a fourth. See which ones survive the best and make a note for future reference.

A general blocking guide for crochet and knitting

I've put some general rules below just because it might save you making so many samples but trying it out for yourself on squares or little samples is THE way to go with blocking...

Blocking items made from superwash/tough wool

Wool has a good memory so responds well to blocking. When its pinned out into shape and dried, it retains that shape until its wetted again (unless you treat it very roughly). Wool also stretches when wet, so you can block wool items into larger shapes easily. You can't block something smaller though...

A lot of wool is tough enough to withstand any of the three blocking methods as long as the water you use for washing/spritzing is not hot

and as long as you do not touch the wool with the iron when steaming. Some sock yarn can be machine washed and dried on low in a tumble drier. Always check the yarn label and try out a small sample first before trusting your shawl or blanket to the machine.

Finer wools eg fine merino

These are more delicate and will probably need to be blocked by handwashing, spritzing or gentle steaming.

I demonstrate handwashing and blocking a pair of socks in the video - it is best to be really careful even when handwashing.

Never wring out an item made from wool. It will be stretched and distorted. Just press gently with the flat of your palms to get rid of some excess water then blot in a clean, dry towel or use a salad spinner for small items and a table top spinner (if you have one) for larger items.

Again, test first but very large items might be OK on the lowest spin setting of a washing machine.

Blocking wool blends, silk, cashmere and alpaca

Alpaca, cashmere and silk are much more delicate and are very prone to stretching when wet even in a yarn that also contains wool. Never machine wash and hand wash with great care.

For the first block after making, pin out and spritz with water. I would not attempt to steam block anything with silk or cashmere...

Blocking cotton

Cotton feels tough but when its wet it really stretches easily. Cotton tops, sweaters and jumpers may be machine washable (check the ball band on the yarn) or may need handwashing but always blot and dry flat. Hang it up to try and it will be several inches longer when its dry...

Small items and garment pieces made from cotton yarn or cotton and acrylic blends work very well with steam blocking.

Blocking acrylic

Acrylic is a completely synthetic fibre and does not change just when you wet it. It has very little memory and the fibres don't catch on to each other like wool fibres do. I believe (and there are many who disagree with me) that steam blocking is best for small items made from 100% acrylic. It is the heat that sets the fibres into shape but it must be applied carefully.

You must never touch the acrylic with the iron however, because it will melt and the item and the iron will probably be ruined.

I always block granny squares, bunting triangles and even entire blankets using steam applied 2-3 cm above the surface of the item when its pinned into shape. As soon as its cool, its blocked.

Some knitters do block garment pieces using steam but wetting a cloth and pressing the iron down to push the steam through the knitting. I would not recommend this technique of steam blocking for crochet as the stitches will be squashed and will lose their definition.

Blocking acrylic blankets

Steaming an entire blanket is a pain, literally, as its really hard on your back... My lovely friend Heather from the blog [The Patchwork Heart](#) blocks all of her lovely Stylecraft Special DK blankets by washing them in the washing machine and then tumble drying on the coolest setting. They come up beautifully (but I'd try a granny square first!).

Blocking linen

When I read about linen, it made me want to crochet with some! Linen is probably the only fibre that gets stronger when its wet so to block it, it needs to be totally wet and then whacked against the side of the bath to soften the fibres. Crikey!

Equipment for blocking

There are many blocking aids, pins and mats available but its best to work out where your money is spent most wisely.

Pins (THE most important things in blocking)

It is essential to get pins that won't rust. Sewing pins are made of steel and when they come into contact with water, they can rust unpredictably. Rust stains on a cream knitted shawl or a cotton mandala in pastel shades is a big NO-NO!

The T-blocking pins that you can get that are advertised as for knitters are no better - look at the Amazon reviews. Rusting is a big problem. I was very lucky to meet Fay of [Knit it, hook it, craft it](#) the other week and she sent me some of the blocking pins she's sourced.

They are galvanized and so don't rust and come in three types for different blocking jobs:

- [Entomology pins are for fine fabrics \(I demonstrate these in the video\)](#)
- [Spanish lace pins - sturdier for general blocking](#)
- [Toilet pins - for heavier fabrics](#)
- [The pin magnet works with all of them \(and your sewing pins too\)](#)



The names are a bit weird but the pins are fab - Fay has sent a pack of Spanish lace pins and a handy pin magnet as a giveaway this week so that one of you can try them out too.

My honest review

I've not come across anything better so far and they don't cost a huge amount. T pins are £2.50 for 50 on Amazon and the entomology pins are £6.00 for 100. The Spanish Lace pins are £8.00 for 200 so its actually cheaper to buy 200 of these than 200 T pins. The larger toilet pins have black glass heads (which is very cool) and are £7.00 for 50. Postage is added at check out and I just bought the lace pins and magnet for myself - postage was £3.50.

Blocking mats

You can buy blocking mats for knitters but I would not waste my money on them (spend it on pins instead!). You get 6 mats that are 12 inch square for about £23....

I bought some gym floor mats from ebay that are 2 feet square (60cm x 60cm) and thicker and I bought 10 for £10. The seller wasn't that reliable but there are others selling a similar product.

Ebay does change all the time but here are three UK ones with mats at a reasonable price. Some have the smaller ones, one still has the larger ones:

- [9 mats x 30cm by 30cm mats £6.95](#)
- [Also 9 mats x 30cm by 30cm £6.49](#)
- [12 mats 60cm x 60cm £14.59](#)

Even cheaper (ie free) is blocking directly onto a carpet with clean towels laid on top of it first. Pins just stick down into the carpet.

Other equipment for blocking

Really this is just stuff you will have already or that is cheap to buy:

- Steam iron or steamer
- Spritz bottle (ie a plastic plant sprayer)
- Ruler for measuring
- Pencil and maybe a compass for drawing out blocking shapes for motifs
- Greaseproof paper for templates

The demonstrations in the video cover the pins and mats and show spritz blocking, wet blocking using handwashing and steam blocking. I also stress about the need to try out blocking methods for yourself with a sample of the yarn you want to block.

And if it all still goes horribly wrong, please don't blame me! xxxxxx
Kathryn

Want to see the original video podcast?

[Go straight to YouTube for The Crafternoon Treats Podcast Episode 9](#)

