

by Ann Shayne and Kay Gardiner

Our Philosophy of Stash

Dear Problem Ladies,

I've been knitting for about six months now. I have, therefore, reached the point that I do not remember Life Without Knitting. Knit knit knit. It's so damn good. Why is it so good? (That is not my question. It's just rhetorical. Why oh why is knitting so.dang.good?)

Here's the thing. The other day I was knitting while sitting on the 30 Gallon Double Tuff Hardy Boy Rubberoid Container that holds my absolutely minimalist starter stash. You know, a few hanks that I have picked up here and there because they were purty and/or they were 20 percent off and/or they were hand dyed by some lady at school—that sort of thing. Clicking away, I noticed something.

What I noticed is that the lid would not stay on the container. It kept bouncing me off (which totally messed up my gauge).

Problem Ladies: I don't mind telling you that I am not a small woman. I got to thinking, if this is six months' worth of accumulated yarn, what will my stash look like in six years? What will my house look like? And will my husband and I still be living at the same address?

My question to you is this: Do you have any advice on how to keep stash acquisition from getting out of control?

Mystified



Dear Mystified,

We are so glad you have asked us this question. As you can probably tell from what big know-it-alls we are, the Problem Ladies have been knitting for a combined total of . . . eternity. We've walked a very long stretch of the stash-shopping trail of tears that you are just starting out on. We've gone through repeated cycles of giving bins of luxury fiber yarns away to school arts & crafts rooms, and then promptly re-filling every cubic inch of livable space with more yarn than we could ever knit up, including a lot of yarn that we decided we didn't like within 24 hours of buying it. We've hit bottom, rock bottom. We've realized certain truths, one of which is that knitting and buying yarn are two independent hobbies, and that we would probably want to spend all our money on yarn even if we never knit another stitch. There is just something about yarn that makes you want to buy it.

Although we realize the burden that a burgeoning stash can impose on one's household, one's budget, and one's relationship with one's life partner, we do not—repeat, do NOT—go in for “yarn diets” and “knit from your stash for a whole year” and other exercises in self-denial. Despite everything, we still happen to think that buying yarn is the absolute best, most pleasurable use of

any extra cash one comes into. But we have learned, over time, that some kinds of stash are more satisfying than others. If you buy the right kind of yarn, you will enjoy having it around, you will not need to give it to the Tiny Tots Day Camp to make kid mohair God's Eyes with, and you might even knit it up. Ponder our tips:

Rule Number One: The single skein is a sucker play.

People buy a lot of single skeins. A skein of something juicy and expensive seems like an affordable indulgence that will forestall a more catastrophic dent in the budget. But unless you knit a tremendous number of Baby Surprise Jackets, these singletons will sit in your stash forever, waiting for the Right Project that never comes.

(Exception to Rule Number One: Souvenir skeins. If you are going on a trip, you are quite naturally going to end up buying a skein of yarn from every yarn shop you come across in your journey. This is a cost of doing business as a knitter. Make these skeins into Baby Surprise Jackets.)

Rule Number Two: Figure out what your “flour and sugar” yarns are.

This is the rule that has saved the Problem Ladies from financial ruin and deep unhappiness. There are certain yarns that each of us is always going to be interested in knitting, until the day they pry the needles from our cold, stiff claws. One of us, for example, has a tendency to look at a pattern for a cashmere sweater and think, “Wouldn't that be awesome in indigo-dyed denim yarn?” Another of us is always going to be knitting socks. Staple yarns, or “flour and sugar” yarns, are the yarns you find yourself actually running out of (once in a while). These are the yarns you can stash without fear. Figure out what they are, and steer the credit card in that direction.

Rule Number 3: Never buy a yarn just because it is being discontinued.

This is a key rule. Our stashes are filled with age-clouded plastic bags containing 10 skeins of yarns that at one time seemed vital to our very existence. Rowan Magpie, anyone? Judging by our garage-busting inventories of this fluffy favorite, it seems that we thought Rowan Magpie was the very last Aran-weight wool that would ever be manufactured, in our lifetime. We even considered stashing it for future generations, so that knitters yet unborn would someday know the Glory That Was Magpie. (OK, we didn't just consider it. We actually did it. Our grandbabies will be knitting Magpie, doggone it.)

It turns out we were wrong. Magpie may be gone, but the spinners kept making beautiful Aran weight woolen yarns. Maybe not EXACTLY as good as the late, great Magpie but, as it turns out, pretty alluring stuff. And when a yarn has been discontinued, designers tend to stop writing patterns for it. This is when those bargain bags start to weigh you down. Have faith, people: they will keep making wonderful yarns. You can buy them when you need them. There is no need to

stockpile.



Knit Strong! Keep those cards and letters coming in to problemladies@twistcollective.com. Write a letter that Kay and Ann choose to answer in the winter issue and we'll send you a Twist Collective tape measure.