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Illustrations by Franklin Habit

The problem ladies have all the answers!

Tired of Knitting?

Dear Problem Ladies:

I don't even know why I'm writing, because I'm not even asking a question. It's just that I think I'm done with knitting. It was fun while it lasted, but I'm just working too much these days to knit. And all this yarn I've stashed is bringing me down.

Partied Out

Dear Partied Out:

WHAT? HOLD ON! Sit down here for a minute. Here's a cup of Tang. Have a saltine.

We are so glad you wrote, because we would like to talk you down from the precipice. We have been there. We have hit rock bottom on knitting. There have been moments when we wondered if we would ever knit again. These periods tend to hit when we have frankly over-knitted—when there are globs of incomplete knitting stuck to all the upholstered surfaces of our home. When the bales of yarn under the bed actually become the bed. When there's a Hefty bag sitting in the middle of the den, and we know there's yarn in it, yet we can't remember what kind. When we've come home from Rhinebeck so jacked up on kettle corn and lanolin that we sit in a stupor for three days, shuddering with the overstimulation of it all.

This is all part of what it is to be a knitter. It's a peaks-and-valleys thing, once you really hurl yourself into it. Unlike most things in life, a pastime like knitting allows for wild and unbridled obsession. You can go all the way—you can get down into 0000 needles, making a lace collar for a stuffed mouse. You can make eighteen cowls. You can amass a perfect inventory of every shade of Rowan Lightweight DK. In this world, there is no such thing as too much. Until, of course, your inner regulator fires off a signal and you discover that, incredibly enough, there is a limit to where knitting will lead you.

In our experience, that's a great thing. In fact, we would suggest that these periods of lying fallow are actually productive, even necessary. Will you ditch knitting forever? Um, we would bet money that you won't. Once a knitter, always a knitter.

Our only advice is not to ditch your stash. (Yarn is pricey.) Or, if you're seeking catharsis, ditch only the yarn you bought on sale, because we all know that that stuff represents the weaker side of yourself. Just put it all away, forget about it, and work on your rubber stamping, or gardening, or aphorism writing. It'll be there on that day—maybe years from now—when you rediscover it, and knitting will be so great, all over again.



The Return of Eyelash Yarn

Dear Problem Ladies,

Just saw a report from the big yarn trade show that eyelash yarn is back. What up with that?

Dismayed

Dear Dismayed,

Yeah, we saw that too. What is it about disconcerting things returning from the past? American Express just emailed us that we were eligible to pre-order tickets for a Van Halen concert next month. We didn't want to do that in 1977, never mind 2012.

This is not Betty White reappearing for a triumphant victory lap. This is a jowly politician from 1994 lurching back into view. We have still not seen a project involving eyelash yarn that makes us sigh with delight. We're not saying it's impossible, but we look at a lot of knitting. Seriously, we think there are a lot of yarns more fun to work with, more satisfying in the end, than eyelash yarn.

Zen koan: If you can't see the stitches, is it knitting?

Take Your Beloved Stash on a Vacation

Dear Problem Ladies,

Have you ever been on a knitting tour? Was it fun?

Andrea

Dear Andrea,

Oh, every single trip we take is a freaking knitting tour. Anytime we hit the road, for any reason at all, we spend more time calculating our knitting requirements than figuring out the clothes. It's how a person ends up at the beach with eight skeins of mohair/merino worsted weight yarn and no underpants.

As for one of the organized trips that seem to be cropping up more than ever, we wistfully press our noses against our computer screens and wish for the moment in life when we could stop, drop, and wander around, say, Scotland, trailing yarn behind us and meeting fascinating yarn makers. We keep reading about trips to Iceland. That sounds incredible to us: sitting in a geothermal pool while binding off a sleeve. Wallowing in a vast pile of lopi. Staring into some steamy crevice and considering the immortal, while knitting in the round.

Knitting's best teachers are often a feature of these trips. It all sounds just great.

I How to Talk to Your Dog about Yarn

Dear Problem Ladies,

How do I convince my terrier that the bags of yarn lying around the house are my toys and shouldn't be killed?

@SilknLinen, via Twitter

Dear SilknLinen,

As you no doubt have discovered, the terrier race is not known for being open to persuasion. Given that terriers were bred for catching rats and other small, greasy scavengers, it is upsetting to see how much a terrier loves kid mohair. It doesn't bear thinking about.

The motto of the realistic terrier owner has got to be: Pick Your Battles. Here's what the terrier-cohabiting half of the Problem Ladies does: she lets the terrier win a few. When, through owner error or sloth, a ball of potentially rodential yarn makes it into the terrier's mouth, she adopts a wait-and-see attitude. If the yarn is meant to survive, it will be abandoned in favor of the squeaky hedgehog toy, or the aroma of someone making a smoked turkey sandwich in the kitchen. (Problem Lady also worries about the possibility that rats taste like smoked turkey. Sorry about that.) When you think about it, losing the occasional ball of fine fiber is pretty low on the list of Problematic Terrier Behaviors.

Does Washing Lace Mean Re-blocking It?

Dear Problem Ladies,

Do I really have to re-block a lace garment every time I wash it?

@moniru1, via Twitter

Dear moniru1,

You sound strikingly like a young boy we know who asks questions such as: "Do I really need to put the remnants of my Hot Pocket somewhere other than on the floor of the den?" and "Are you seriously suggesting that four hours of Xbox in one day is too much Xbox?"

We think you know the answer to this question. But we don't blame you for asking. Once you wash a lace garment and decide to punt on the re-blocking, we think you'll naturally reach for the

blocking pins, because that lace is not going to look as fabulous as it did back when you blocked it the first time.

Is Hemp Actually Pot?

Dear Problem Ladies,

I keep seeing hemp yarn. Everybody says it's like linen only softer; like cotton only better. I am a little embarrassed to ask this, but what exactly is hemp? I thought it was, like, you know, related to pot. I know it's not pot, but how not pot is it?

Law-abiding Knitter

Dear Law-abiding Knitter,

We love hemp yarn! It's sturdy, it's un-wooly, and it makes the most amazing string bags (and garments, and scarves). We are completely, 100% pro-hemp yarn. However, like you, the Problem Ladies have had a foggy, bleary-eyed, dazed understanding of this fiber.

But now, all has been made clear, thanks to the [North American Industrial Hemp Council](#), an organization working hard to explain hemp. Here's what they tell us:

Hemp has been grown for at least the last 12,000 years for fiber used in textiles and paper, as well as for food. Industrial hemp and marijuana are both classified by taxonomists as *Cannabis sativa*, a species with hundreds of varieties. Industrial hemp is bred to maximize fiber, seed and/or oil, while marijuana varieties seek to maximize THC (delta 9 tetrahydrocannabinol, the primary psychoactive ingredient in marijuana).

According to the NAIHC, to receive a standard psychoactive dose would require a person to power-smoke ten to twelve hemp cigarettes over an extremely short period of time. The large volume and high temperature of vapor, gas and smoke would be almost impossible for a person to withstand. Alternatively, if one tried to ingest enough industrial hemp to get a buzz, it would be the equivalent of taking two to three doses of a high-fiber laxative. Please let us know if any of you attempts this, because we like knowing people who do totally wacky stuff.

Hemp was grown commercially (with increasing governmental interference) in the United States until the 1950s, only to be doomed by the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, which placed an extremely high tax on marijuana and made it effectively impossible to grow industrial hemp. While Congress expressly expected the continued production of industrial hemp, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics lumped industrial hemp with marijuana, as its successor the US Drug Enforcement Administration, does to this day.

Net result: you're not going to find American-grown hemp, unless you've got some cousin up in the Appalachian mountains who likes a challenge.

Finally, if you're still reading this, HIGH FIVE! You are clearly hemp curious, so here is some Platinum Access hemp lore, courtesy of the NAIHC:

- George Washington and Thomas Jefferson both grew hemp. Ben Franklin owned a mill that made hemp paper. Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence on hemp paper.
- Because of its importance for sails and rope for ships, hemp was a required crop in the American colonies.
- Industrial hemp has a THC content of between 0.05% and 1%. Marijuana has a THC content of 3% to 20%.
- More than thirty industrialized democracies distinguish hemp from marijuana. International treaties regarding marijuana make an exception for industrial hemp.
- Canada now allows the growing of hemp.
- Wearing a hemp necklace will make you as supermellow as Jack Johnson. (Okay, we were just testing to see if you would read this far.)