

Lynne Rowe's flower granny squares showcase crochet's versatility – but believe it or not, she actually started out as a knitter



PHOTO: Lynne Rowe

Best of both worlds

Are you a Stitch Switcher? We speak to four fab makers who knit as well as crochet to compare and contrast both crafts



Clockwise from left: Gareth Hodgson loves a knit, but crochet is his number one craft; Lynne Rowe's owl family and mice, showing knitted critters on the left, and crocheted on the right

You're crocheting in public when a stranger approaches. Their curiosity is well-intentioned. Perhaps they've never seen a crafter out in the wild. You take a deep breath and tell yourself you'll be nice. Your yarn is damp from the sweat on your palms. You'll have to frog these last few stitches, your tension is so tight.

"What are you knitting?"

You want to throw down your WIP in frustration. "No!" you almost shout. "It's not bloomin' knitting! Sacrilege! Blasphemy!"

Instead, you smile at this stranger and explain the difference. You know one isn't better than the other. You know there's an opportunity here. As infuriating as this misidentification can be, knitting is a gateway craft for many people, and your public display of crochet could be the reason a stranger picks up a hook. You might even inspire lifelong knitters to try a craft that's totally new to them. Or perhaps you'll take up knitting!

MYTH-BUSTING MAKES

We asked four knitters and crocheters, affectionately dubbed Stitch Switchers, what misconceptions they once had about our favourite yarn craft.

"When I first looked at crochet, I thought it would be much harder than knitting," says Lynne Rowe, the designer and author behind

Knit Crochet Create. "I assumed it was mostly used for blankets or decorative items," she explains, "which really isn't true."

Lisa Richardson, a hand-knit designer who also crochets, echoes this sentiment. "I saw a lot of knitting as garments and scarves. The only way I saw crochet being used was for bags and blankets."

"I really enjoy the challenge of working on the same project in crochet and knitting"

Jane Burns is also a Stitch Switcher who learned to knit before getting to grips with crochet. "Lots of people had said that crochet was much easier than knitting to learn," she tells us. "But I really struggled with where to place my hook. With knitting all the stitches are neatly on the needle and you work them one after the other, but with crochet there were so many places I could insert my hook!"

For Gareth Hodgson, who runs yarn shop Manchester Wool and Yarn, the experience was quite different. "Crochet seemed much

easier for my brain to understand," he says. "Knitting patterns seemed like a massive leap from my basic scarves and I remember really battling to understand what a purl stitch even meant – a theme I see in our knitting workshops all the time."

THE HISTORY OF HOOKS

Knitting can be traced back to 11th century Egypt, while crochet didn't appear to take off until the 19th century, when it became popular among Irish women as a way to make money. Before that, it was used in 17th-century French lacemaking, and Mary Queen of Scots was known to have been gifted silk thread for crochet in the 1500s – but even then, it's fair to say knitting had a head start. Could this explain why so many people gravitate towards needles before they take to the hook?

"I learned to knit first," Lynne explains, "and came to crochet a little later." The passing down of crafts through generations played a pivotal role for her: "I come from a creative family of knitters and crocheters, so it felt natural for me to join in. I loved watching my nan. I was always mesmerised by her needles or hook moving so fast, turning yarn into something colourful for us to wear."

For Lisa, sewing was the catalyst for her love of crafts. "My gran had one of the non-electric sewing machines that you had to peddle with

Right: Jane Burns' knitted dinosaur cardigan, which can also be crocheted
Below: Lisa Richardson stitching with her son, who is desperate to give it a go



PHOTOS: Jane Burns, Lisa Richardson

IT'S TIME TO GIVE IT A GO

We asked our Stitch Switchers what advice they would give to 'mono-crafters' – someone who knows how to knit or crochet, but doesn't do both.

Lisa: "Oh, just give it a go. Try a few different techniques to find out if you really like it."

Jane: "Why limit yourself to one when you can play with both?"

Lynne: "Many skills transfer between both crafts, such as understanding yarn weights, managing tension, reading patterns and fixing mistakes."

Gareth: "I would always say DO IT! Don't be put off because you're worried about it going wrong. At one point you didn't know a **dc** from an **ss** or a **k2tog** from a **ktbl**. You have so many resources at your fingertips."

your foot. I can remember being allowed to chop up old clothes and sew dolls' clothes." Having first picked up crafting around the age of four, she adds, "The only problem was my foot wouldn't reach the peddle!"

Learning through a relative was also key to Gareth's crafting journey – he was taught how to knit by his mam when he was nine years old. But crochet came later: he first picked up a hook at university, teaching himself through YouTube tutorials "on the quest to make myself the perfect fisherman beanie".

Jane, who designs knitwear for a living, also learned to crochet through YouTube. "I started designing knitted projects 18 years ago. It was then I realised I needed a hobby that was not 'work'. I already had plenty of yarn in the house, so crochet was the obvious choice."

Knitting may have had a head start, but with access to the internet, crafty peers and a whole lot of yarn, crochet is catching up.

FINDING FUNCTION

None of this is to say that knitting is inferior to crochet, or vice versa. When we celebrate Stitch Switchers, we exult in the joy in multi-crafting. "Some people will swear that knitting is better for garments and crochet for

three-dimensional items," Jane says, "and, yes, there is some truth to that. But as a designer I really enjoy the challenge of working on the same project in crochet and knitting." Her Dinosaur Explorer Hooded Cardigan is a prime example. "The knitting works perfectly for those spiky details, while the crochet creates a lovely drape for the cardigan body."

"I often prefer knitting for garments," Lynne tells us. "I turn to crochet for accessories, toys, and homewares. Crochet creates a stronger, more structured fabric, which can be quite sturdy. That said, I don't believe either craft should be limited to certain projects. You can choose the craft that best suits the yarn, the purpose of the item, and how you want the fabric to behave."

"If I ever need to make a beanie it will always be crochet for me," Gareth enthuses. "I love the structure crochet stitches give items." For him, crochet is a joyous, mindful activity. "If I make a mistake it's so easy to rip back and start again," he says. Lynne is an advocate for crochet's forgivingness, too: "Mistakes are easier to hide, and you can often adjust stitch counts as you go. No one will ever know."

For Lisa, crochet is her preference when she's on the go. "I found crochet easier to

travel with – not so many worries about dropped stitches or breaking needles. With knit projects, trying to work that last sleeve in the round on a busy train might not be as easy as that crochet motif."

Gareth saves his more intricate knitting projects for days off: "Telly on, brew on the side with the dog sat next to me." Lynne is also a TV knitter, saying, "I can feel the needles and stitches with my fingers. I find that harder with crochet, as you need to be more precise about where the hook goes into the stitch. When either craft requires more focus, such as shaping or following a more complex pattern, I prefer to work in a quiet space so I can concentrate properly."

And just as many of our Stitch Switchers learned their craft through watching their elders at home, this tradition is sure to repeat itself. "My little boy is always asking to try," Lisa says, "and because of his little hands we try crochet for the dexterity." Another Stitch Switcher in the making, perhaps?

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