

MCRPA Member Spotlight

March 2024



Crafting Connections

A Beginner's Guide to
Crocheting and Knitting

Adaora Nwigwe was first introduced to the art of knitting by her mother when she was around 10 or 11 years old. She vividly remembers watching her create a simple scarf, and inspired by her, Adaora decided to give it a try herself. While knitting didn't become a long-term hobby for her, the experience was valuable as it laid the foundation for mastering the art of crocheting. She found crocheting to be more accessible than knitting, so she continued to pursue and develop her skills in crocheting.

In 2012, a former colleague from her time at MC introduced Adaora to the world of crocheting through the website Ravelry.com. Intrigued, she embarked on a journey to learn various simple designs to create blankets and scarves for her friends. Over time, Adaora crafted numerous infinity scarves, baby blankets, and even a throw blanket using leftover yarn for her personal use. She still has the throw blanket along with the bag of yarn she's kept as a memento.







Numerous tutorials for individuals interested in learning crochet are available on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. Additionally, yarn stores across the metro area offer both knitting and crocheting classes suitable for beginners and those already proficient in the craft.

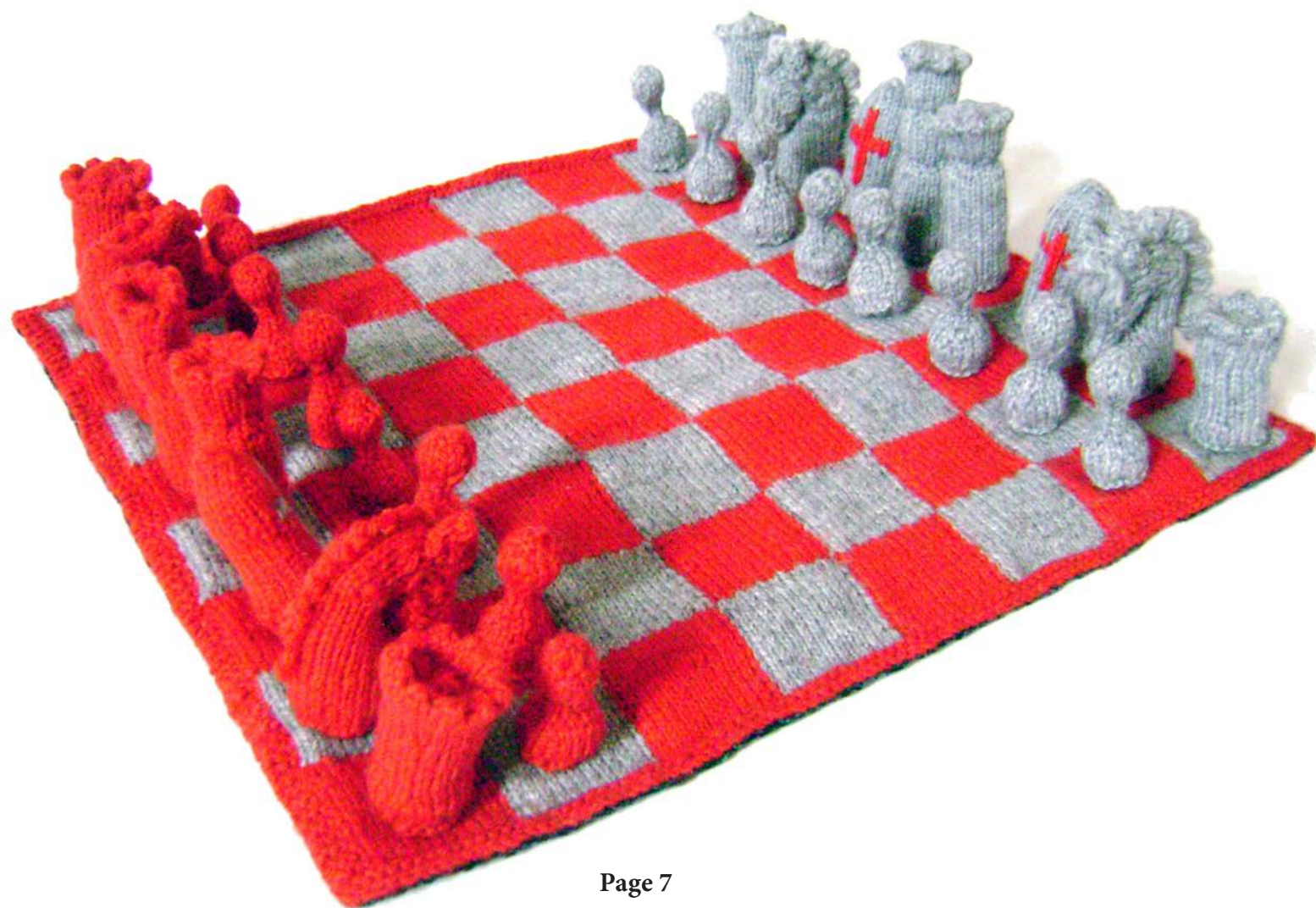
For beginners, Adaora recommends starting with less expensive yarn and crochet needles, which can be found at places like Walmart or craft stores. It’s beneficial to get comfortable with crocheting before transitioning to more expensive, higher-quality products and needles. The market offers a wide range of needle sizes tailored to various designs – from large needles for crafting stylish and funky handbags to very small needles ideal for delicate clothing.

The versatility of crocheting is astounding; it opens up a realm of creative possibilities limited only by one’s imagination. Whether it’s experimenting with different needle sizes or exploring diverse projects, the world of crochet offers a rich tapestry of options for enthusiasts at every skill level.

Elysse Meredith discovered knitting and crocheting when she was in college. At first, all she could do was knit in a straight line, but when a friend-of-a-friend taught her to crochet, something clicked. When she moved a block away from a knitting and yarn shop during graduate school, the rest became history.

“I joke a lot that crochet was my ‘gateway drug,’” Elysse laughs, “but seeing as I now knit, crochet, weave, dye, embroider, sew, and spin, I’m not sure how much of a joke it is anymore! I currently have six sheep fleeces in my garage in various stages of turning into something, and I have to measure my annual spinning yardage in mileage.”





She averages about three miles of spun yarn a year.

One of Elysse's earliest yarn inspirations was the Crochet Coral Reef project, which introduced her to hyperbolic and freestyle crochet. From there, she fell in love with amigurumi (toys). When she learned to knit, she brought the love of toys with her, designing and knitting a chess set that won her a scholarship from Jimmy Beans Wool. In 2022, she fulfilled a dream by contributing to the Saratoga Springs Satellite Reef at the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College. Currently, she is learning to do Irish crochet, on a huge knitted garment kick (sweaters and socks!), and considering reviving her yarn-bonsai project.

For new knitters and crocheters, Elysse encourages experimenting and starting small.

"This isn't necessarily a cheap hobby, and it can be time-consuming," she cautions, "so start with a small project to see if you like it."



As a knitting and crochet teacher, she encourages her students to be brave, as mistakes are often also techniques they haven’t learned yet. She also recommends high-quality materials.

“You should enjoy your tools,” Elysse notes, “and if you are going to invest time and energy into something, you want the final product to withstand time and wear.”

With a background in costume history, Elysse can wax philosophical about labor practices, environmentalism, ethics, women’s work, and the satisfaction of making your own clothes.



An admitted “yarn snob” who previously worked in a yarn shop, Elysse loves discussing the strengths and weakness of different fiber types and weights, as well as where to buy. For acrylics of any kind, Michaels is where she goes. Her favorite online shops are the Woolery for spinning and weaving supplies; Jimmy Beans Wool for yarn, needles, and hooks; and Paradise Fibers for yarn, fiber, and other notions. If all else fails, WEBS is an indispensable online yarn superstore. For patterns, her first (and usually last) stop is Ravelry, an online database, pattern shop, and social networking site. That said, Elysse’s favorite place for yarn is the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival. Occurring the first weekend of May every year and less than an hour from the Germantown campus, Maryland Sheep and Wool has much more than just sheep and just wool.

“It’s one of the largest yarn festivals in the country – we’re absolutely spoiled having it nearby,” grins Elysse, who promises she’s not going to buy another fleece this year. She’s broken that promise three years in a row.

Embarking on her crocheting journey over 15 years ago, Tilandra Rhyne discovered a passion that transformed into a therapeutic and rewarding craft. Despite growing up with my grandmother's crochet expertise, it took some time before I fully embraced the art.

My journey into crocheting began with a self-taught approach. Armed with a starter kit containing a helpful guidebook and essential crochet hooks, I gradually honed my skills. As I gained experience, YouTube tutorials became invaluable resources for mastering more intricate designs.





Crocheting, for me, transcends a mere hobby; it's a source of solace and relaxation. The rhythmic motion of the yarn and the click of the crochet hook create a soothing atmosphere that allows me to unwind and express my creativity.

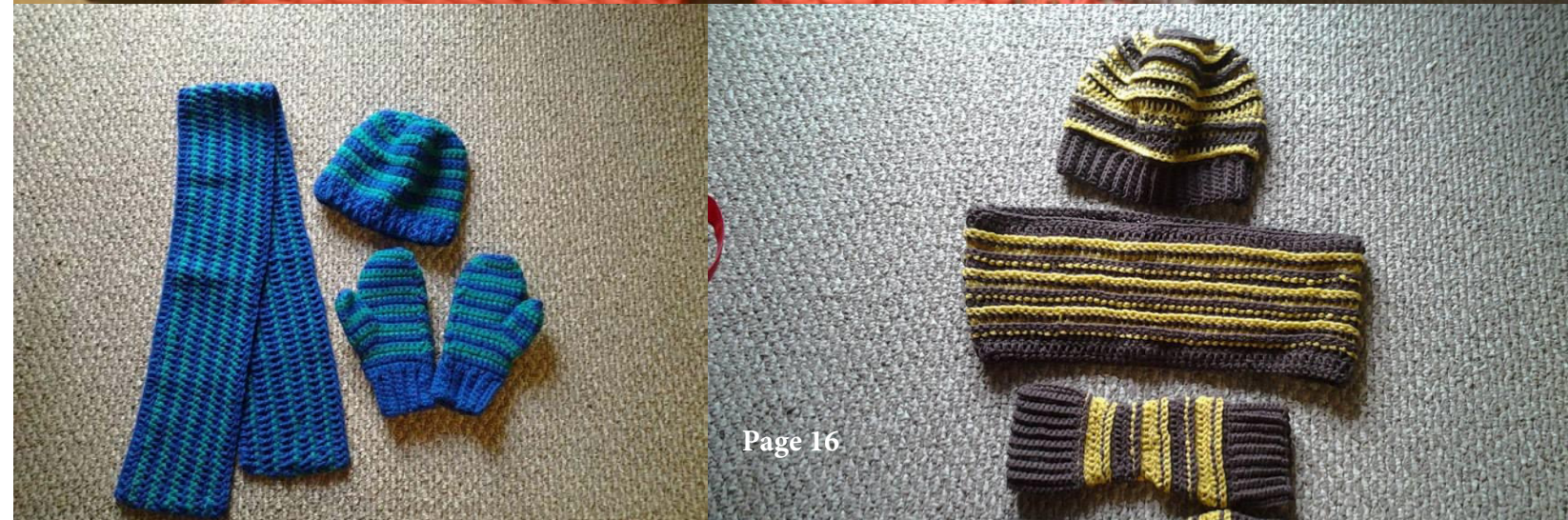
One of my proudest moments was crafting a baby blanket for my niece, the first child of my sister. Over the years, I've extended my creations to include sets of gloves, hats, and scarves – items that have found homes in shelters, been gifted to loved ones, and even sold.

When my nieces were younger, I delighted in crafting special accessories for them. The joy and appreciation in their eyes fueled my passion for creating personalized and meaningful pieces.

While I experimented with knitting, I found the pace too slow for my liking. This realization led me to invest in a loom, a shortcut to achieving the knitted look without compromising speed.

My yarn selection process involves visits to Joann's Fabric and other craft stores. The tactile experience of feeling the different textures is crucial, as not all yarns are created equal. The choice of yarn plays a significant role in the outcome of each project, influencing the overall look and feel.

Reflecting on my crocheting journey, I've discovered a world of creativity, relaxation, and meaningful connections through my handmade creations. From blankets for newborns to accessories for loved ones, each stitch tells a story of dedication and passion, marking my ongoing adventure in the world of crocheting.





Nghi Nguyen discovered his passion for knitting and crocheting during his teenage years, inspired by his sister's creation of a crochet scarf. Intrigued by the idea of crafting his own scarves and blankets rather than purchasing them, Nghi eagerly embraced the hobby.

"I was like around 10, my initial reaction was that it was fascinating," Nghi recalls. "I didn't realize you could create your own scarf and blanket; I always thought you had to buy them from the stores."

Guided by his sister, he quickly learned the art of crocheting scarves. Later, Nghi expanded his skills to knitting, focusing on crafting blankets. While acknowledging the lengthy and sometimes tedious nature of knitting a blanket, he found a solution to make the process more enjoyable by combining it with watching shows like "The Price is Right," "Jeopardy," and "Wheel of Fortune."







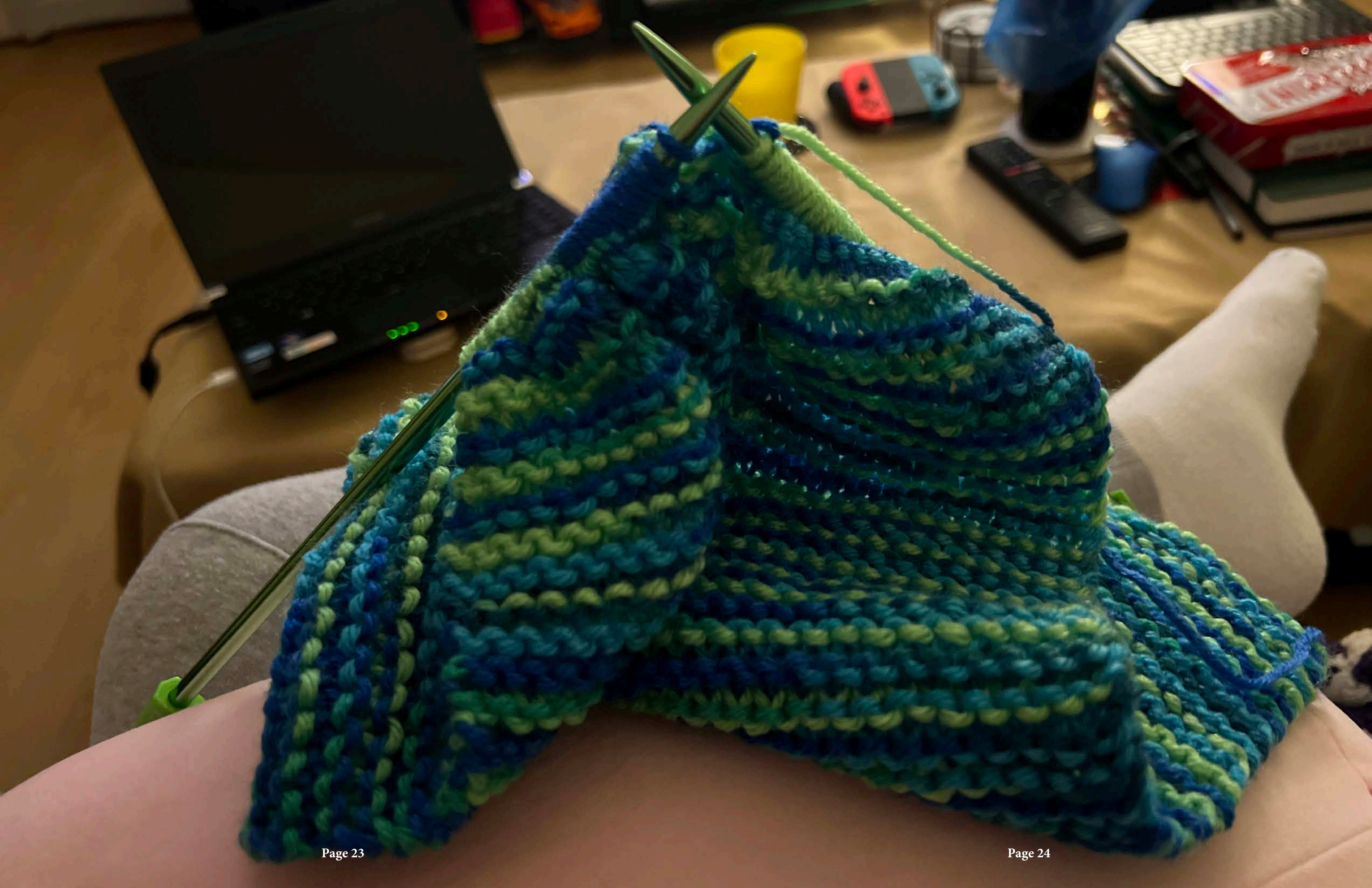
“Some people opt for larger yarns to expedite the knitting or crocheting process,” Nghi explains. “I tried that once, and it took about three months to complete. I wasn’t working on it every day, so it took that long.”

Additionally, Nghi points out that using larger yarns can be costly. The blanket he knitted with such yarns amounted to almost \$100, as he purchased nine rolls of yarn for that particular project. Despite the expense, he describes the experience as wonderful, emphasizing the resulting blanket’s exceptional warmth.

“The blanket may not be perfect,” Nghi admits, “but it’s incredibly warm when you use it during the winter months while watching TV on the couch.”

For those interested in starting knitting or crocheting, Nghi offers a straightforward piece of advice: turn to YouTube tutorials. He highlights the abundance of tutorial videos on YouTube that showcase various patterns for creating items such as hats, scarves, and sweaters.





When it comes to purchasing materials, Nghi generally opts for either Amazon.com or Michael's. He suggests keeping an eye out for special sales at stores like Michael's, providing an ideal opportunity to stock up on yarns and supplies.

Furthermore, Nghi recommends beginners to visit a physical store initially to choose yarns and needles, as the experience and feel can differ from online shopping. Once comfortable with preferences, he encourages online shopping but stresses the importance of the initial hands-on experience in a store.



Thank you to our contributors:

Adaora Nwigwe
Elysse Meredith
Tilandra Rhyne
Nghi Nguyen

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