

Stash Organization Cheat Sheet

You will need:

- A LOT OF TIME.
- At least one room that is otherwise clean, free of pets, and other people (unless they are also crafters and will understand).
- A beverage is helpful, but don't overdo it. You don't want to go cross-eyed halfway through and need a nap. You might need one anyway.
- Containers that work well with your space. Stackable containers are often better than open baskets, but it will depend on your storage. I like clear plastic tubs with tops that snap on, but I've also been known to use open-top baskets. They don't all have to be the same size, either. I have a lot more of some kinds of yarn than others, and my containers reflect that. Cardboard grosses me out, to be frank. My theory is, if I spent money on good yarn, I should be willing to store it as well as possible. I have been known to stash away, say, sock yarn, in a rarely-used suitcase...under the bed. Who will know?
- A permanent marker. Even though my boxes are relatively see-through, I still like to have a small label on the side. There are also a few other uses.
- If you have one, a digital point-and-shoot camera can be very helpful. If you are using Ravelry or a spreadsheet to keep track of your inventory, a laptop is also a great tool. Make sure the date is set properly on your camera and computer. This could be important later.
- Again, if you have one, a sensitive digital scale or spring scale is great to have when totaling up how much yarn you have. American Science and Surplus (<http://www.sciplus.com>) often has reasonable scales. Once you have one, you can't remember how you did without it.
- Index cards.
- Bags, for anything you plan to give away or sell.
- Time. Seriously, I'm not kidding people. Assume you will need at least 1 minute per ball of yarn in your stash. Then there's still your tools and your books to think about. Plan accordingly.

Yarn

First, you have to decide how you should divide up your yarn. The main criteria I can think of are color, weight and fiber content. If you tend to know exactly what color you want to use for a project, and don't mind working to figure out how to substitute yarn weights, organizing by color might be your best bet.

If, on the other hand, you tend to choose your yarns based on the weight needed (you want to knit a pattern in worsted-weight if it calls for worsted-weight), organizing by weight might work best for you.

If you are someone who has a lot of different kinds of fiber, dividing those fibers out might be the way to go.

Also, if you tend to buy yarn with projects in mind, it's a good idea to put the yarn, needles and pattern together. Somehow. I like to use tote bags or knitting bags, but I have also pressed duffel bags and suitcases into this form of service. That method works great until you, um, need the bags for something else.

No matter what style of division you use, I suggest that sock yarn should always have its own category. That works well for me.

Missing ball bands are probably the most annoying thing, to me, in a stash. I don't like to use 1,000 zip-top bags to keep things together. One thing I have tried is tying the two ends of the ball to each other, with the tag either wrapped around the resulting string or looped through it in some way. Probably the best defense against a lost ball band is photographic evidence. This is where that camera comes in. Just snap a photo of the yarn with its band. If you can't read it easily, copy out the most important information onto an index card and take a photo of that with the yarn. Even just a small corner of the yarn is helpful. If you want a pretty photo for Ravelry, take that, too, but this label photo is important. You can't count on keeping all of your photos in order forever (or remembering if you shot the label or the yarn first), so having a yarn and the label in the same frame is essential to really preserving that information.

Info for Yarn Labels

Yarn Name

Yarn Brand

Weight

Length in a Ball

Weight in a Ball

Suggested Gauge

Suggested Needle Size

Fiber Content

Number of Balls/Total Weight You Have In Each Colorway (this is where that scale comes in handy)

Ok, we have materials and theories. Time for some steps.

1. Take out everything. If you can't take out everything, take out all of one category. In my case, I like to divide yarn by weight, but I segregate cotton and cotton blends into one tub. I don't have enough cotton yarn to bother with any deeper classification.

2. Consider carefully if any of your stash should be purged. I like to give away yarn that I know

I simply will not use. Choose any knitter or charity. Most will be thrilled to death with yarn that makes you yawn. Have bags handy for yarn you will give away or sell.

3. Label and photograph everything. Prepare to release it back into the stash.
4. Tuck each category into its own container, or its own portion of a container.
5. Be proud of yourself.

Needles and Tools

There really doesn't seem to be one storage solution for needles. I like to put my single-point needles in a large vase. It's pretty and, since they are all different colors, it's easy for me to find the set I want. I keep circular and double-points in a large, expanding file folder. I love these folders. To keep the dpns from migrating in-between dividers, I put all of the dpns I have of each size into a zip-top bag, and then put the bag into the section where it belongs. I group my smaller-than-1s together and my larger-than-11s together and sort through them when I need something. That works for me because most of the needles I use are in-between those extreme sizes. If you use a lot of tiny or huge needles, you might want to divide your folder accordingly.

I have heard some people use cases originally designed to hold bait for fishing. They're called "worm binders", and knittersreview.com wrote about them very convincingly. Maybe I will make the switch one day. They do look pretty cool and aren't very expensive.

Link: http://www.knittersreview.com/article_tool.asp?article=/review/product/060119_a.asp

For shorter needles, pencil cases can provide good storage. I haven't tried this, but I've heard good things about them.

Years ago, a friend of mine made me a roll-up needle case. It works best for single-pointed needles and I mostly use it to protect my single pair of ebony needles.

Personally, I think it would be really cool to have a magnetic strip on the wall, like the knife holders used in some kitchens, and be able to snap my metal needles right to the wall. As awesome as that would be, I would still need a way to store non-metal needles, so I haven't tried to get away with that one yet.

As you are going through your collection, be on the lookout for frayed wires, blunted tips, and any other tool that is no longer useful. Consider replacing anything that does not serve your needs.

Whatever you do, remember that just about any storage solution is better than the places your needles can end up if you're not careful. Your needles won't be able to do you much good if they are buried in a discarded project, are under the couch cushions, or have become a cat chew toy.

Books

Gather up your books. Consider using either Ravelry or some sort of spreadsheet to keep track of your books. If you have one spot that will hold them all, that's great. Otherwise, consider a sort-and-conquer technique similar to the one for yarn.

I have Desert Island Books, Books I Am Using Right Now, Essay Books and The Rest of My Knitting Books.

Desert Island Books: These are the books that I could not do without. I keep them very near me, or, in the top-left-hand corner of my knitting bookshelf, depending on my living arrangements. When I was recently in-between houses, I kept them on the top shelf of my closet.

Books I Am Using Right Now: Tend to follow me around the house, but their preferred resting spot is my bedside table. I try to keep the number honest.

Essay Books: Are books to read about knitting, but don't have a ton of patterns. They tend to get mixed in with my novels. This might be a different category so that I can camouflage the exact extent of my knitting book collection. Maybe.

The Rest of My Knitting Books: I really do attempt to keep most of my knitting books together. I'm not quite organized enough to alphabetize them, but I've found that if I can keep my search area for a book smaller, I don't get as frustrated when I'm looking for a particular book.

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