



CURIOUS HANDMADE

MAKE YOUR OWN
YARN ADVENT CALENDAR

#KNITVENTCALENDAR

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WELCOME TO KNITVENT

Hello! My name's Helen Stewart. I'm a knitting pattern designer and the founder of Curious Handmade. Over the years, the Curious Handmade community has shared a special holiday tradition, which we call Knitvent. It's a mystery collection of patterns released over several weeks, and it's a lot of fun. As each secret design is revealed, it's a little like opening the doors of an advent calendar for a surprise. It's a lovely way to kick off the gift-knitting season in style, and we look forward to it every year.

Another holiday tradition that is very popular among knitters is the yarn advent calendar. They've been around for some time, and their popularity only seems to grow each year. During the month of December, Instagram fills up with excited and joyful posts from people opening up their calendars each day. I don't know who first came up with the idea, but it was a brilliant one. It's so simple and so perfect: 24 tiny skeins of yarn, one to open each day beginning December 1st.

Just like Knitvent, these calendars are a way to recapture some of the surprise, anticipation, and delight of the holiday season. Peeking behind a closed door to see what's inside is a feeling that never loses its charm, and when you combine that with a knitter's passionate love for yarn, you have a recipe for knitting heaven. After many requests, I started including a pattern in each Knitvent collection designed to be knit with advent yarn calendars. These designs are also perfect for stash-busting the piles of scraps that many knitters seem to accumulate, and are also versatile enough to be knit using whole skeins of yarn.

Even so, each year I've heard from lovely knitters who were disappointed that they didn't have a yarn calendar of their own to use when the patterns were released. That sparked the idea for this little guide. At heart, we're all makers, so why not make our own? There's no reason to be left out of the advent calendar fun! Enjoy! x





WHY MAKE YOUR OWN?

So much planning, love, attention and hard work go into the amazing yarn advent calendars created by indie dyers, and they are worth every cent. With that said, I know that they aren't on the cards for everyone.

Many knitters are working with strict and thoughtful budgets, especially at this time of year. Sometimes the cost of a professionally-made yarn calendar just doesn't fit. Other knitters are on strict yarn-diets and have promised themselves to knit only from stash, so bringing two dozen new minis into the house is a firm no. Sometimes, popular advent calendars sell out early, and by the time you start thinking about Knitvent, the presales are over and it feels like you've missed out.

These calendars also make wonderful gifts for knitting friends, helping you make a little room in your stash while spreading lots of yarny joy. Or, you and your bestie can each make one and trade! I know some knitters who have made an advent yarn calendar swap a tradition they look forward to every year. These are all great reasons to consider making your own advent calendar, but you don't need any reason other than the fact that it's a fun and creative thing to do!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Now is the perfect time to put together a handmade advent calendar, before the holiday frenzy really begins. You have time to gather up all your supplies. A handmade advent yarn calendar project can be as simple or as extravagant as you like. It all depends on your stash, your budget, and the amount of time you have to spare. Here are the things I think are helpful to have on hand before you begin:



NECESSARY

- A scale (digital is easiest)
- Scissors
- 24 different scraps of yarn weighing a minimum of either 10g or 20g each

NICE TO HAVE

- If you want to turn your scraps into mini skeins, you will want a sturdy object for wrapping yarn. If you have a niddy noddy for winding skeins, great. If not, a piece of cardboard or a cereal box works well! You want the longest side of your wrapping object to be about twice as long as the desired length of your finished mini skein.
- Sticky tape or washi tape
- Materials to wrap up each mini skein
- A marker, pencil, or stickers to number each package
- Any little extras you want to include
- Something to hold all the yarn packages together

A NOTE ON YARN SCRAPS, MINIS, AND STASH

While many knitters who have been making things for a while are swimming in scraps, I know that's not true for everyone. Knitters on a budget, new knitters, young knitters and efficient, thrifty knitters who use up all their scraps as they go might find gathering up 24 mini skeins a challenge. If this is you, there are a few things you can try:

SWAPPING

If you're a member of a local knitting group, a scrap/destash night can be a fun way for everyone to share, trade, and bond over your mutual love of pretty yarn. It can also help you grow your mini skein collection quickly. If you're just getting started, you can make minis out of just one or two full-sized skeins of yarn and then swap away to your heart's content. If online swapping works better for you, there are also many swap groups on Ravelry, some of which specialise in minis and scraps.

LOOK FOR DESTASH

Rehoming yarn from another knitter can be more affordable than buying new yarn. Ravelry groups are a good place to find knitters who are selling off some of their stash, sometimes at deep discounts. Etsy is another spot to look for destash, although prices tend to be higher (sometimes still less than retail, though.) Facebook also has a number of very active destash groups which may be worth exploring.





MIX SCRAPS AND FULL SKEINS

To stretch out your scrap collection, you might consider splitting up a full-sized skein of a neutral or speckled yarn into a number of minis to alternate, mix, and match with your scraps in your calendar. While it might seem less exciting than a different colour every day, if you're using the minis all in one project it can actually help create a stylish and cohesive look.

A LITTLE BIT OF SHOPPING

If you decide to treat yourself to some brand new mini skeins to round out your collection of scraps and stash, you'll still save money. It's a much smaller investment than a full yarn calendar. Some indie dyers sell gorgeous and affordable sets, and sometimes you can find discounted grab-bag options which heighten the element of surprise!

CHOOSING A COLOUR SCHEME

There are no rules and no required rhyme or reason to choosing the yarn colours for your advent calendar. Like any project, your personal taste is everything. You can choose whatever you like and decide what order (if any) they should be opened. A true random assortment of mini skeins where you never know what's coming next is fun and exciting. A painstakingly planned pastel fade is gorgeous. A personally curated selection of your best friend's favourite colours is a kind and thoughtful approach. The freedom to put together any kind of colour scheme you fancy is one of the true joys of making your own. It can be as involved or as easy as you like. If you're not quite sure where to begin, here are a few approaches you could try:



TOSS THE STASH

You may already be swimming in mini-skeins, you might have been hoarding scraps for years, or maybe you just have some deep stash that deserves a chance to shine. Keep things simple. Just grab what jumps out at you and see if it plays nicely together: no further planning necessary. You can wrap these up at random: often unexpected and inspiring combinations will occur that you might never have considered otherwise. Joy!

KNIT THE RAINBOW

Everybody loves rainbows! From the classical spectrum to pastel “unicorn” rainbows and blue-green “mermaid” versions, there's a lot of magic in this approach. To keep things balanced, it helps to choose a number of base colours for your rainbow that will divide evenly into 24. For example if you choose 6 colours (perhaps red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple) you can look for 4 different scraps in each colour family. If you want 8 colours in your rainbow (maybe red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink and cream) then you only need 3 scraps in each colour family.



STORY DRIVEN

If you love working to a theme, you can design your calendar yarn choices around that. Your imagination is the only limit. Certain colours may evoke a favourite scene in a movie or a favourite character from a book. Play and experiment until everything feels just right. It can be an invigorating creative exercise to build a mood and a world just from colours.

SOFT AND SWEET

If your stash is heavy on the pastels, you're in luck. The gentle nature of these colours means that you never need to worry about clashing. Speckle-mania is still going strong, and quiet speckled colourways tend to harmonize effortlessly. Just pick 24 favourites and go, without worrying about which order you think looks best.

GENTLE FADE

If you really love taking your time over the little details and want to compose a masterpiece of blended colour, you can curate your calendar to be a perfect mini fade. You might want to divide your fade evenly into a number of specific colour sections (as with the rainbow), and then look for equal numbers of scraps to fill each section. Solid or semi-solid mini skeins are helpful to define the centre focus of each colour. A gradient or ombre effect works best when the transitions are gradual and those endlessly useful speckles are brilliant for visually smoothing out the edges.

MAKING THE SKEINS

Most commercial yarn advent calendars come with mini skeins in either 10g or 20g sizes. You can make yours any size you like, but either of these are a safe bet. Which one you choose may be dictated by the size of your yarn scraps or by a particular pattern you'd like to knit. For example, Knitvent 2017 brought us the Land of Sweets Cowl, which used 10g mini skeins, while the Dust of Snow Wrap from Knitvent 2018 used 20g minis. If you have the yarn to spare, 20g mini skeins will give you the widest choice of patterns.

Once you've decided on the size of your skeins, it's time to bring out the scale. How strict you want to be about weights is up to you, but your target weight should at least be used as a minimum. Generally, if a scrap is just a little over weight (a matter of a few yards) you might as well just leave it as-is. If it's enough over that the remainder could be a useful scrap in its own right, then you may want to snip it down to size.

How you present your yarn is also up to you. You could wind it up into mini balls or wrap each scrap around a little piece of cardboard if that's easiest. If you have the time and inclination, I think making neat little mini skeins is fun and pretty and gives the advent calendar a bit of professional polish. To make your mini skeins, grab your scraps, your tape, and a sturdy object to wrap the yarn around, then just follow the steps on the next page.



MINI SKEINS

STEP BY STEP



STEP ONE

Tape one end of your yarn scrap to your wrapping object.

STEP TWO

Start wrapping your yarn around the object to create an even hank of yarn.

STEP THREE

When you reach the end of your scrap, tie it off by tying it around the hank.

STEP FOUR

Using two tiny yarn scraps, loosely tie the hank of yarn at either end.

STEP FIVE

Undo the tape and carefully remove the hank from the wrapping object.

STEP SIX

Hold the hank of yarn by the two ends that have been tied. Gently twist the hank in one direction until it spins itself all the way to your fingers.

STEP SEVEN

Carefully fold the twisted hank in half. Let go of the middle and the twist will automatically twirl the two sides together. It should be looking skeinish!

STEP EIGHT

There will be a loop at one end of the hank where you were holding the yarn while twisting: just tuck the other end into that loop and it will hold itself together!

Now just repeat this 23 more times. (Doing this and then imagining doing it dozens and dozens of times always makes me think about how hard indie dyers work!)

ALL THE LITTLE EXTRAS

Yarn alone makes a fabulous advent calendar, but if you really want to spoil yourself or your recipient and have a little spare time or budget, you can add in a few special touches. Put one in each package to discover each day or sprinkle them in at random points throughout the month. Here are some of my favourite things to include:



THE SWEET STUFF

As kids with advent calendars we couldn't wait to open the next door and find the day's treat. As adults we're not that different!

You can choose classic childhood sweets or upgrade with decadent little squares of chocolate...any little sugar rush to savour with knitting and a cuppa!

SOMETHING TO SIP

Speaking of a cuppa, this is another opportunity to treat yourself or your friend. Fragrant herbal and spiced tea bags or packets of rich hot chocolate should please anyone. Depending on your knitter, the odd airplane-sized mini bottle of botanical gin or Irish cream for a boozy kick on a long winter's evening might not go amiss either.

FUN AND RANDOM

Cute enamel pins are a perennial favourite, but you can let your imagination run wild. Maybe you have an inside joke about penguins or maybe you happen to know that your friend has a weakness for pretty stickers and stationary. The sillier the better, I think.



WONDERFUL WORDS

If you're making the calendar for a friend or loved one, it can be very special to include a tiny note in each package. Just a line or two is enough: one of the reasons you love them, a happy memory of them, something you learned from them, a quality you appreciate in them. You could look up inspiring, funny, or heartwarming quotes or choose favourite lines from literature to copy out for each day, which is particularly fun if you've themed your calendar around a beloved book or series.

KNITTING ACCESSORIES

Anything tiny and useful fits right in here. Stitch and row markers are perfect mini-presents and companions to mini-skeins. There are so many wonderful makers selling these on Etsy that you can lose an afternoon browsing adorable sets, or you can make your own from beads and charms and a few findings. It's another chance to customise things if you're really committed to a theme! Other ideas: row counters, safety pins, a wee crochet hook for beading or catching dropped stitches, a set of cardigan-perfect buttons, darning needles, stitch holders, a tiny measuring tape...

WRAPPING IT ALL UP

Once you have your 24 beautiful bits of yarn and whatever extra bits you've picked out, it's time to put everything together. To preserve the element of surprise each day, it's nice to individually wrap each mini-skein and any extra bits you might be including. If you're making the calendar for yourself, all this wrapping and fuss might seem unnecessary, but I still think it's fun to make the effort. This is about doing something kind for yourself, after all. You might be surprised how much you can still surprise yourself, especially if there are a few weeks between making the calendar and beginning to open the packages!

One lovely knitter who makes a yarn advent calendar for herself each year told me that she gets her children to wrap and number her little parcels for her so she doesn't know what's coming next... I think it's a brilliant and very sweet idea.

You can get creative with how you wrap things. Tissue paper and ribbon works perfectly and looks beautiful, but if you're looking for a lower-impact option you can return to the childhood staple of recycled newspaper tied with baker's twine or the very scrappiest ends of scrap yarn.

You can leave the 24 packages as a lucky dip, or you can use a marker, a sticker, or a tag of some kind to write a number on each package so they know which one to open when! If you have the



time and plan to make the advent calendar a recurring tradition, you could even think about sewing and numbering individual little draw-string bags or stockings from scraps in your fabric stash. This idea is admittedly a bit extra, but I know there are some of you who are extra enough to be that fabulous! My hat is off to you.

For the rest of us, a bit of paper and string will do nicely. When all your little bundles are wrapped up, there are many lovely ways to present your advent calendar. I've seen people use a pretty basket, a tote, or a roomy project bag. Again, if you're the sewing type and feeling fancy, there are many lovely patterns out there for reusable hanging advent calendars with fabric pockets. Or, you can just bundle everything into a cardboard box and wrap it up like an ordinary gift.



HAPPY KNITVENT!

I hope you've found this guide inspiring and that you're excited to try making your own advent calendar this year. If you do decide to go for it, I'd love to see photos of your process, your stash, your finished calendars and the lovely things you make with it! Use #KnitventCalendar to tag your posts on Instagram and get in on the fun. You can also pop into the Curious Handmade Ravelry Group to chat about your holiday knitting plans: we'd love to see you there. Knitvent will be here before we know it. I really hope you'll join us. Let the anticipation build!

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