

## DOUBLE NEEDLE CAST-ON FOR KNITU

by June Hemmons Hiatt

*David and Amy have mentioned Double Needle Caston from my book, **The Principles of Knitting**, several times on KnitU. I thought that since the book was out of print, it was unfair to mention a technique that few people had the means to learn, and so I asked if they would like to post it. The version you see here has received a preliminary editing for the new book. I don't know if it will remain exactly like this, but it will be close. For those of you who have the old edition, you might find it interesting to look at what kinds of changes have been made; they are typical of what will occur throughout the new one.*

*This caston was a great deal of fun to develop. I had learned all the other methods I could find at the time, and realized that none of them worked very well to solve some problems that I knew were fairly common. I fussed and fussed, playing with every aspect of casting on I could think of and nothing was working. Then I woke up one morning and all I had to do was write it down. One of those Eureka! moments.*

*Double Needle Caston is the youngest member of a distinguished family. The Half-Hitch Castons, taken together, are among the most versatile and useful of all those available in knitting. (Half-Hitch has been known by many names - it is often called Long Tail Caston -but I called it what I did because a classic half-hitch knot forms the baseline.) If you know the original, you will soon recognize Double Needle Caston as a variation on a familiar theme, and find it easy to learn. This set of instructions has been taken out of context, however, and contains a few terms used in the book with which you may not be familiar. Here are their definitions:*

- *The term "nearside" refers to whichever side of the fabric is nearest the knitter; "farside" means the side of the fabric away from the knitter.*
- *The term "inside", means the side of the fabric that will be worn closest to the body; "outside" is the side that is visible to others.*

*Here are the instructions. I hope you find it useful.*

# Double-Needle Cast-On\*

I have saved the most difficult, but in many ways one of the most interesting of this family for last. Here is a variation that creates a handsome, unobtrusive, fully expandable edge suitable for every stitch pattern I've tried it on. This one is the hands-down winner. For one thing, it works beautifully with Double Rib, for which none of the other variations on Half-Hitch is quite as good. But most important, it handles a scalloped or serrated edge with aplomb. Let us consider for a moment why this is a breakthrough.

Whenever one knits a pattern that creates a scalloped or angular edge – and there are many lovely patterns that do – the baseline tends to be too tight, causing the edge to curl -- and this curling cannot be steamed out.

You know what it looks like – little "cups" all along the edge. Why does this happen? If you were to measure along every curve or angle of an edge like that, and compare the measurement to that of the straight width of the fabric, you would find an enormous difference – the edge can sometimes be twice as long as the fabric is wide. There simply aren't enough stitches, and therefore yarn, along the Cast-On edge to stretch that far. With Double-Needle Cast-On, additional yarn is provided to the edge, allowing it to accommodate itself to any contour the stitch pattern creates. Despite its ability to expand, the edge will be neat and trim and will neither stretch out of shape nor sag.

You will remember from the discussion of Knit Half-Hitch Cast-On that the elasticity of the edge is determined by the half-hitches that encircle the base of each stitch. The trick here is to form the stitch on one needle and the half-hitch on another, smaller needle. This

second needle, which should be a minimum of two sizes smaller than the top needle, acts as a gauge, measuring out a precise amount of yarn to the baseline of each stitch, thus assuring adequate yarn for expandability. The instructions will seem complicated at first, but keep in mind that you already know this Cast-On – it is simply modified. Don't learn it just by rote, but watch carefully as you go and make sense of the process so you really understand it. With practice the technique goes smoothly, although it is impossible to do it as fast as one can do Half-Hitch Cast-On.

Here are the instructions – they are long, but remember, it's worth it:

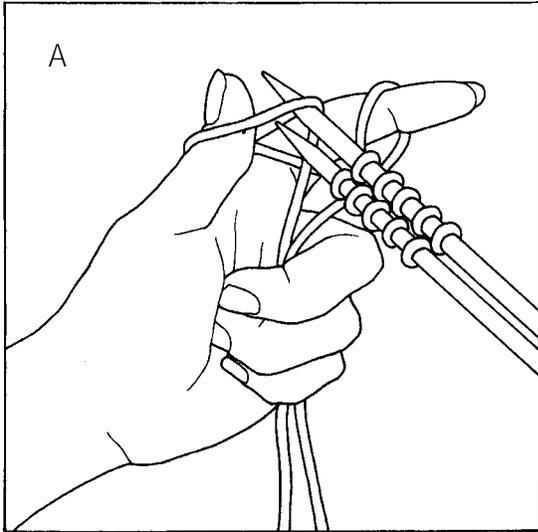
1. Allow for a tail of yarn, make a Slip Knot and place it on the needle held in the right hand, with the tail of yarn hanging down on the nearside.
2. Take up a second, smaller needle and line it up under the first one, holding the two needles as one. The Slip Knot will be on the larger needle; the two strands of yarn should be hanging down on either side of the smaller one.
3. Pick up the two strands of yarn in your left hand as for Knit Half-Hitch Cast-On.
4. With the tips of both needles, pick up the yarn on the outside of the thumb as for Half-Hitch Cast-on.
5. Pick up the strand passing from forefinger to needle with just the top needle, going over, (the strand will pass between the two needles from farside to nearside), down the farside, and under the strand.

\* Excerpt from *The Principles of Knitting*, pp. 132-134, Copyright © 1988 June Hemmons Hiatt

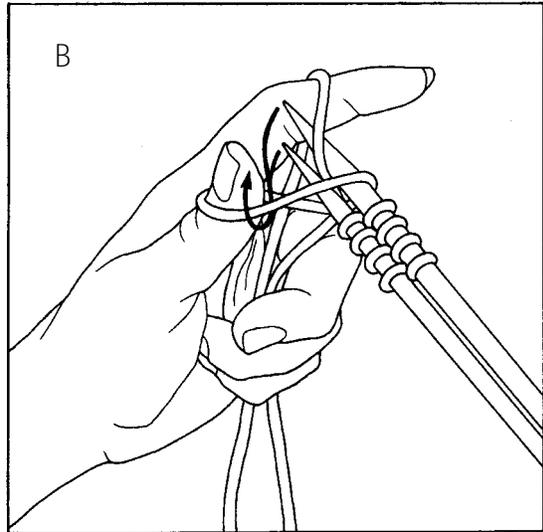
6. Bring this strand through the loop formed between thumb and needles. Before you drop the loop off the thumb, bring the top strand of the loop between the two needles from farside to nearside so it is caught on the lower needle.
7. Now drop the loop from the thumb, and pick the strand up again below the newly formed stitch. Apply tension to both strands to tighten the stitch on the top needle and the half-hitch on the bottom needle. The half-hitch should be tightened firmly.
8. Holding both strands steady with the left hand, rotate the two needles away from you so the tips draw a complete circle around the taut strands of yarn. At the same time, the two needles should rotate around each other in your hand, with the top one going down to the farside, under, and up into position again.
9. Continue in this manner – making a stitch, then rotating the needles – until you have the required number of stitches. When you do, pull the bottom, smaller needle out of the stitches.

As you can see, the top needle determines the size of the first row of stitches, while the size of the bottom needle determines the amount of yarn allowed to the half-hitch. When you rotate the needles, the yarn that forms the stitches will pass under the yarn of the baseline, which ties it against the fabric to keep it neat. If you want to study the structure of the caston, use two colors of yarn, one on the thumb for the baseline, the other on the forefinger for the stitches.

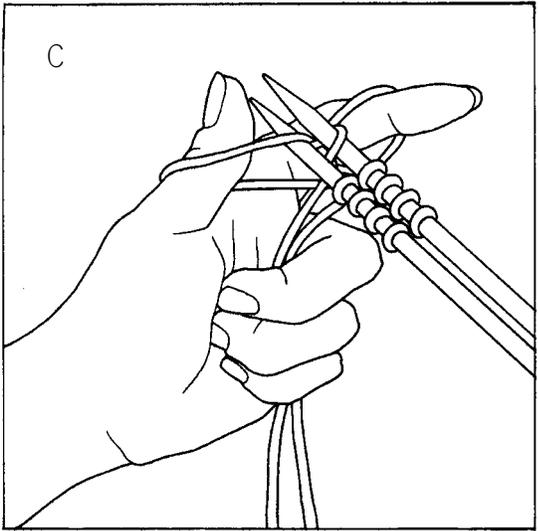
Just as with Half-Hitch Cast-On, there is a Knit and Purl side to this edge. If you want the "Knit" aspect on the outside and you are working flat, turn and start with an inside row. After you have worked a row or two of your pattern, stretch the material out to its maximum. This smoothes out the funny little loops left when you pulled out the bottom needle, and at the same time you will see how beautifully expandable this edge is. I used this technique for the first time on a young boy's sweater – the ultimate test of the ability of an edge to stretch rather than break with hard use – and it has performed superbly. It is also particularly good for lace patterns, which tend to widen considerably and often have irregular edges, and I have heard tell that some people like it for sock tops.



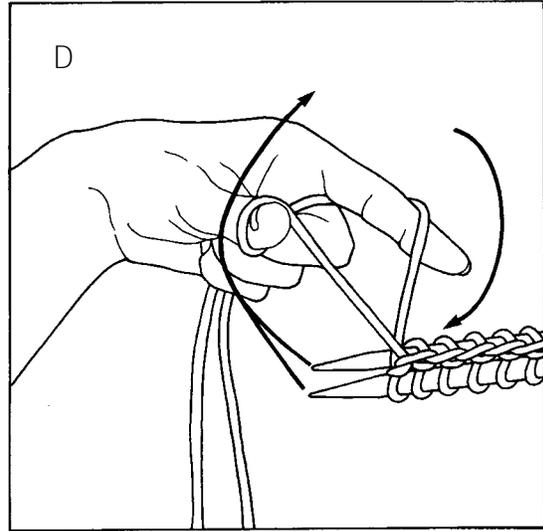
**A**  
DOUBLE-NEEDLE CAST-ON/PICKING UP LOOP



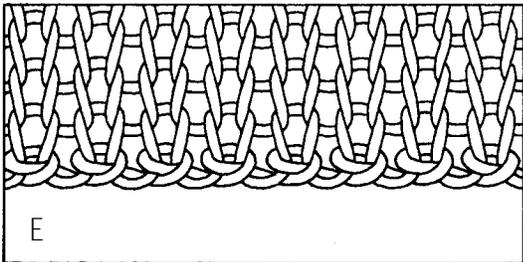
**B**  
DOUBLE-NEEDLE CAST-ON/BRINGING STITCH THROUGH LOOP



**C**  
DOUBLE-NEEDLE CAST-ON/CATCHING LOOP ON LOWER NEEDLE



**D**  
DOUBLE-NEEDLE CAST-ON/ROTATING NEEDLES



**E**  
DOUBLE-NEEDLE CAST-ON EDGE