

Yarn 101 with Fancy Tiger

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

(inspiring music) - Hi, I'm Jaime. - And I'm Amber. We're from Fancy Tiger in Denver, Colorado. We have a craft shop and in our shop we carry a lot of different yarns. We really love different fibers and different types of yarn. We're going to tell you today a little bit about what we look for in a yarn. - It can be intimidating and overwhelming sometimes to go into a yarn shop and see all of the different types of yarns that are available. So, today in Yarn 101, we're gonna teach you everything we know about yarn. We're gonna teach you how it's made, what to look for when picking out yarn for a project, what the different gauges are, what the different fibers are, the difference between plant fibers and protein fibers. - We'll cover a little bit of everything about yarn. (inspiring music)

Chapter 2 - Natural Fibers

Yarn overview

- We're gonna talk about how yarn is made. This is a piece of fiber and yarn is made from lots of different fibers and it's the same whether it's a plant fiber or a protein fiber like wool. As you can see, when it's just in the fiber form, it is very easy to pull apart. So in order to make yarn twist is added to the fiber. And by adding twist it then makes it really strong. This is how yarn is made. - This is called a single. If you want to make your yarn stronger two or more singles can be plied together to create a plied yarn, which adds even more strength to the yarn. You can take a high twist single, this just means adding a lot more twists to the original singles, and ply those together. And the higher the twist the stronger the yarn's gonna be. And that's going to keep the fibers from coming out of the yarn. We can show you a few examples of different types of plies here. First we have a single. This yarn is just one twist of yarn. Then we have a chunky two ply yarn. You can see when I untwist it you can see the two singles that created the two ply. Here we have a nice example of a three ply yarn. The singles are very small here, so even though there's three of them the yarn is still very thin. But the three plies are gonna add to the wearability of this. Here is a chain ply. It's one single but the single is chained together instead of twisted together. That adds a lot of strength to the yarn. This is a really soft yarn but it's gonna wear really well. And then this is a very high twist yarn. It's also a soft fiber, but the high twist is going to make it great for sweaters. - This construction of yarn really affects how your yarn is gonna wear over time. A very soft yarn that is a single ply is not gonna hold up to wear as well as a coarser yarn or a plied yarn. For example, this is hat that is made out of a very soft yarn that is a single ply. However, hats don't typically receive very much wear, so this was a good yarn choice for this project. It isn't pilling too much and it still looks really nice. A sweater receives a lot more wear. Your arms are moving against your body, you wear bags and backpacks and jackets. So a soft yarn that's a single ply is not gonna be the best choice for a sweater if you want it to wear nicely and not pill. However, there are some exceptions. This is a really great example of a single ply yarn that wears extremely well. And the reason is, is because the fiber itself is quite coarse. So when you have a coarse fiber it's gonna hold up to wear a lot better than a very soft fiber. This sweater is several years old and has been worn many times on backpacking trips, camping trips and it looks beautiful. It was made from lopi yarn, which is an Icelandic wool. So it's quite coarse but quite warm. - Now I'll show you an example of a soft yarn that would be appropriate for a sweater. This sweater is made from very soft wool that's spun into

really tight singles and then has a lot of plies going into the yarn. That keeps the soft fibers from escaping the yarn and keeps it from pilling. And this sweater is gonna hold up really nicely. The high twist of this yarn also creates a really great stitch definition for this sweater pattern. You can see the stitches really clearly. - So we've taught you a little bit about yarn construction, and you should use this information next time you're looking at yarn. If you have a very soft yarn that is just a single ply, it's probably not the best choice for a sweater, but would be perfect for a hat or a shawl that doesn't get a lot of wear. If you are looking for a heartier yarn for socks or a sweater that gets more wear, look for something that is either a coarser fiber or has a lot of plies, or has a very high twist. - [Amber] Now we're gonna talk a little bit about different weights of yarn. - Weight or gauge is probably the most important thing to think about when you're picking out yarn for a project, if you're using a pattern that already exists. These are examples of the most common weights of yarn. Lace, fingering, sport, DK, worsted, aran, bulky and super bulky. When you're looking for a substitution or trying to find yarn for a pattern, the most important thing is to first find the correct weight of yarn. So if you have a worsted weight pattern, you definitely wanna look for a worsted weight yarn. This is gonna help you have the most success with making that project. - Weight is really important when you're choosing a yarn because that's how you're going to get the gauge that you need for your project. We have two samples of gauge swatches here. This one is with a worsted weight yarn. And it comes out to about 15 stitches per four inches. The one here is a fingering weight and it comes out to 28 stitches per four inches. When you're substituting yarns in a project you wanna make sure you're using yarn that is very close to or the same weight as the yarn you're substituting for. That way you can make sure that you're getting your gauge and your project will come out the right size. - All of this information that Amber is talking about can be found in your yarn label, which is a very important tool when choosing a yarn. This is a typical example of what a yarn label is gonna look like. And it has a ton of information right here. First, and most importantly, I would look at this word, it's sport weight. So if you're looking for a sport weight yarn, that's important. Also, right here in this box it tells you a suggested gauge. So it's saying of a US 5 knitting needle. It's also telling you that for a four by four inch swatch, you're gonna get 24 stitches and 32 rows. So if you had a pattern in front of you you could see how closely these numbers match up to the gauge suggested in your pattern. This gauge over here, it doesn't have to be perfect. You can go within a few stitches per inch and it doesn't have to be exactly on a US 5, usually they'll give you a couple needle ranges. So anywhere from a four to six would be good for this yarn. Also important over here, it tells you how much weight this is. So 50 grams or 1.76 ounces. And finally, how many yards or meters you have. A hundred and forty five yards, a hundred and thirty three meters. All of this information is gonna come together to help you decide if this is gonna be the right yarn and then by the yards, how many of these is it gonna take to make your project. Also on the label it tells you what type of fiber it is. A hundred percent wool. And it gives you washing instructions, which will be important once you're finished. Here is one more example of a very different yarn that is very bulky. And you can see here that this yarn is giving you more of a range. So six to eight stitches per four inches, and it gives you a needle range as well of US 15 to 17. It still has the other information, a hundred percent wool, how many grams and how many yards. Now we're gonna talk about color. - We have some really colorful yarns here. A lot of times yarns have more than one color in them, and it can create different looks to your finished fabric. - These are some beautiful examples of different types of yarns. This one is a tonal dye. You can see that it's pretty much one color, but it is not a true solid. There's variation here in the shade of blues and greens. It was a hand dyed yarn, and it was probably kettle dyed so that the color is not uniform on the yarn. This one is super fun, this is a

speckle dye. And the way this is dyed is little bits of color are applied to the yarn all over. So it has a really cool speckled effect. This is another example of a kettle dyed yarn. You can kind of see the way that this yarn was created when you unwind it. And you can just see where different colors were applied. So there's a magenta, there's some periwinkle, some gold and red and blues. And then sometimes the colors will blend together, which makes a really beautiful effect. These two yarns are example of self striping yarns. These yarns are gonna change colors as you work with them. You can see it really well on this one. This yarn, if you started from the outside, is gonna change from brown to greens to blues and end in purple. You could also choose to start in the middle and have the colors go the opposite way. This one's gonna do the same thing, but as more of a rainbow. And this one you're gonna start from the outside and it's gonna go from orange to red and then there's greens and blues and even dark blues in there. - I'll show some examples of some of the tonal yarns. This is a red tonal yarn that's been worked up into a sweater. And this is a green tonal that's been worked up into a shawl. I'm also wearing a tonal yarn that's been knitted into a lace cardigan. And it has a really nice like, speckled effect but not too crazy, it's almost a solid. You're gonna get this tonal look with a yarn such as this one. It's almost solid, but not quite. And it makes a really nice depth to the color of your finished fabric. For the speckled look, once you knit it up it's gonna look something like this. Where there's kind of an unpredictable speckled effect throughout the fabric. And that's what you're gonna get from a speckled yarn like this one. - [Woman] This hat a really pretty example of a kettle dyed yarn that uses multiple colors. And as you can see, the colors are gonna be randomly placed in the knitting. And again, it's gonna be unpredictable and it looks really beautiful. - This is a hat that was made with a self striping yarn like this one. And the self striping yarn is mixed with an ombre yarn, which goes from like a pale green to a dark green. So behind that color we can see the self striping is the back to purple to pink to lavender, greens and then blues. And using the two yarns together is a fun way that you can use the self striping yarn. But you can also use it on its own and it would be really beautiful and you can see those gradations even more. You can also use it in a wider project, like a shawl, and the stripes are gonna be smaller in width and it's gonna be really beautiful as well. The smaller your project, like this hat is, the wider your stripes are gonna be. Now we're gonna talk a little bit about a different way to make colors in yarn. - The ones we just talked about were all dyed yarns. These are all different types of colors that are made in a different way. These are heathered yarns and then this one is a barber pole yarn. - [Amber] This is an example of a tweed. When a mill makes tweed they use different fibers with different staple lengths. That's the length of the actual wool. And it's dyed different colors, it's blended together at the mill to make a tweedy textured yarn. And usually the little bumps in there are a contrasting color. Then we have some heathered yarns. This one's made with multiple colors of wool. They're more similar lengths as opposed to what's in the tweed, and they're blended together at the mill. They card all of the wool together in its different colors and then make one yarn from that. This yarn is a heathered yarn where the fibers are different fibers. It has wool and linen in it. And those two fibers pick up the dye differently. So that creates the heather look. This is another example of a heathered yarn. It's a single ply and it's chunky. But the fibers are dyed different colors and when those are blended together it gives it that nice heathered look. This yarn here is a barber pole. And that means each ply is a different color. And then they ply them together to create that barber pole look. - This sweater is a beautiful example of a yarn that is heathered with different colors. As you can see, there's little bits of orange and green and yellow. And the overall color is a really beautiful mustardy yellow color. This is an example of a yarn like this where it's a heathered yarn but the different colors, which is a dark charcoal blue and then a white, are made because it's different

fibers blended together. So the white fibers you're seeing in the heather is linen and the other dyed fibers are a llama and silk. It's really beautiful. My last example is this swatch here, which is an example of a barber pole yarn like this worked up. The difference between this one and this one is that this is actually three different plies of three different colors of wool that are twisted together. Whereas the sample we showed you in the skein is just two colors twisted together. You can see that the color is all over and it's pretty uniform. And the barber pole gives a really beautiful effect. We've gone over how yarn is made, different weights and gauge, and a lot of different options for color. - Next we're gonna talk about one of the most important aspects of choosing a yarn. Which is fiber. What is the yarn made from?

Plant fibers

- Now we get to talk about fiber. What is the yarn made from? We're gonna start with talking about plant fibers, which we have a lot of different varieties here for you to look at. And you're probably really familiar with cotton, which is the most common plant fiber, and there are a lot of different options of cotton yarns available. But there's some other plant fibers that we love, such as linen, and hemp, and bamboo. So, we're gonna talk about all of those. - Some of the great uses for these plant fiber yarns is for summer weight garments. They're really great at keeping you cool. So, you don't wanna make any winter wear out of them, but they are really great options for garments, still. They're easy to care for, easy to wash, and some of them you can even wash and dry in your washing machine. They do stretch out a little bit, so when you're making your garment it's good to make a gauge swatch to see just how much it's gonna stretch once you're finished knitting with it. - You wouldn't wanna use plant fibers for something like socks or a hat because they don't have a lot of elasticity, so they're gonna stretch out and then they're not gonna go back to their original shape. But, they can still be great for garments, summer shawls, tops, and we also have some great examples of bags made out of plant fibers that we're gonna show you today. I'm gonna talk a little bit about some of these yarns that we have here on the table, and I'm gonna start with cotton, which is the one you're probably the most familiar with. But even cotton can have a lot of different forms. These two are very shiny, and this one has a more matte finish. The difference between these are that the shiny ones are mercerized cotton, which means the fiber has gone through a process that involves boiling it that gives it this nice sheen. This one is an organic cotton that doesn't have quite as much processing, and is a more matte finish. It's also very soft, these are all really soft cottons. Cotton can also come in a bunch of different forms. This one here is a tape form, and this is a chenille. So, there's lots of different varieties just within cotton. I'm gonna show you a really awesome example of this mercerized cotton. This is a beautiful example of it crocheted up into a bag. As you can see, it's quite dense, so it was a really tight crochet hook, and that makes a really nice fabric for this bag. And then multiple colors were used to create this awesome pattern. And you can see the shine of the mercerized cotton. This is a great yarn for a bag because it's super strong, so it's gonna hold up really well to wear, and it looks great. - Some other vegetable fibers you might find, this is a hemp yarn. There's also linen, which are these three. And those all come from other plants. Hemp from the hemp plant, and linen from the flax plant. Linen and hemp are also really great for bags. Here's an example of a crocheted bag made from a hemp yarn. Even though the bag is light and lacy, the hemp is so strong. It has really long fibers in it, and it makes a great, strong bag. - [Woman In Gray] Hemp is also naturally antibacterial, so it's great for washcloths as well. - These two linen yarns are very different. One's a chain ply, and one is a single ply. The chain ply is gonna be really great for garments. It's a lightweight yarn that sometimes the vegetable fiber

yarns can be a little bit dense. So, this creates a really great light fabric. This one you can see that it's pilling a little bit already. It's a single ply, so like we talked about earlier, it might not be the best choice for something that's gonna be worn and have a lot of rubbing happening against the fabric. I do have an example of a sweater made from the lightweight chain plied yarn. And you can see that it's really drapey, really light, and it's great to wear in the summertime. Sometimes when you find linen in the skein it can seem a little bit stiff at first, and like it might not be the best choice for a garment. But once you knit it up and wash it it can be really drapey and beautiful. This is the same yarn knit into a swatch, and you can see how the fabric is going to act. It's really nice. - The last example we have here of a plant-based yarn is this little skein of bamboo. Bamboo is made from a different process that's similar to making rayon, and involves quite a bit more processing than its more natural counterparts of linen and cotton. The benefits of bamboo is it's a super soft fiber, so this is a very soft skein. It's also really silky-looking and drapey, so that could make a really beautiful drapey garment, which would be lovely to wear in the summer. Because of the processing that is involved in making a bamboo or rayon yarn, it make not be the most environmentally-friendly yarn, but it is still a lovely yarn to work with. If you are concerned about the environment, a more minimally processed hemp or linen yarn is gonna be a better option. Or, if you're looking for cotton, look for organic cotton. Plant fibers are amazing because it lets us knit year-round. Living in Colorado in the summertime, we can use plant fibers like linen and cotton to make awesome garments that we can wear and knit all summer long. - But we do live in Colorado, so we are really excited about wool. If you live somewhere that gets cold, then you're gonna be excited, too, about the next thing we're gonna show you.

Wool fibers

- Now we're gonna talk about protein fibers and the moment we've all been waiting for, wool. Wool is one of our favorite fibers to work with and there's a ton of reasons why wool makes one of the most perfect yarns for knitting or crochet. - Wool is a really great fiber at regulating temperature. So if there's unpredictable weather or cold weather, it's the perfect thing to make a sweater or garment from. Wool is really great at wicking away water and it naturally keeps sheep warm in cold weather and rainy and snowy weather, so it works just as well keeping us warm by wicking away moisture and keeping us thermally insulated. - Wool also has a lot of elasticity. It's gonna keep it's shape so it can stretch and then it'll just spring back. So it's great for anything that you want to hold shape, such as hats, socks, sweater sleeves, anything like that. - One of the properties of wool is that if you agitate it enough, it will felt. And sometimes this is useful for making things like rugs and potholders, but other times when you're making a garment you don't want it to felt. So you have to wash it gently. One thing you can use is a Superwash wool, which has gone through a chemical process that removes the scales on the fiber and it keeps the yarn from felting. The Superwash wool is easy to care for, but if you're looking for something that's the most environmentally friendly option, a natural, unprocessed wool is a better option. - These properties are universal to all wool, but there are tons of different sheep breeds and there are properties that are unique to each sheep breed so now we're gonna talk about some breed-specific yarns. The most common breed that you've probably heard of before is Merino. This right here is a skein of Merino wool. So it's 100% Merino, and the reason Merino is so popular is because it's known for being incredibly soft. And this yarn is incredibly soft. So this is one reason that people love Merino. However, there are some downsides to a super soft wool such as Merino, the number one being that it's not gonna wear as well as a coarser wool. So it's gonna develop a lot of pills much faster than a coarser wool. - On the

opposite end of the spectrum would be this Lopi yarn. Lopi's made from an Icelandic wool that comes from a sheep that's dual-coated. It has a harsher outer coat which repels water and it has a softer under coat which is really warm and downy. The yarn itself is pretty coarse. You wouldn't want to wear this against your skin, but it makes a really great option for outer wear, Jamie's hiking sweater that she showed earlier uses this Lopi yarn, and the color work is just beautiful in this yarn, but it also is great for thermally insulating and keeping snow and sleet off of you while you're out in harsh weather. - Whenever I wear my Lopi sweater I'll just wear a T-shirt underneath or some long underwear so that it's not right against my skin. Another yarn that is also kind of coarse but is another great wearing yarn is this, our heirloom Romney yarn. Romney are a type of long-wool sheep, which means the staple length of the wool fibers are extremely long. This helps this yarn to be a very good wearing yarn, it's not gonna pill at all and it's great for outer wear and mittens. I have some examples to show you. This is a cardigan that is knit out of the Romney, and cardigans are great for a coarser wool because you're always gonna have some type of shirt on underneath it if you're sensitive to the wool, but it's again gonna keep you really warm and it's gonna wear great, this has no pilling at all. Another great use of a coarser wool is mittens, whenever we wear mittens in Colorado, there's a lot of shoveling of snow, cleaning off of our cars, our hands touch things all the time, so mittens get a lot of wear. So using the coarser wool not only is gonna keep your hands warm and dry in the snow, but it's also gonna wear beautifully. Again, there's no pilling, and these mittens look like they were just knit. - Another great single-breed yarn is this Shetland yarn from Scotland. This Jameson and Smith is a great option for using natural colors of sheep breeds, and you can do color work with the different colors. I can show you a vest that I made from that. One of the great things about single-breed sheep is that some of them come in so many colors, and the Shetland comes in about a dozen colors, which makes it an amazing choice for color work. The Shetland is also milled into hundreds of other colors, so it's often used on the Shetland islands for traditional fair isle vests and sweaters. - Another single-breed yarn that we love is Loft, which is a U.S. made yarn from Brooklyn tweed, and this is actually made from a cross of Targhee and Columbia sheep, and it is made here in America, the sheep live in Wyoming. And one thing that makes this particular yarn really unique is the sheep have very springy wool. So it is completely different from the heirloom, which this is a very long, staple length, and almost has a shine to it. Loft is the total opposite, it's a very springy wool. And this also makes beautiful garments. And I have a sweater here that I knit out of Loft, and you can see it's a really nice fine fabric because it's a fingering weight yarn, it's just got a nice really springy texture to it which is lovely and really comfortable to wear. This is also gonna be a softer wool than the other ones that we've shown you so far, I would say it's in between a Merino or something like the Lopi. - Loft is grown and milled in the U.S. which makes it pretty special. There's a lot more companies these days going to U.S. mills to make their yarn, this here is another example of a U.S. sourced and milled yarn by Jill Draper. And these are really special yarns that I think it's great to support. - This one is a Cormo Merino, so again it's single-breed, but it's a cross-breed sheep and the Merino is definitely gonna make it a little bit softer, but the Cormo gives it a really springy texture similar to the Loft. As you can see, we love wool. The more you learn about the different properties of different breeds of sheep, the more you can know and find the perfect yarn for almost any project. - If you wanna learn a little bit more, some of our favorite resources are *The Knitter's Book of Wool* by Clara Parkes, and *The Fleece and Fiber Sourcebook*, which is by Deborah Robson and Carol Ekarius.

Luxury fibers and blends

- Now we're going to talk a little bit more about some other fiber types that are not wool and not vegetable fibers. There's a lot of animals that you can get fiber from. You can get it from the animals hair, just like wool, which you can get alpaca, yak, cashmere, there's a lot of other animals. And then there's also silk, which comes from an insect. - We're gonna talk about some of these more luxury fibers as well as blends, and how do these work when knitted up. And we're gonna start over here with cashmere which is one of the softest fibers available and it comes from the cashmere goat which is a dual-coated animal with the coarser hair on the outside and then a downy fur underneath. And it's this downy fiber that is used to make cashmere yarn. So the yarn, the fiber has to be de-haired before it is made into yarn and cashmere is extremely soft. This de-hairing process is what makes cashmere more expensive. Next let's talk about silk. Silk is made from silkworms. They weave it in their cocoons and then it is processed into yarn. Silk is extremely strong fiber. It is also shiny and it also adds a lot of drape to knit garments because of it's weight. So this yarn here is 100 percent silk but it's also really great to blend into things. So this yarn here is a really beautiful blend of cashmere and silk. So the cashmere is super soft but you can see that the yarn is really shiny because of the silk. This is another blend that uses silk and this time it's wool, alpaca and silk. The little nubs in this yarn are the silk and you can tell they've actually been dyed a different color as the wool and alpaca and then blended into the yarn which gives a really beautiful effect. These silk blends can make amazing shawls. Let me show you this one that I love. This one here uses this cashmere, silk blend just on the bottom for this lace portion. Because this is an expensive fiber and an expensive yarn using it in this manner and combining it with a more affordable wool really helps your yarn go a long way. And you can see how light an airy this is and it's also got a really beautiful shine so great for a lace project. - Silk is known for it's long shiny fibers but there's also silk noil which is a little bit more nubbely and texturey. Silk noil is used in this yarn and blended with camel fiber. Camel is a soft, downy fiber that's brushed from the undercoat of camels. It is, like cashmere, de-haired, so it turns out to be a very soft fiber and this is great yarn for sweaters. Jamie actually knit a summer sweater from this yarn and the texture just shows off beautifully in this little sweater. - Next I'm going to talk about alpaca. This is an alpaca yarn right here and you're probably familiar with alpaca, they're pretty freaky looking and also adorable and they have very soft fiber. The fiber is also really warm so it's great for cold climates and it also has a lot of drape. So it's heavier than wool and it's going to hang and drape in a way that's totally different from wool. I'll show you a sweater that was made with the alpaca and silk blended together. And you can see how this sweater is hanging. It's quite heavy. Both the alpaca and the silk have a lot of drape so if you were looking to substitute a yarn for a sweater that was knit out of 100 percent wool, alpaca/silk might not be the best option because it's gonna completely change the way that garment looks. - Another great fiber that comes from a goat is mohair. And it is silky but it has some nice, hairy halo to it which can be useful for interesting projects. It's used a lot in shawls which are light and airy and create a real ethereal feel. I've also used it in this little stuffed animal to give the stuffed dog a little bit of a hairy look to him. Another yarn that has a great halo is angora. Angora comes from adorable bunnies and it is very soft and makes a beautiful halo. Angora would be great for hats, cowls, anything where you want that super soft beautiful halo. Finally we come to wool blends where you can mix wool with almost any fiber and it can come up with some really great results. This yarn is also the yarn that I'm wearing here and it is wool mixed with alpaca. So it has little bit more sheen and drape than just if it was 100 percent wool. This yarn here is wool mixed with mohair. So the mohair gives it a little bit more sheen and it's also gonna give it a halo when it gets more wear to it. And this yarn is wool mixed with linen. You can see the linen fibers are white and don't take the dye

as well as the wool. And the linen is going to give this yarn a little bit more rustic texture and it's gonna help it be not quite so warm when worked up. Finally we have very classic blend of wool with nylon. Nylon is added to the wool to give it extra strength and this is perfect for socks, which are gonna get the most wear. Now that you know more about different types of fibers it will really help you understand how fibers work together. And it will help you pick out yarns when looking at different blends. - When using different blends and substituting for projects it's good to think about how drapey the yarn is because that's going to affect your row gauge. So knitting a swatch is really important, especially when you're changing your fiber type in your substitution.

Chapter 3 - Synthetic Fibers

Synthetic yarns and unusual fibers

- As you can tell, Amber and I love to make garments out of natural fibers, but if you're looking for some more bells and whistles there's tons of things to be found in synthetic yarns. There's metallic thread, boucle, and this one even is reflective. - What? Supposedly it's reflective if you take a photo of yourself with it. Yeah! (laughs) - [Woman With Gray Hair] There's a yarn out there for almost anything. - There are some natural fibers that are pretty crazy, too. One of my favorites is habu silk and stainless steel, which I've used in this sweater here. The silk and stainless is a really skinny yarn. It's almost like a thread, but the stainless steel gives it some structure and makes a really cool transparent effect in the sweater. - When working with different fibers you always want to check your label to see if it's machine washable. Synthetic fibers usually will be, but most of the natural fibers we've talked about will need to be hand washed gently and then laid out to dry. We hope that you've learned tons about yarn and next time you go to a yarn shop you can use your knowledge to pick out the perfect yarn for your next project.