



Introduction – What is intarsia and when is it used?

Intarsia is a neater way to create blocks of colour where stranding or weaving in would look unsightly and be unnecessarily cumbersome. It is particularly useful as a technique creating blocks of colour, motifs and designs where small areas of colour are distributed over the knitted fabric (for example in a sky design this may be stars or small clouds).

Why use intarsia?

With intarsia there are no strands at the back of the work to snag or catch. Stranding makes a fabric heavier and thicker which may not always be desirable, particularly with garments where drape, give or soft textures are needed. Light coloured main fabrics, finer yarns and open textures may allow stranded yarns to be seen, spoiling the overall effect.

How does intarsia work?

Unlike fairisle knitting, where yarns not in use are carried along at the back of the work, intarsia simply uses a separate strand of yarn for each section of colour. One might think that this would result in a tangled mess of yarn. Fortunately, there are a number of easy techniques to keep yarns under control!

Intarsia patterns

Intarsia motifs and patterns are normally knitted from charts (or a combination of charts and written patterns). The video will show you the main points but for more information, refer back to Understanding charts in lesson M2.L01.1.

Using ‘butterflies’

If only a few stitches are to be worked in a particular colour, wind a small amount onto a bobbin, a small piece of card or a “butterfly”. A bit of guesstimating is needed to gauge the amount of yarn needed, but this improves with practice and new yarn can always be joined in if you run out.

Making a butterfly



1. To make a butterfly, lay a 15cm (6”) tail of yarn across your palm. Take the working yarn behind your hand through your middle and fourth fingers.



2. Wrap the yarn in a figure of eight around your thumb and little finger, holding the fingers about 8cm (3”) apart by first taking the working yarn around the back of the little finger then bringing the yarn across the palm and taking it between the thumb and the first finger.



3. Take the yarn around the thumb, across the palm and around the little finger again, going between the little finger and the fourth finger.



4. Take the yarn back across the palm, between the thumb and the first finger and around the thumb.



5. Continue wrapping until enough yarn has been wound, cut off the yarn leaving a 15cm (6") tail.



6. Leaving the loops on your fingers, take the end of yarn from between your middle and fourth finger and pass it down behind the loops.



7. Pass the tail through the loop

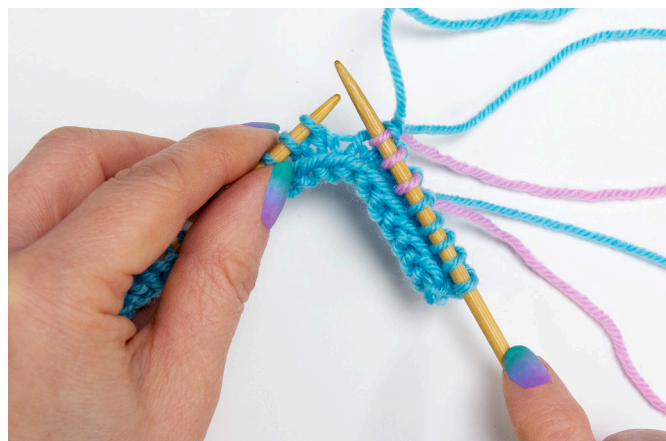


8. Pass the tail through the loop again and draw up tight.

9. Remove the wrapped loops and draw off the yarn from the cut tail. Make a separate butterfly for each colour section.



To knit an intarsia motif – First knit row



1. Knit to the colour-change. Join the new colour to the existing colour using a single knot. Slide the knot close to the needle. This knot will be undone later and woven in so leave 15cm (6") of the new yarn at the back of the work to sew in later.

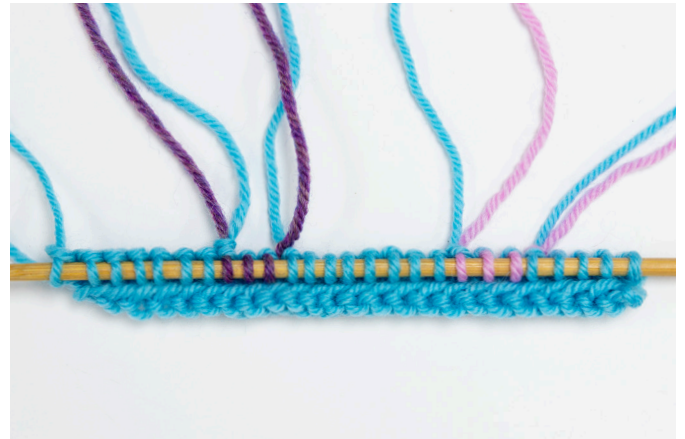
2. Make the next stitch in the new colour. Do not cut off the first colour but leave at the back of the work. Hold the new yarn quite firmly and knit in this colour until the next colour is required. At this stage the first stitch may be a little loose. If necessary, pull the tail end gently, enough to stop the stitch unravelling but not too tightly as this will pucker the knitting.



3. At the next colour section, repeat step 1, joining in the new colour.

4. Repeat steps 1-2 at each colour-change.

- At the end of the row there will be several butterflies dangling behind the work, one for each colour-change. Even if a colour is used more than once in the row, a separate butterfly is used. For large sections, it is possible to keep the yarn on the ball.



Purl row



- Turn the work to begin the purl row, leaving the butterflies at the front of the work. For a new colour, follow steps 1-2 above, knotting in the new yarn with a temporary knot and leaving a tail for sewing in.



- To continue with a colour from previous row, twist the old and new yarns by holding both yarns at the front of the work and taking new yarn from front to back beneath the old yarn. Draw up the old and new threads as necessary to keep stitches even.

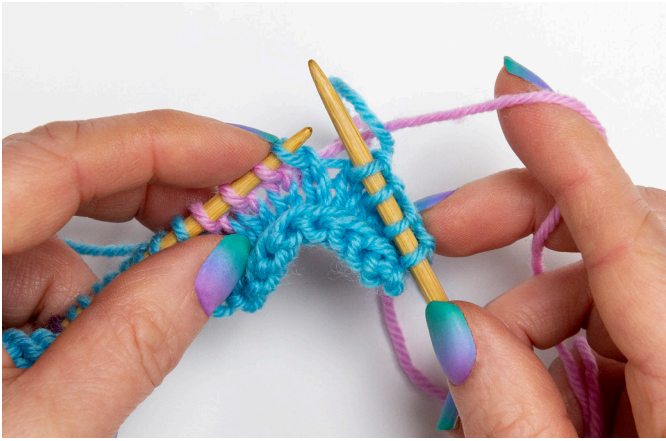


- Continue in the appropriate colour until the next colour change, repeating step 2 for new colours and twisting the yarns where the colour changes occur.



- At the end of the row, gently adjust the tension if the stitches from row one have become loose. To prevent the butterflies tangling as you work, only unwind thread as needed. Keep the threads not in use nice and short. This not only makes knitting easier, it helps reduce any pull on the yarn and helps keep tension even.

Second and subsequent knit rows



1. On the next (knit) row, with the butterflies at the back of the work, when you reach the first colour change, bring the yarn to be used next, from back to front, under the old yarn (the old yarn lays over the top of the new one).



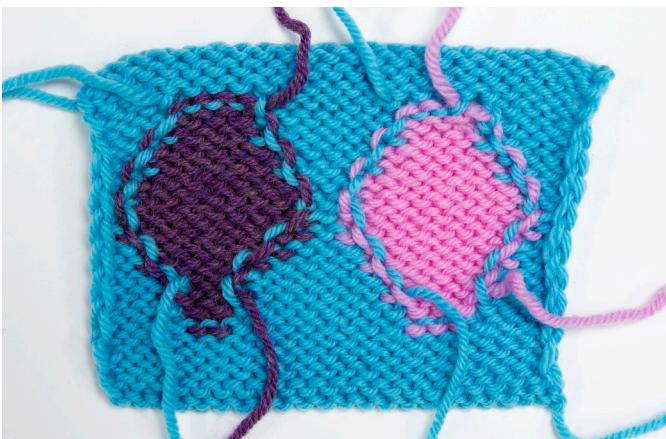
2. Holding the old yarn quite firmly beneath and behind the new yarn, knit the next section in the new yarn, drawing up the two yarns to prevent a hole.



3. Repeat for each colour-change. For a new colour, follow the instructions for the first knit row (above).



4. When a section of colour is complete (remember this may be over a number of rows), leave around 15cm (6") to allow the end to be neatly woven in and cut off. Any excess can be cut off after weaving in, but too short a thread may allow the work to unravel and stitches become loose.



5. To tidy up ends, thread the cut yarn onto a blunt-ended bodkin and, on the back of the work, carefully weave in and out of neighbouring stitches. Where possible, weave into stitches of the same colour to avoid threads showing through. Check stitch shape is not distorted or too loose as you work.



6. Viewed from the RS the motifs should look neat with no pulling or holes at the edges.

TOP TIPS

- If only a couple of stitches will be worked in a particular colour, a butterfly may not be required and the yarn can simply be left as a long strand at the back of the work.
- Stranding can be combined with intarsia and may be appropriate where, for example, only one or two stitches divide two larger areas of a single colour.
- Check regularly for yarn tangles and unravel sooner rather than later!
- Don't throw away short lengths of leftover yarn. They may be useful later in small areas or for sewing up.
- Weaving in threads as you go makes the process seem less daunting than leaving them all until the end.

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