

Reclaim Yarn from Commercially Manufactured Sweaters

Step 1: Choose the right sweater. Before you begin, make sure...

- Seams are NOT serged. However, if only the shoulder seams are serged it may still work.
- Fiber content and color are desirable. Will the resulting yarn be something you truly want to work with? When starting out, avoid fine gauge sweaters and materials like mohair and/or chenille which are difficult to unravel.
- Condition is good -- no felting, weak spots, pilling, or extensive damage, but a sweater with one or two small holes or stains can be salvaged.
- There isn't too much embellishment. Stripes, fair isle, intarsia, embroidery, and/or beading may be difficult or time consuming to undo. Look for plain sweaters or those in which embellishment is limited to a small area.

Step 2: Prepare the sweater.

- Wash sweater according to care instructions.
- Remove labels, closures, and topical decorations with as little damage to seams and/or body of the sweater as possible.

Step 3: Take the sweater apart at the seams.

- Find the line of chain stitching at the seam. It should look something like this <<<<<<<. The chain will unzip toward the direction in which the Vs are pointing.
- Find the beginning of the chain and carefully cut it using a seam ripper or needlepoint scissors. Take care not to cut into the body of the piece.
- Pull tail to the opposite side of the seam. It should now unzip freely unless there are knots, labels or other obstacles in the way.
- If the tail breaks, gently undo several stitches of the chain, pull tail to the back once again, and continue unzipping.
- Repeat these steps until the sweater is in separate pieces - front(s), back, sleeves, collar.

Step 4: Unravel.

- *Note: most commercially manufactured sweaters are knitted from the bottom up, so they will unravel from the top down.*
- Cut off the bind-off edge from each piece.
- Begin gently pulling strands of yarn until all uneven or short pieces have been removed from the cut edge.
- Soon you will notice the yarn is no longer in short lengths and has become continuous.
- At this point, begin winding yarn into balls by hand or on a ball winder.

Step 5: Prepare reclaimed yarn for knitting or crocheting.

- *Note: gauge will be affected if yarn is knitted in its "curly" condition.*
- Put the yarn into hanks tied off in several places. Wet the hanks then hang to dry using weights (like cans of tuna) to pull them straight but not too tight. Alternatively, dry hanks can be hung with weights then steamed straight.
- Not crazy about the color? Reclaimed yarn can be over-dyed!

Useful online resources:

- <http://dawnprickett.blogspot.com/2008/01/recycling-sweaters-for-yarn.html>
- <http://www.handspunartyarn.com/p/how-to-unravel-sweater-to-recycle-yarn.html>
- <http://soulfulhuesknits.blogspot.com/2007/10/how-to-unravel-sweater-to-use-its-yarn.html>
- <http://www.squidoo.com/how-to-recycle-sweaters-for-yarn>
- Ravelry's Thrifty Knitters Group