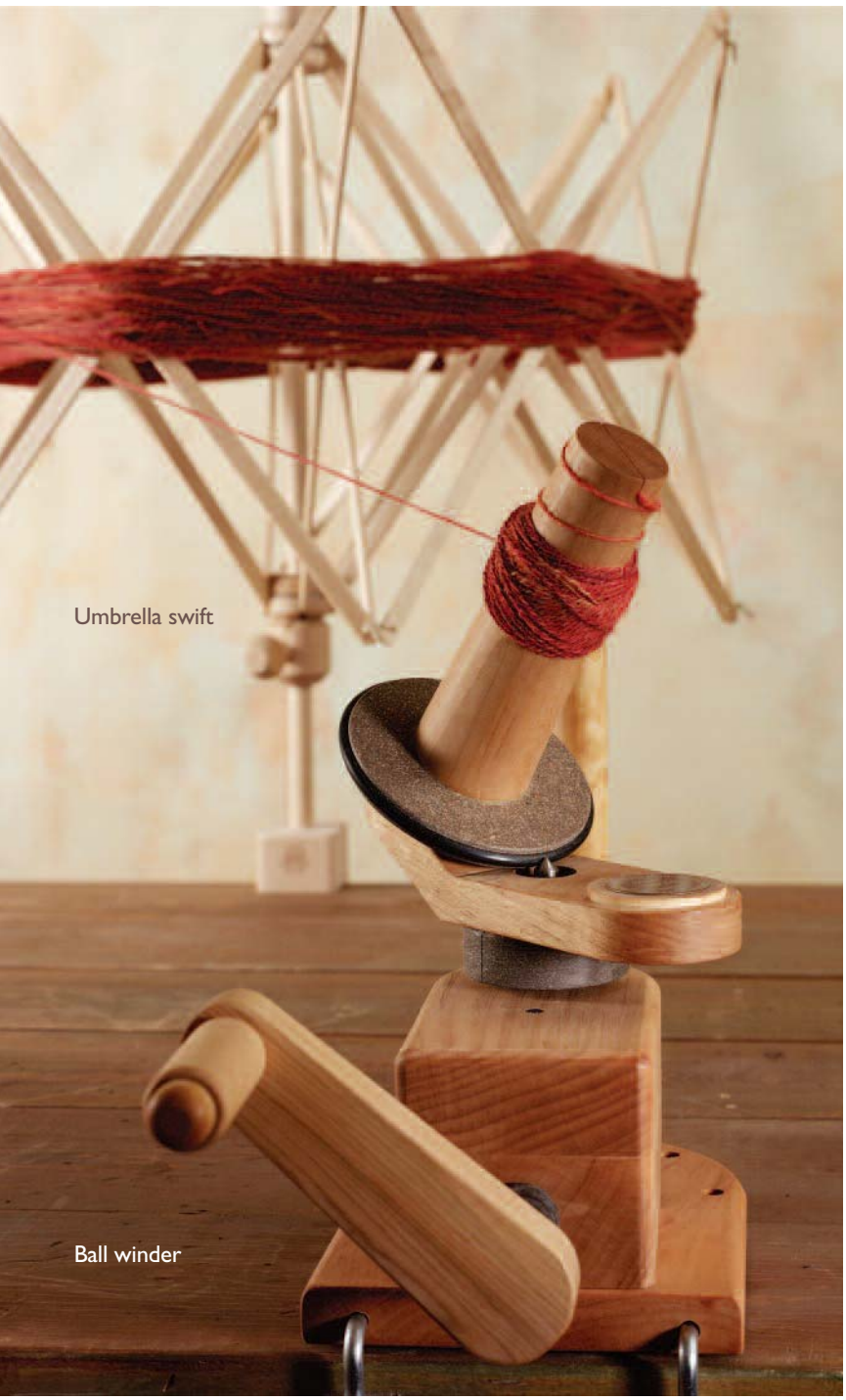
Managing Your Yarn

BY CAROL HUEBSCHER RHOADES



Umbrella swift

Ball winder

After you've spun a singles yarn onto a bobbin or spindle, you have to decide how to manage it so that you can ply and wash it. What you do depends partially on the fiber and the amount of twist in it and partially on what equipment you have on hand. In this column, we'll look at how to get your yarn off the bobbin for plying and skeining.

If you have enough bobbins, you can spin all your singles yarn onto the bobbins and then ply directly from them. It is best if your **lazy kate** (the rack that holds bobbins) has a tensioning device, so you can ply rhythmically and smoothly, and the yarn won't suddenly fly out and tangle. Of course, you also have to hold each strand with an even and relatively firm tension as you ply. If your singles yarn has a high amount of twist, tension very carefully so that snarls don't get trapped in the yarn. I usually wind cotton singles yarn onto a PVC pipe with holes in it, boil it for 30 minutes, and then wind the yarn onto a niddy-noddy to dry. After that, I wind it back onto a bobbin to ply from. Work from bobbins and not balls when plying high-twist yarns to avoid tangling and frustration.

If you don't have enough bobbins or a holder for plying directly from spindles, you can ply low- to medium-twist singles from balls made on a ball winder or a nøstepinne. Each of these tools has advantages and disadvantages.

A ball winder has a cone for holding the yarn, a yarn guide, a crank mechanism, and a clamp for attaching to a table or board. You can hold a ball winder in your hand rather than clamping it to something, but it gets a bit tricky if you have to hold the clamp at the bottom away from the crank as you wind *and* hold the yarn as it goes through the eyehook guide.

I use my ball winder to wind singles yarn from the bobbin while it is still on the wheel or to wind plied yarn from an **umbrella swift** (a cage-like apparatus for holding skeins of yarn). For winding singles, leave the bobbin on the spinning wheel and hold the ball winder parallel to the bobbin about a foot or so away from it. Run the yarn tail across the hooks and under the flyer arm to tension it, thread it through the eyehook, and then double the tail

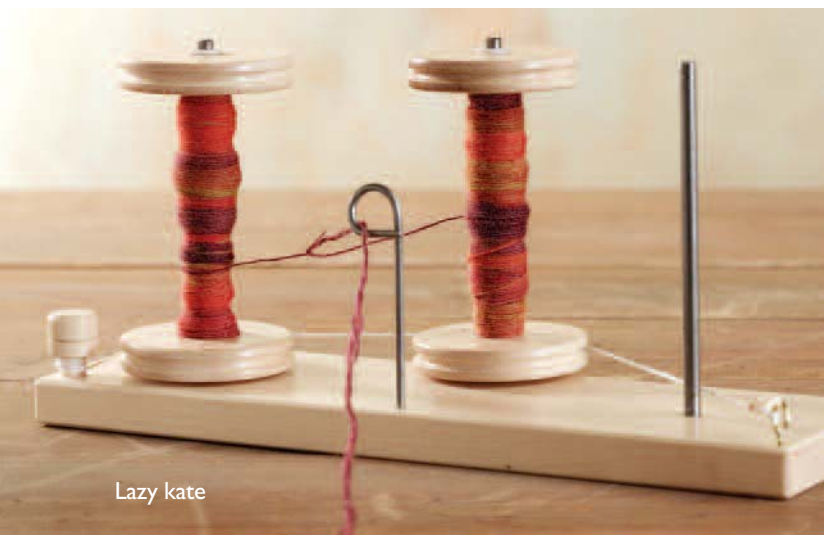
about 2 inches and put it firmly into the slot at the top of the cone on the ball winder. Turn the crank smoothly at a medium speed and check the tension of the yarn as it winds. Too little and the ball will be very sloppy; too much and the yarn is stretched, and the ball can collapse inward. If you can't tension the yarn on the hooks and flyer arm, use your fingers to hold and tension the yarn. You can also position the bobbin on a tensioned lazy kate. After the ball is wound, if it isn't on a removable cone that the yarn will stay on, insert a piece of heavy paper or a folded index card into the center of the ball as you remove it from the top of the cone to keep the ball from collapsing inward.

A **nøstepinne** or winding stick is a handheld tool for winding yarn into balls. In the United States, we use the Norwegian term; the Swedes call it a *nystpinne* and the Danes a *vindepind*. If you are going to buy or make a nøstepinne, make sure there is a notch around the top and that the top half is smooth and tapers from the center to the top. My favorite nøstepinne is 3½ inches in diameter at the center and 2⅝ inches just under the top notch. A notch at the bottom is handy, and the tool should fit comfortably in your hand.

You can hold the nøstepinne in whichever hand is comfortable. Start by wrapping the yarn around the bottom notch two or three times to hold it. Bring the yarn up to the top and wrap it once or twice around the top notch. If your nøstepinne doesn't have a notch at the bottom, simply wrap the yarn around the top notch and hold the tail with your thumb below the spot where you start winding. Now bring the yarn from the top notch down about 1½ to 2 inches (the bigger the ball will be, the lower you want to start winding it). I hold the nøstepinne in my right hand and guide the yarn with my left hand, winding it diagonally from the lower left up to the right. The key to making a ball successfully is winding with the yarn at an angle, just the way yarn is wound in a commercial ball of yarn. You want an egg shape, not a round ball. At first you may have to hold the yarn in place with your fingers as you wind. Wind a few turns, and then roll the nøstepinne slightly in the direction from which you start the wrap. Since I wrap from left to right, I roll the nøstepinne to the left. Continue winding and rolling the nøstepinne until you have a nice, egg-shaped ball of yarn. Remove the ball from the top of the nøstepinne, keeping hold of the original tail if you need it to ply or knit from. The ball should have an open center that won't collapse.

Ball winders are good for winding large amounts of yarn and for making a flat-bottomed ball that can sit on the floor or in a box without rolling around. If I have a large project, I wind each bobbin of singles yarn onto a ball winder and stack the balls in order so I can ply the first and last balls together, the second and second-last together, and so forth. That way, any differences in the yarn grist will be more or less evened out. While you can ply from the two ends of the ball produced on a ball winder, the center can collapse and it can be tricky controlling the tension of the two yarn ends.

Nøstepinnes are convenient for winding small amounts of singles yarn that can be plied from the ball. Plied yarn is also wound onto a nøstepinne for two-end knitting (which uses two strands alternately throughout) so that you can easily pull the


Lazy kate


Nøstepinne


Niddy-noddy

strands from the center and outside of the ball. The disadvantage of a nøstepinne is that winding on is slow and you have to be careful to wind evenly and smoothly so that the yarn doesn't slide or tangle. Yarn wound onto either a ball winder or nøstepinne can also acquire or lose twist. For more on this, see Rita Buchanan's excellent article on center-pull balls listed in Resources.

After you've plied your yarn, you can skein it onto a **niddy-noddy.** This is a tool for skeining and measuring yarn. It has a center "stick" that is usually carved so you can hold it easily. Each end of the stick has a crossbar with one end curving upward and the other tapering down (sometimes one crossbar has curves at both ends). There is often one flat end so that you can slide the yarn off the niddy-noddy. The crossbars are offset 90° from each other.

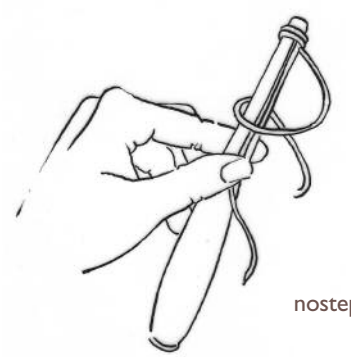
Start winding the yarn by holding the tail at the center of the handhold and keep hold of it as you wind. Then take the yarn up over the left end of the top crossbar, down and under the right-side end of the lower crossbar, up and over the other end of the top crossbar and then down and under the other end of the lower crossbar. When you get back to the starting point, begin counting complete wraps as you continue to wind. Measure the yardage for one wrap, and then you can multiply by the number of wraps for the skein total (for more details, see Rita Buchanan's article on measuring yarn listed in Resources). Wrap evenly and with medium tension. Wrap too tightly and you can't get the yarn off and your yardage count will be overly optimistic; wrap too loosely and the yarn falls off or slides to the wrong part of the crossbar. After you've wound the yarn, secure each end with a short piece of waste yarn tied around the skein in a figure eight, and then tie the skein in at least two more places before removing the yarn from the niddy-noddy. Your yarn is now ready to be washed and used. ⌘

Carol Rhoades is settling into her new home in Madison, Wisconsin. She has hidden all the unsightly bins of wool in the basement and spins upstairs in a pleasant and tidy room.

Resources

Buchanan, Rita. "A Closer Look: The Ins and Outs of Centerpull Balls: How to Avoid Tangles and Frustration." *Spin·Off* 24, 4 (Winter 2000), 26–29.

Buchanan, Rita. "Measuring Yarn, Part I: Length, Weight, and Grist." *Spin·Off* 16, 3 (Fall 1992), 46–51.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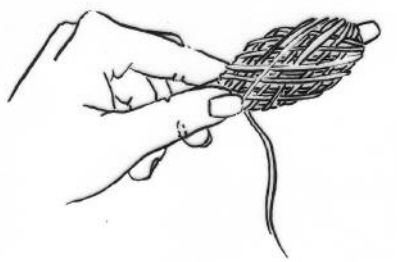

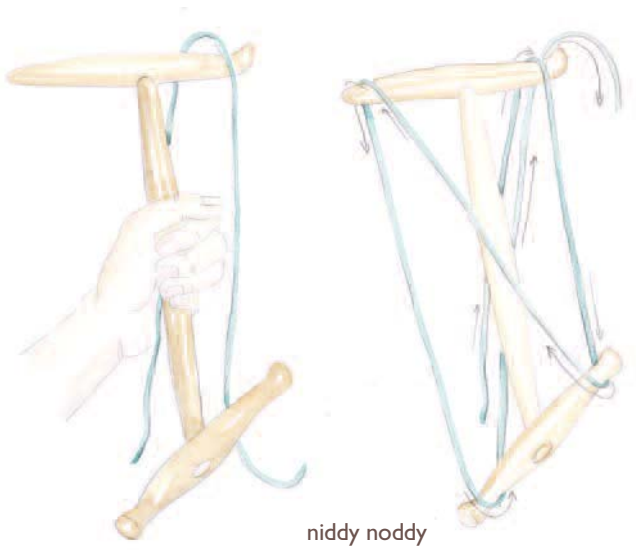
niddy noddy