

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Baby Knits For Beginners

Debbie Bliss

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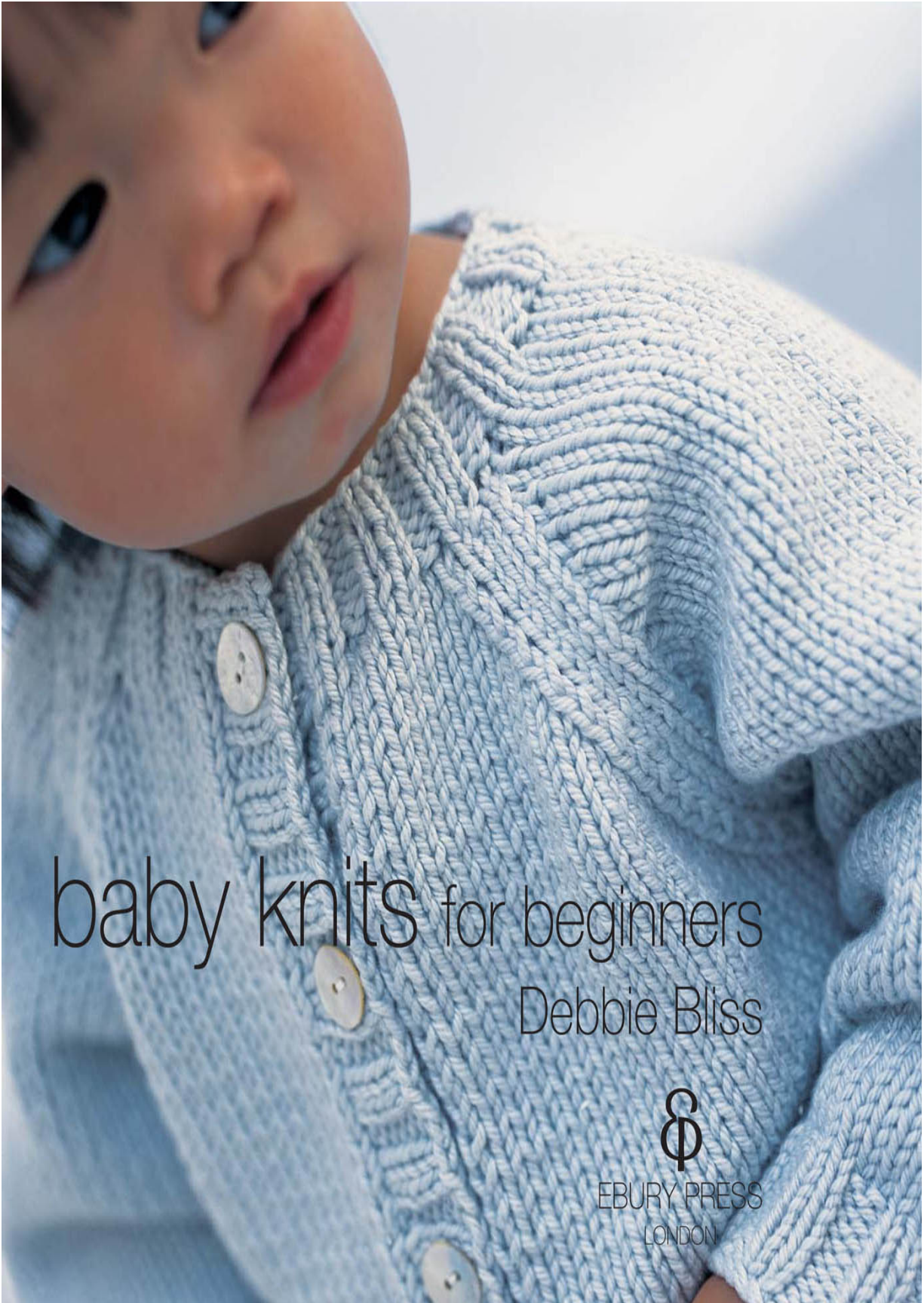
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About the Author

Debbie Bliss is the foremost knitwear designer for children. With a string of bestselling titles to her name, she regularly tours the US, Canada and other countries, giving lectures and doing workshops and has her own Debbie Bliss branded yarn range which is sold worldwide. Debbie lives in London with her husband and two children. Her website is www.debbieblissonline.com.



baby knits for beginners

Debbie Bliss



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introduction

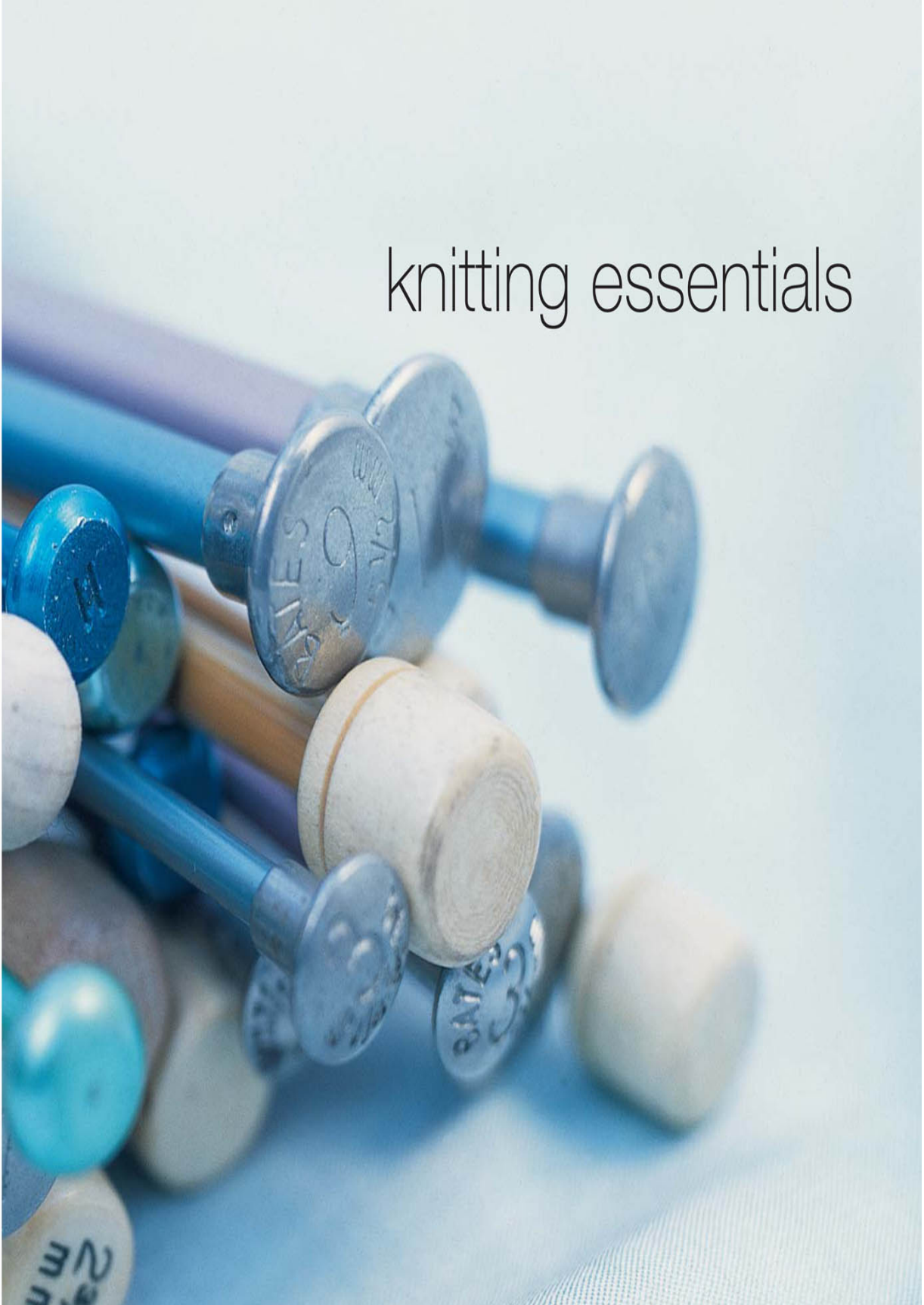
Many first-time knitters are attracted to the craft when they are looking for something special to make for a new baby. Surrounded as we are by mass-produced garments, creating a hand knit gives us the opportunity to invest into every stitch the love and care we feel for our own baby or one of a friend or family. Everything we knit is unique, however many other people have made the same pattern; every knit or purl we work reflects our individuality. Small garments also give the new knitter the opportunity to experience the excitement and satisfaction of completing a project more quickly than when tackling one for an adult. When learning anything new it is important to feel that the finished design is always in sight, especially when you are perhaps struggling for a time with a new technique.

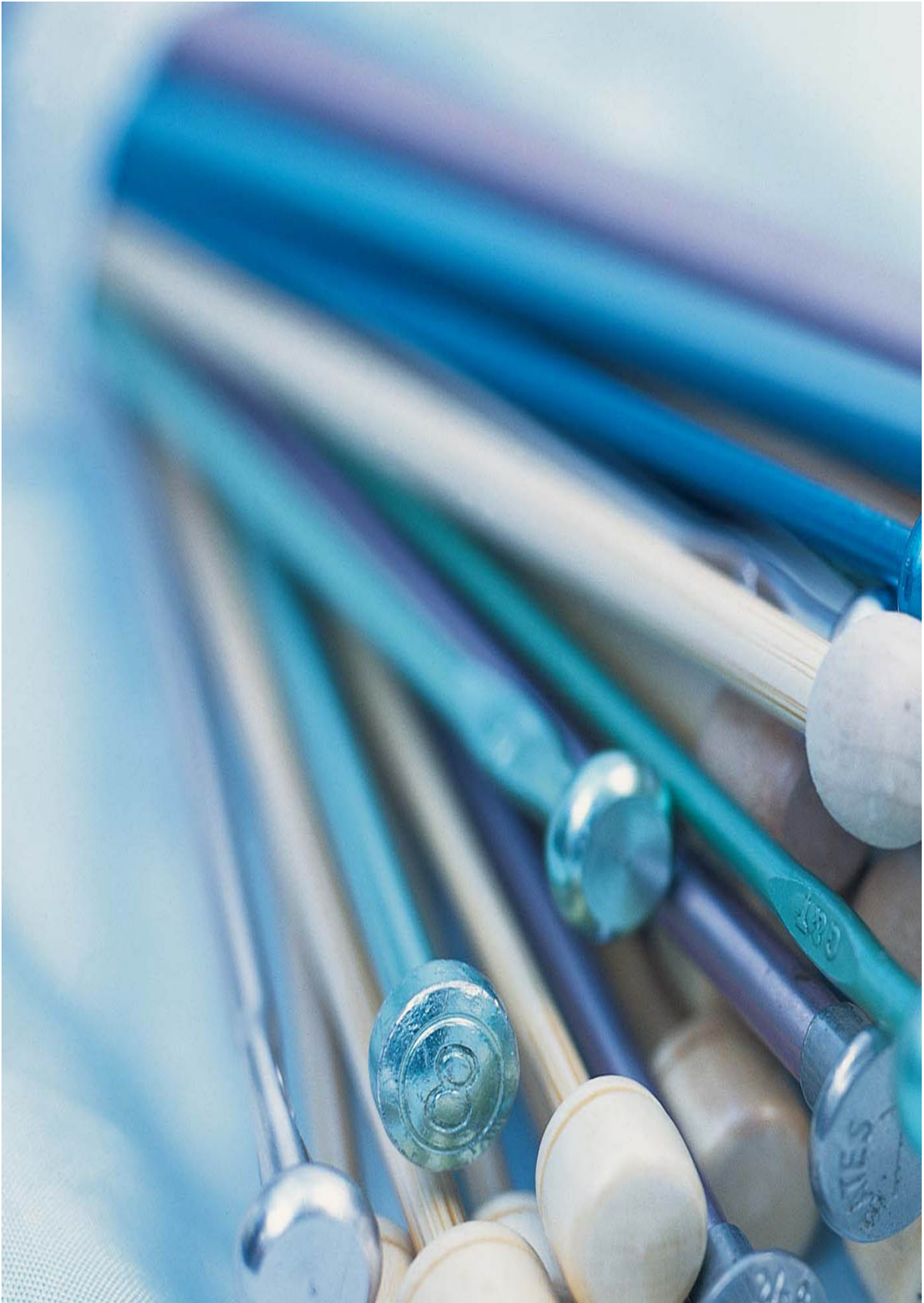
Each project here features a new technique or a new stage in developing your understanding of the craft, from the simple garter stitch scarf to the final design, a V-neck sweater with pockets and fully fashioned shapings. There are clear, easy-to-follow diagrams at the beginning of the book, which are then repeated when a particular technique is used in a pattern. The techniques have been repeated both to help the reader and to emphasise the stage that she/he has reached. As well as concentrating on the basics, I have also explained pattern instructions that I have found even experienced knitters sometimes find confusing - things such as turning rows or creating square set-in sleeves.

Although most of the designs are very simple, I have designed them to be attractive and stylish in their own right rather than just exercises in technique. I have kept the styles classic as one of the joys of knitting for babies is

that if the garments are well looked after they can be handed on to others and down to future generations. I have also used my own yarn ranges, which I feel are perfect for knitting for babies, with soft cottons, cashmere mixes and merino wool to wrap around or snuggle into. Child friendly, they are easy to wash and wear.

knitting essentials





Knitting Essentials

Yarns

Equipment

Reading Pattern Instructions

Care of Garments

yarns

Your knitting essentials will always begin with your yarn and needles. We are lucky to be around at a time when there is so much choice to be had in the variety of wonderful yarns that are available and a selection of needles to suit all types of knitting and preferences. Here is a guide to yarns in general and to the ones used in this book.

yarn fibres

Fibres are divided into two main categories, natural and synthetic. Natural fibres are then divided into animal fibres, such as wool, angora, cashmere and silk, and those from vegetable fibres, such as cotton, linen and hemp. Synthetic fibres are made from polyester, nylon and acrylic. Synthetic fibres tend to get a bad press and for good reason. Although they are cheaper and can be thrown into a washing machine, they don't have the same insulating properties and can produce limp, flat fabric, which will melt on contact with an iron. However, blended with natural yarns they can add durability and lightness.

yarn plies

Yarn is also made up from one or more strands of yarn called plies. Plied yarn comes from several plies of yarn twisted together. The thickness of a yarn comes not from the number of plies but the individual thickness of each ply. For instance, a 4-ply yarn can be finer than a single-ply heavy yarn. Yarns with a tight twist are usually strong and smooth and those with a looser twist are generally softer and less even. They can pull apart if over-handled and may not be suitable for sewing up your garment.

yarn weights

Yarns come in different weights or thicknesses and range from fine 2- or 3-ply yarns to bulky, chunky yarns. The thickness of the yarn determines how many stitches and rows there are to 2.5cm (1in) and is the basis on which all knitting patterns are created.

the most commonly used yarns

4-ply: a fine yarn knitted on 3¼mm (US 3) needles. The tension is usually 28 sts to 10cm (4in).

Lightweight yarn: this is a yarn that is slightly thicker than a 4-ply and is worked on the same-sized needles. It is between a 4-ply and a double knitting yarn. The tension is usually 25 sts to 10cm (4in).

Double knitting: often referred to as DK, this yarn is knitted on 4mm (US 6) needles. The tension is usually 22 sts to 10cm (4in).

Aran weight: slightly thicker than a DK and traditionally used in Aran or fisherman sweaters, aran is knitted on 4½mm (US 7) or 5mm (US 8) needles. The tension is usually 18 sts to 10cm (4in).

Chunky: knitted on 6½mm (US 10) needles, the tension is usually 14 sts to 10cm (4in).

yarn descriptions

You may come across these yarn terms when choosing yarn.

Wool: wool spun from the fleece of sheep is the yarn that is the most commonly associated with knitting. It has many great qualities as it is durable, elastic and warm in the winter. Merino wool is from the oldest breed of sheep and is considered the finest wool yarn. Lamb's wool comes from a lamb's first shearing and pure new wool is used to

describe wool that is made straight from the fleece and is not recycled.

Cotton: cotton is made from a natural plant fibre. It is an ideal all-seasons yarn as it is warm in the winter and cool in the summer. It also shows up stitch detail well, which makes it ideal when you have subtle stitch patterns such as moss stitch, particularly where it is used as detailing. Generally it does not have the elasticity of wool.

Cotton and wool: using a yarn that is a combination of cotton and wool is particularly good for children's wear because the wool fibres give it elasticity while the cotton content is perfect for children who find wool irritating against the skin.

Cashmere: cashmere is made from the under hair of a particular Asian goat. It is associated with the ultimate in luxury and is unbelievably soft to the touch. If combined with merino and microfibre, as in my cashmerino range, it is a perfect yarn for babies.

Smooth yarns: these tend to be the yarns with the tighter twist. They are sometimes also referred to as classic yarns. The smooth surface makes them perfect for showing up stitches, which is particularly important with subtle stitch patterns or cables.

Fancy or novelty yarns: these yarns tend to be part of a fashion trend for a particular season. They are often textured, such as the curly looking bouclé, or may be a shiny ribbon yarn. They do not always have a very long shelf life so knit it while you can, or if it is for a project that you are going to put on the back burner, make sure you have enough yarn!

Blends: yarns made from a mix of fibres, such as wool/cotton, cotton/silk. They can often combine the best of both worlds, for instance the elasticity of wool with the coolness of cotton.

Marls: yarns of two or more plies where the plies are different colours.

Tweeds: yarns with a background shade contrasting with flecks of different colours.

Random or variegated yarns: these have been dyed with different shades along the length of the yarn. They can be a good way of achieving colour effects without having to change yarn and colours.

Felted yarns: these have been treated so that when knitted they give the soft and fuzzy appearance of felted fabric.

Heathers: yarns that combine grey fleece yarn with dyed yarns giving a soft, muted look.

Debbie Bliss yarns

The following are descriptions of my yarns and a guide to their weights and types. All the yarns used in the book are machine washable.

Debbie Bliss merino aran: a 100% merino wool in an aran or fisherman weight. Approximately 78m/50g ball.

Debbie Bliss wool/cotton: a 50% merino wool, 50% cotton lightweight yarn blend that is between a 4-ply and a double knitting weight. Approximately 107m/50g ball.

Debbie Bliss cotton double knitting: a 100% cotton in a double knitting weight. Approximately 84m/50g ball.

Debbie Bliss cashmerino aran: a 55% merino wool, 33% microfibre, 12% cashmere yarn in an aran or fisherman weight. Approximately 90m/50g ball.

Debbie Bliss baby cashmerino: a 55% merino wool, 33% microfibre, 12% cashmere lightweight yarn between a 4-ply and a double knitting weight. Approximately 125m/50g ball.

buying yarn

Always try to buy the yarn specified in the pattern. The designer will have created the design with that yarn in

mind and a substitute may produce a garment that is different from the one that you had wanted to make. For instance, the design may rely for its appeal on a subtle stitch pattern, which is lost when using a yarn of inferior quality. Or by replacing a natural yarn such as cotton with a synthetic fibre you may end up with a limp fabric and the freshness and crispness of the original fabric lost. No manufacturer will accept responsibility for problems you may have with the sizing of a pattern if a different yarn has been used.

If you do decide to substitute a yarn, buy one that is the same weight and, where possible, the same fibre content. It is essential to use a yarn that has the same tension or your measurements will be different from the original design. The garment will have been designed to specific proportions and a difference in tension may mean the boxy sweater you fell in love with has become a skinny tunic.

You will also need to check meterage or yardage. The fibre content and make up of the yarn determine how much yarn you get for the weight. In other words, two 50g balls may have different lengths of yarn, so you may need to buy more or less yarn than that quoted in the pattern.

By checking the ball band on the yarn you will have nearly all the information you need before you start your project.

the ball band

Yarn weight: the company's name and brand name will tell you whether you have the right yarn for the design. There may be different weights of yarn within the same named range so make sure you haven't picked up, for instance, the double knitting quality of the range when you needed the aran weight. The tension and needles quoted on the band

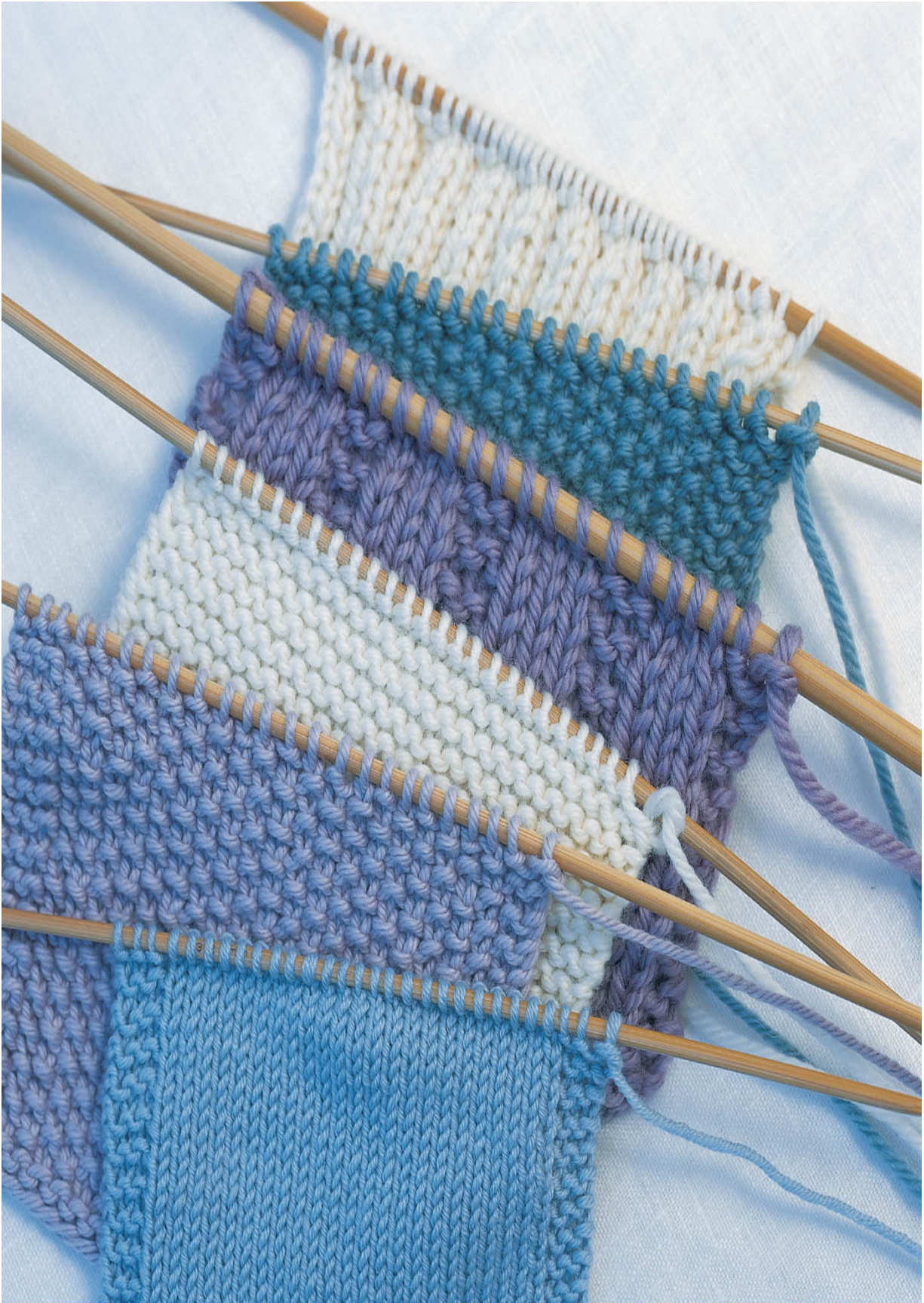
will also help you here. A standard double knitting weight is usually 22 sts to 10cm (4in) and knitted on 4mm (US 6) needles. An aran weight is usually 18 sts and knitted on 4½mm (US 7) needles.

The metreage or yardage: the length will inform you as to whether you need to buy fewer or more balls if you are substituting a yarn. The weight will tell you in grams or ounces the weight of the ball. This is also important to check if you are not using the yarn quoted. It is all too easy to buy eight 50g balls and then on rereading the pattern realise the original yarn was in 100g balls and you should have bought double the amount.

Fibre content: this will tell you, for example, whether the yarn is cotton, wool, acrylic or a blend, and care instructions will let you know whether the finished garment should be hand-washed, machine-washed or dry-cleaned.

Dye lot number: check this because yarns are dyed in batches or lots, which can sometimes vary considerably. Your retailer may not have the same dye lot later so try to buy all your yarn for your project at the same time. If you know that sometimes you use more yarn than that quoted in the pattern, buy more yarn initially. If it is not possible to buy all the yarn you need with the same dye lot, work the borders such as cuffs, ribs or collar in the odd one as it is less likely to show.





equipment

When you are ready to learn to knit you will need, first and foremost, yarn, knitting needles and scissors.

knitting needles

Knitting needles come in a variety of materials, sizes, styles and prices. As you progress you will begin to use the type of needles that suit you best.

Knitting needles have been around for a very long time and have been made in a variety of materials from ivory to whalebone. Since they were first mass produced in steel they have been made in wood, aluminium, plastic and more. For beginners I would recommend bamboo needles as they have a silky finish, which lets the stitches glide across the needle and are good for clammy hands, one of the disadvantages of the new, nervous knitter!

There are three types of needle: straight, circular and double pointed. Straight knitting needles are sold in pairs and come in three lengths. You will need longer needles for work that is wider or if you need to pick up a lot of stitches – for instance, down the front edges of a jacket. A pattern should tell you if you need to use longer needles. Circular and double pointed needles are usually used for circular knitting when there is no seam.

A needle's size is determined by its diameter; the smaller the needle, the smaller the size of the stitch, and vice versa. Finer yarns are worked on smaller needles and bulkier yarns on larger ones. If you are not able to achieve the tension or number of stitches and rows to 2.5cm (1 in) that the pattern states then you will need to change your