

MAKING THE MOST OF THE GARTER BAR

Now that we have the GB9 Garter Bar for the chunky (9mm) machines (as well as the 200 needle bar for the standard gauge machines), there are twice as many reasons to learn how useful a garter bar can be, and with 9mm prongs, it has never been easier!

The GB9 is made in two 55 prong sections that can be coupled together in the center to accommodate all 110 needles on a chunky bed. Also, it comes with two (55) needle stopper sections. The needle stoppers stabilize the needles and actually help straighten them out so that the garter bar is easier to handle. Beginners will find the needle stoppers make all the difference between success and frustration, although experienced garter bar users often do without.

The garter bar has a raised ridge on one side. Think of this as the right side and get in the habit of using the garter bar with this side facing you. Most of the time it won't matter, but it is essential when you need to turn the work over for garter stitch. The basic instructions that come with the GB9 will get you started.

[1] Speed Ripping is great when you've knitted more rows than you need, or you discover a mistake several rows back. Use the needle stopper to lock the needles in holding position, making sure that the stitches stay in the hooks of the needles. Then, just pull the yarn straight to the side and rip out an entire row of stitches in one motion.

[2] Instead of lifting up the fabric (and catching it on the sinker posts) when you want to peek at the knit side, simply remove the fabric onto the garter bar, look it over, then return the stitches to their needles.

[3] If you want to attach a fancy trim, knitted cord, lace edging, etc. to the knit side of the fabric, remove all the stitches onto the garter bar first. Place the edges of the trim in the hooks of the needles (with the wrong side facing you) and then return the stitches from the prongs of the garter bar to the hooks of the needles and continue knitting. The trim will be joined to the fabric with the next pass of the carriage (if there is a lot of bulk, bring the needles out to holding position and set the Russel Levers to II).

[4] Garter Stitch is knitted by turning the fabric over after every row. This is explained in the directions that come with the GB9. It takes two complete turns to produce one garter ridge.

[5] Double Garter Stitch is twice as fast and easier to do than Garter Stitch because the work is turned after every two rows. It forms a wider ridge that provides a nice accent on yokes or dividing texture for stripes and pattern areas, etc.

[6] One row of Garter Stitch (knit/turn twice) provides a sharp crease for hems and sideways knitted pleats. Because Garter Stitch tends to stretch more easily than stockinette, reduce the stitch size by about two full numbers to knit these turning rows, or the hem will flare and lose its shape. Also, because chunky hems tend to be very thick, knit the inside of them on every other needle to reduce some of the bulk.

[7] Stockinette/Reverse Stockinette Stripes are knitted by turning the work over once every (for example) ten rows. You can also knit short row patters in stockinette/reverse stockinette. For example, use partial knitting to shape a triangle. When all the needles are in holding position, turn the fabric over (just once) and use partial knitting to return needles to working position.

[8] To increase stitches at the center or evenly throughout a row, remove all the stitches onto the garter bar; but do not turn the fabric over. As you replace the stitches onto the needles, skip a needle wherever you need to make an increase. When all of the stitches have been returned to the needles, fill the empty needles by picking up the purl bar from an adjacent stitch to prevent forming holes. Increasing evenly across a row is necessary when you want to knit a very full sleeve or bloused sweater. It is easiest to do after you have transferred the rib stitches to the main bed and knitted one row. If you are working with a yarn that never seems to knit a tight enough rib, try knitting the rib narrower than the body of the sweater, then increasing to the full width after the first row.

[9] The easiest decreases are made by removing all of the stitches onto the garter bar first and making the decreases as they are returned to the needles. Rather than tipping the garter bar to slip the stitches off of the prongs, use your index finger to nudge just a few stitches at a time. Replace only the first group of stitches, up to the position of the first decrease. Lift the garter bar slightly to

remove it from the needle, and shift it over one needle so that the next stitch that you nudge will be returned to a needle that already holds a stitch. All of the doubled stitches in the row will slant the same way. This is the easiest method for making yoke decreases in the plain rows between fair isle borders.

[10] The method described in the GB9 directions is used when it is important which way the decreases slant. For example, skirt darts, V-neck bands, cabled yokes: any time the decreases become part of the design. It can be a little trickier to manage, because you have to handle doubled (or tripled) stitches with the Garter Bar.

[11] Lace Patterns and rows of eyelets for picot hems can be knitted using either of the decrease methods.

[12] Use the Garter Bar instead of holding position to divide necklines. Remove the stitches for one side of the neckline onto the Garter Bar. Push them all the way back on the prongs and then hook the eyes of the prongs onto the sinker posts. Press down gently until the Garter Bar hangs down from the base of the sinker posts so that the carriage can safely pass over it.

[13] Use the Garter Bar instead of scrap knitting to remove shoulder stitches from the machine. You can replace the two sets of stitches on the needles so that the right sides are facing and then bind them off together in a smooth seam. You can also stack stitches on the prongs of the Garter Bar. For example, if you want to knit a dozen Christmas ornaments that all need to be scrapped off and returned to the machine later, knit each one to the point where it would be scrapped off, but remove it onto the Garter Bar instead. Each one can be removed right on top of the previous one and you can return them to the machine later one, one at a time.

[14] The Garter Bar can transfer 55 stitches from the ribber to the main bed all at once! Remove the ribber stitches onto one section of the garter bar, with the ridge side facing up. Set the bar down flat on top of the main bed needles so that the straight edge of the garter bar is against the "step" in the main bed and the prongs are between the sinker posts, pointing toward you. It will be fairly secure and you'll only need one hand to steady it. Hold the second section of the garter bar under the first so that its prongs point toward the main bed and can be inserted in the same stitches. When the stitches have been caught by both sets of prongs (pointing in opposite directions),

hold each garter bar with one hand and gently pull away the first. The stitches will remain on the second section. Hook the prongs onto the needles to deposit the stitches.

[15] Thread decorative yarns or ribbons through the eyes of the garter bar for vertical weaving or embroidery knitting. You'll be able to handle many weaving yarns in one quick motion because the garter bar keeps them perfectly spaced. Bring the needles out to holding position and lift the garter bar up and then down to catch the yarn over the extended needle shafts, with the Russel Levers on II, knit two or more rows, and repeat. You can travel vertically or to the left or right to create texture on the purl side of the fabric.

[16] In order to cross cables with the garter bar, you must have an empty needle at each edge of the cable needles, followed by at least two needles that will not be used to cross cables. A typical needle set up would look like this:

11.1111.11.1111.1111.11.1111.11

The (.) indicates an empty needle. The pairs of needles will just knit plain stitches and the groups of four needles will be used to cross cables.

Begin by placing the empty needles in working position so that they will cast on; then knit 4 rows. Drop the stitches from the empty(.) needles to create extra ease and then return the empty needles to working position again. Remove all the stitches onto the garter bar. Place the first pair of stitches on the left back onto their needles.

* Now, lift and shift the garter bar two needles to the right. Nudge the next two stitches onto the needles. Lift and shift the garter bar four needles to the left and nudge the next two stitches onto the needles. Shift the garter bar two needles to the right (skipping one empty needle) to nudge the next two stitches onto the needles. these are the two plain, non-cable stitches. **

Repeat from * to ** until all the cables have been crossed and all the stitches are replaced on the machine.