Summary of the Stash Presentation – March 2023

Stash – whatever works for you as far as size and composition is concerned. Stash as much or as little as you’re comfortable with and need for the knitting that you do and the way that you do it, but stash the weights, amounts, colors, and fibers that you use on a regular basis. Buy everything else as you need it.

Care – keep your stash protected from insects, damp, dust, and direct sunlight. Zip-Lock bags (freezer strength) and plastic bins are a common choice. Try to keep it at normal room temperature, if possible. Look everything over from time to time, and intervene promptly if you find trouble.

Organization – Sort and store your stash in the way you’ll look for and use it, whatever that is for you. It can be by yarn weight, fiber, color, manufacturer – your call. Keeping a list, whether in a notebook, index cards, or on Ravelry can be helpful, especially for a large stash. The more information you record, the easier it will be to see what you have when you’re planning a project, and determine more quickly whether you’ll need to shop for more. A little more work up front can save a lot of time and money in the long run.

Use – There are several kinds of stash, and they can be used a bit differently.

1. Project quantities already matched to a pattern, ready to cast on
2. Probable project quantities with no pattern found; possibly not the correct amount for the pattern you end up with
3. Random pretty skeins
4. Yarns you didn’t choose for yourself – gifts, prizes
5. Advents and mini-skeins
6. Leftovers/scraps
7. If you spin - handspun
8. Don’t do anything with this category except cast on
9. It’s most economical to hold these lots intact, and not break into them until you’ve figured out how you want to use them. But it’s your yarn – you get to do that if you want.
10. (and 2, really) - Lists are your friends, again. Decide whether you’re starting with the yarn or the project, and search accordingly. If you’ve made a list of the yarns you’re most interested in using, you can search whatever pattern source you use for those yarns – say, 1600 yards of worsted weight wool blend in grey, or 450 yards of fingering weight in bright blue merino. If you’re using Ravelry, you can save a search, or set up a favorites bundle so you don’t lose track of what you find. If you don’t use Ravelry, make lists in whatever format works for you. You can also search Ravelry for projects that have been made in the yarn you’re considering.

 If you’re starting with the pattern – say, you’ve found a shawl you want to make that uses two skeins with high contrast – you can go through whatever stash organizing tool you’re using, or actually toss the stash, to see if you already have such a set of skeins, or if you have one that you can buy something to go with. Pull the possible yarns, if you have more than one choice, and see which you’re happiest with. You can leave them out and take a look every time you go past for a few days, if you’re not sure.

If you keep your list/s to hand, you can add patterns that catch your eye when you run across them, and go looking for the yarn when you have the time later. Ravelry has notes fields in both your queue and your stash, so you can note possibilities there as you run across them.

You might start a list/bundle with, say, two-color shawls you like, or single-skein projects for that one random pretty skein you couldn’t resist. It’s something you can check first when you have a yarn you want to use.

1. No one says you have to keep everything you have acquired. Don’t hesitate to divest yarns that don’t suit you and aren’t worth your time, or that are in a weight you no longer have any interest in working with (although finer yarns can be held together, if fineness is the problem). Your knitting time is more precious than any particular yarn – don’t force yourself to use it up just because it’s there. This applies to your whole stash, not just the yarns you didn’t choose yourself. Once you’ve decided to keep them, the approach above is helpful.
2. There are many, many patterns specifically written for advents and mini-skeins. Check the bundle in the RKG group on Ravelry, or do your own search to find some that suit you.
3. If you have more than a part ball leftover from a project, you may want to use it as in category 3, and look for a pattern that will use most of it as a single yarn.

I generally make sure my part skeins are neatly wound, and I label them with string tags that record the brand and name of the yarn, the fiber composition, the weight remaining, and a calculated yardage from that weight. It makes it easier to see whether I have enough of a particular yarn to use. Some designers let you know the actual yardage used when more than one yarn/color is called for in a pattern.

Part balls can be combined in colorwork. You can either look for a scrappy pattern, or use a standard pattern, and just combine the yarns in a way that pleases you. Some techniques are

1. Colorblocking
2. Alternating rows
3. Alternating rows with a single contrast color
4. As C, but use slip stitches to add interest
5. Fade
6. Carry along another strand

You can weigh your leftovers to see whether you have enough for a particular project. Stephen West recommends allowing 20% over to make sure you don’t run out.

You may want to combine different weights of yarn in a single project, but be prepared to rip if you don’t like the effect. I wouldn’t go more than one step – worsted and aran, say, or DK and worsted – but I’m conservative. You can also hold two or more strands together throughout, or just to match weights. Generally, two strands of fingering weight will be about a DK weight, and three strands will be about a worsted weight. If you’re doing that with scraps and leftovers, as one yarn runs out, add in another.

I can’t recommend Stephen West’s Weavin’ Stephen technique for knitting in ends highly enough. You can see it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fz292NAjH2M.

You can make your own balls of yarn by joining scraps. I strongly prefer Russian Joins (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWrh8VmTJug) to the frequently recommended Magic Ball technique, but I have little faith in knots, especially when they’re clipped close. You can make them in any weight, but I’d keep them to a single weight per ball. You make the colors random, or sort and shade them as it suits you. You can make anything you like with them, if you’re comfortable with the way they colors change. You can use sock yarns and just knit plain vanilla socks in utterly random combinations. You could also carefully divide leftover sock yarns with a scale, and get matching random socks.

If you’re working with handspun, or you have a fixed amount of a favorite yarn, look for patterns that have flexible yarn requirements – the kind that will let you knit until your yarn is gone.

Disposition – the last question is how to dispose of your stash, whether just to reduce its size, or to eliminate it entirely, for whatever reasons. The only wrong reason to destash is because someone who doesn’t live with you thinks you have too much yarn. Go through your stash and evaluate each lot. Do you still want that weight, color, fiber? You can sell (Ravelry’s destash feature can work, but it may take time), donate, gift to friends, donate to Community Knitting, the Yarn Auction, or an organization.