

Ladder of Life Toe-Up Socks



This is a toe-up sock pattern to fit my husband's size 12 foot. His feet are 11.5" from heel to toe, 9.5" around at the ball of the foot, and 13.5" around at the widest point (from the heel to the center front of the ankle and back).

Materials: enough fingering weight yarn for one pair of socks (I used one skein of Trekking XXL colorway 71 which was 459 yards and I needed ALL of it); #1 (2.5mm) US needles. I used double-pointed needles and will write the pattern for them, but of course you could use circular needles.

Gauge: 8.5 stitches per inch over stockinette.

Toe: I used [Judy's Magic Cast-On](#), putting 12 "stitches" on each of the two needles (24 total). If you have a different cast-on preference, that's fine too. After casting on, add a 3rd needle, taking 6 stitches from needle 2 (12:6:6). To do the toe increase:

R1:

needle 1: K1, M1, K until one stitch is left on the needle, M1, K1
needle 2: K1, M1, K to the end
needle 3: K until one stitch is left on the needle, M1, K1

R2: K around

I used a "leaning left increase" for the first M1 and a "leaning right increase" for the second M1. (There's [a video](#) demonstrating these at Cat Bordhi's site which I found very useful.)

I repeated these two rounds until I had 68 stitches on the needles (34 rounds added after cast-on). I then added two more stitches by knitting needle 1 of R1 one more time and then knitting straight across needles 2 and 3. To finish the toe, I did one final round of straight K.

Foot: There should now be 36 stitches on needle 1, and 17 stitches on each of needles 2 and 3. Redistribute as follows: move the last stitch of needle 1 to needle 2 (35:18:17). Add a new needle between 1 and 2, taking 17 stitches from the end of needle 1 (18:17:18:17). Needles 1 and 2 will be the top of the foot; needles 3 and 4 will be the bottom.

Begin knitting the foot using the Ladder of Life Stitch pattern on needles 1 and 2 and knitting straight across needles 3 and 4.

Ladder of Life Stitch Pattern:

R1: * [P1, K1, P1, K1, P1] P5 * end with [P1, K1, P1, K1, P1]

R2 - R6: * [P1, K1, P1, K1, P1] K5 * end with [P1, K1, P1, K1, P1]

Knit until the sock is about 3" short of your desired foot length (I aimed for 10.5" total, so I knit until the sock was about 7.5" long).

Heel: I used the instructions for a large-size heel that I found in Wendy Johnson's pdf file [Fingering Weight Toe-Up Socks With Gusset and Slip-Stitch Heel](#). I started at the section entitled "Create the Gusset" and followed instructions for the largest size. As above, I used a leaning left increase for the first M1 and a leaning right increase for the second. (NOTE: stay in pattern when knitting needles 1 and 2!) I didn't move all the stitches on needles 3 and 4 to one needle as she advises, but other than that I followed all heel instructions as directed until I reached this point:

"Divide these 29 (33, 37) stitches over 2 needles and begin working in the round again."

If you combined the heel stitches onto one needle, then divide them again (19:18). You should be at the beginning of needle 3. Knit across needle 3. Knit across needle 4 until there is one stitch left. Slip this stitch to the beginning of needle 1 and begin knitting needle 1 with a P2TOG instead of a P1. Continue across needle 1 in pattern. Knit across needle 2 in pattern until there is one stitch left. Slip the first stitch from needle 3 to needle 2 and then P2TOG instead of the last P1. K across needles 3 and 4 (there should now be 35 stitches between them and 70 stitches total).

Leg: Now the Ladder of Life Pattern is worked across all 4 needles. I chose to start the pattern with R1, but it's not necessary. If you want to start with R1, then continue as for the foot (knitting in pattern on needles 1 and 2 and knitting straight across needles 3 and 4) until it's time to begin R1. Then begin knitting in pattern across all 4 needles. Continue until you reach the desired leg length, ending on R6. Bind off and weave in ends. I used EZ's sewn bind-off because it's very flexible, which is good for getting the sock over your heel. Instructions for it are available at the bottom of [this very useful page](#) at Knitty. The EZ bind-off looks a bit like a row of purls which fits in nicely with the stitch pattern!



Additional notes: I found the Ladder of Life pattern in Barbara Walker’s “Treasury of Knitting Patterns” (vol. 1), though she only has 3 stitches between ribs. It’s a traditional stitch pattern used in Aran knitting. Also, I discovered while these socks were on the needles that Ann Budd published a sock pattern in Interweave Knits using the Ladder of Life pattern as well. She offers the pdf for free [here](#). It’s top-down, in sizes for a woman’s 8 or 9 ½ foot. Check it out!

With all the references to the work of other experienced knitters out there, I hesitate to call this an “original”! Nevertheless, please do not publish this elsewhere or use it for commercial purposes without permission. Feel free to print it out for personal or charitable knitting if you wish. Katherine E. Fagan, March 2008.