
Make Upcycled T-Shirt Yarn with Faith Hale

Chapter 1 - Make Upcycled T-Shirt Yarn

Overview

(upbeat music) - Hi, I'm Faith Hale. I'm a staff artist here at Creativebug and I love nothing more than upcycling materials for a crafty purpose. T-shirt yarn totally fits the bill. It's pretty simple to make and it's really versatile to use. It's great for knitting, crochet, and macrame, and it can be made using a single t-shirt. I'll be showing two different methods, a really simple one using just a pair of scissors and one that's a little bit more complex but much faster using a rotary cutter and a cutting mat. If you're like me and you hate throwing anything away, hang onto your old t-shirts and use them to make yarn.

Materials

- All you really need is a T-shirt and a pair of scissors. But if you wanna do a little bit of a faster version you'll need a cutting mat, a rotary cutter and a quilting ruler. And you'll also need a measuring tape to measure how long your yarn is. I get most of my T-shirts from thrift shops and you'll find the best value at places like the Goodwill Bins, where you can buy it by the pound or if you have like a basket day where you fill a basket for a certain amount of money. I find them for as little as four for a dollar but that's kind of on the inexpensive side. I also try to make sure I find T-shirts that don't have side seams. For Gildan brand, they usually don't have side seams so the jersey is knit in one tube. This way we can get a nice uninterrupted spiral. You can use T-shirts that have side seams if you like. I would use that more for things like a crocheted rug, not so much for something if you're using the yarn as string or macrame. I don't advocate for cutting up brand new shirts but this is a great way to repurpose a shirt that's become stained and baggy and worn out and that's no longer wearable.

Basic T-shirt yarn

- We'll begin by deconstructing our T-shirt, cutting it off just at the underarms. And then we'll cut off the bottom hem. And then this whole piece will be cut in one big spiral. We're going to make sure that our cuts are about an inch wide, and to help you you can take a ruler and measure off where an inch falls on your thumb. So, from the end of my thumb to this knuckle is an inch. So, you'll see as I'm cutting if I line up the fabric to where that wrinkle is on my knuckle I know about where an inch will be. And there's nothing too tricky about this part, it just gets a little tedious to keep going around and around. You'll use your thumb to kind of inchworm this along. And once you get back to that initial point I'll just angle it slightly, and then our next round the transition will be a lot smoother. You can go ahead and just snip this off, smooth it out. It really won't affect us much later, but it might give us some peace of mind. Continue cutting around the spiral until you get all the way to the top. We don't have to cut too precisely. It doesn't really matter if there's a jagged edge or two. Once we curl it up you won't notice the edges at all. Any scissors that will cut fabric can be used. Sharper scissors are probably easier. (upbeat instrumental music) You'll get to a point where you're almost cutting it in half then it'll narrow down. Make sure you're just keeping it the same width that you've been cutting this whole time so you don't have these extra chunky pieces at the end. You can do a little less than an inch. You can do up to two inches, but as long as it's consistent that's really the most important thing. And there we go. I'm gonna cut off this last piece. I don't

think we're going to be able to use it. Keep this separate while you deconstruct the rest of your shirt, so we're going to cut off the sleeves and the collar. The yarn you make from these pieces will not be as smooth as the yarn you made from the body piece. However, it is still usable. So, if you were crocheting a rug or you didn't mind bits and pieces that were irregular this would be just fine. If you're doing something smoother you wanna stick with the body yarn. So, I'll come in on one of the collar sides, and we're going to spiral around the neckline. (upbeat instrumental music) And if you want this to be a totally zero-waste project you can square these off and use them as cleaning rags. They're great for cars or small bits of machinery. You can also use pieces like this for stuffing. I've made a great pouf for my house stuffing it with little scraps like this. You can also cut this up into tiny bits. If it's 100% cotton it is biodegradable so you can compost it. And the sleeves are kind of fussy. They tend to rip at this seam when you pull the fabric taut to make the yarn. So, it's not ideal, but I have worked with it. So, here's how we'd go about cutting the sleeve. It'll get you a yard or two. Make sure if you still have the seam attached you're cutting off the seam as well. And this you can kind of spiral in the same way. So, instead of the yarn piece being on our left-hand side it's on the right-hand side. I could have turned the sleeve inside out to be consistent. Again, these are the little bits that can be shredded and buried or tossed. You'd repeat the same process with the other sleeve. And then to make your yarn you'll work with each piece a little bit differently. This is really the part where it turns from fabric strips into yarn. You'll take it in your two hands. You can see it's already starting to curl, and you pull it tightly. And there you have your yarn or string. So, it's totally different than before you stretch it. Go ahead through the whole thing and pull all of it out. This will be really easy with the body pieces, and I just gather it up in my one hand as I'm going but you can just drop it next to you. I've also seen people do this by stepping on one end and pulling really tightly. But I'm sitting, so I'm not stepping on it. It is really satisfying to have it coil all up. And when you get to the end you have this fabulous hank of yarn. Before I ball it up I like to measure it. The best way to measure it is against the table. You can either measure at a full yard or a half a yard. I'm gonna do half a yard. Because a yard is 36 inches a half a yard is 18 inches, so I'm just marking it on the table with washi tape. And I'm just going to measure it out half a yard at a time, counting as I go. (upbeat instrumental music) So, we had 34 half yards, which means we have 17 yards of yarn just from this one body of the T-shirt. To ball it up take one end in your hand and wrap it around your fingers about 10 times, just your three middle fingers, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10. Slip it off, and we're gonna wrap it around here about 20 times. We're gonna turn it 90 degrees, kind of squash this out, and we'll wrap it five to 10 times and rotate it. And at this point you can really just wrap it willy-nilly, continuously turning the ball as you go. Here we have a fabulous ball of yarn. Now, if we're using those pesky pieces we pulled earlier from the neckline and the sleeve, you're probably wondering why I'm denigrating these pieces of yarn, you'll see in a second. So, the sleeve yarn, when we pull the same way, it'll curl up, but occasionally at that seam it'll break. So, if you really are committed to using this yarn, which you're more than welcome to, make sure you're pinching that seam in your hand when you pull it so that it doesn't pull out. But this does give you an additional about two yards of yarn. And same thing for the neckline. These won't break as easily as the seams did under the arms, but because we're using different pieces of the jersey, so when we're doing it in a spiral we're only using horizontal cuts. But because we're circling around the neck we're using horizontal and vertical cuts of the jersey, so you'll see it just doesn't tube up in the same way. Like this isn't going to curl because it's a vertical orientation of the jersey. That's not such a problem if you're crocheting it. But it's probably gonna look weird if you are braiding it or using it for macrame. Kind of funky yarn as opposed to our beautiful sleek yarn.

And then you ball this up in exactly the same way. It's easy as that, it's ready to use.

Super fast T-shirt yarn

- If using scissors to make T-shirt yarn gave your hands cramps, this version is going to be much easier. You'll need your cutting mat, a sharp rotary cutter, and a quilting ruler. Lay your T-shirt out on your mat as flat as possible and line your seam up with one of the lines. Cut off this bottom altogether. And then we'll cut an inch at a time, stopping three inches shy of the top, and you can either line up your T-shirt with your ruler or with the mat. Just pick one and stick with it. (upbeat music) When you get up to the top, let's cut it off entirely, and you're welcome to cut this portion like you did with the scissors, but there's nothing special we can do with the rotary cutter. Open up your T-shirt. Ooh, that's fun. And get your hand in here, and we're going to cut from here all the way to the edge. So we're turning it from a loop into a strip. I'll be cutting off this point anyway, so if that part wasn't super precise, that's totally fine. Now we're going to line up our cuts all the way up, and it'll make it a nice big spiral. If you find this is still too much hand cutting, when you do the rotary cutter cuts, you can cut them a lot closer to the fold. I just find that sometimes if I get too much momentum, I just cut it right off the edge, so this is just me playing it safe. (upbeat music) It's easy to lose track of yourself at the very end here. Just remember that you'll have fewer cuts at the bottom than you do at the top, so you'll have one cut here and two cuts there. I can't tell you how many of these I've accidentally just cut off the loop at the very end. Just push all of your cuts to the side, leave your final loop here, and give yourself a little bit of space. And from here, of course, it's the exact same process. We gotta pull it nice and taut. That's so satisfying. (upbeat music) Now you have two balls of yarn, and I'm guessing a work surface covered with little fuzzies. A lint roller will work wonders.