

Contemporary Broomstick Lace by Jennifer Ammentorp

If you are looking to try something new, that is rather old, consider trying your hand at Contemporary Broomstick Lace (BSL). The Broomstick lace technique emerged in the late 18th century and was used to embellish festive dancing costumes in European cultures. The lace was created by alternating from crocheting a row of loops around a broomstick onto a row of crochet, followed by crocheting clusters of loops off the broomstick. The difference between crocheting and knitting is crochet completes a stitch before making the next stitch, while knitting is a whole row of open stitches. The loops in broomstick lace are considered open stitches, like in knitting.

My introduction was through an old Annie's Attic pattern book displaying a shawl on the cover made of BSL using a hairpin lace loom. It looked unique, and different from traditional BSL. With loom and yarn in hand, it was time to see what BSL was all about.

My initial interest was a bit fickle, I admit. Lots of loose ends to work in, and there was no serious plan for my project. It fell to the wayside for several years. Then, I found glossy lace weight silk yarn, the missing spark of inspiration for me. My first design was simple and monochrome, in a nice blue silk yarn. With this project came the lesson to count stitches of each completed row, before starting the next row. Counting twice is better!

Modern hairpin lace looms adjust loop sizes, eliminating the need for dowel rods of

different thicknesses or plastic knitting needles. As shown in Figure 1, an adjustable tool allows for several combinations to create a variety of patterns. Below is a white lace weight single ply cashmere with a mix of lace weight single and double ply silk, following a rainbow pattern of color. This project will have several pieces with a different color cashmere, all following an identical silk color scheme, and is expected to take at least 4 months to complete.



Figure 1 Contemporary BSL in progress

A wrap of twisted one-inch loops alternating with untwisted three-inch loops creates a dramatic pattern, as shown in the piece named "Blue Jean Baby." Pink cashmere, double ply multicolor silk, and single ply ecru lace weight yarns were the magic combination in that project.

Contemporary Broomstick Lace by Jennifer Ammentorp

The yarn is very luxurious and a real joy to work with, very sensuous. One must be careful when using these yarns because the silk will fray from brushing against coarse fibers.



Figure 2 Blue Jean Baby - Completed Fall 2023

There are purists in the world who believe broomstick lace must be made on a non-adjustable object like a dowel rod or large knitting needle, using fingering weight yarn. In truth the lace could be made using a yardstick, ruler, or flattened cardboard tube. My preference is something flat, versus round, for project stability and to devote more time to creating lace, rather than corralling yarn or tools. Using the size 35 knitting needle to create one-inch loops required greater effort, to keep the knitting needle from rolling and slipping while making loops, than using a flat tool or

method to which I am accustomed. Other names for BSL are Jiffy Crochet, or Peacock Eye Crochet. Figure 3 illustrates how the name Peacock Eye Crochet came about, as seen on the reverse side of the traditional BSL piece.



Figure 3 Traditional Broomstick Lace on Size 35 Knitting Needle

Contemporary BSL has greater variation by using an adjustable hairpin lace loom, to keep it interesting. My preferred loom is a Chetnanigan's custom anniversary loom. It is scaled in metric, and has a range of measurements, up to 6 inches (15cm). Older commercial looms made by Boye and Bates that were made in the USA, can make loops from ½ inch to 4 inches tall in ½ inch increments. While ordering supplies to teach classes with tools and materials provided, I discovered that Bates hairpin lace looms made outside the U.S. are adjustable, but with different measurements than ½ inch increments of those previously made in the U.S. (This is an important detail to ensure the proper quantities of yarn to make the pattern being

Contemporary Broomstick Lace by Jennifer Ammentorp

taught.) It takes approximately 65 hours to complete a 5 foot long 130 stitch wide wrap of alternating one- and three-inch loops, from winding the yarn to the finishing touches of tucking loose threads and sewing on a label. This is a good example of where the name “jiffy crochet” evolved. A similar sized piece of straight crochet would take approximately 175 hours to complete. BSL on average is much faster than crocheting a 5 foot long 130 stitch wide wrap. The multicolored wrap shown in Figure 4 took approximately 75 hours to complete, as it used 9 skeins of yarn, each taking 40 minutes to wind.



Figure 4 Contemporary BSL using both commercial and custom-made hairpin lace looms

As with any handmade piece, one should use the finest fiber available for the time investment to create a piece. My go-to fibers are hand painted silk, silk blends, and cashmere. Between the variations in hand painted skeins, combined with different loop length patterns, every piece is unique. After more than 34 finished pieces (and a growing demand for my wraps) using

various color schemes and loop patterns, I am finally on to something!

About the Author

Jennifer is an engineer by day and BSL designer in her free time. She and her husband live on a farm in Virginia, growing food and ingredients for home remedies. She has been designing and crocheting lace for over three decades, is a newcomer to IOLI and will attend the annual conference in Dallas. More information, BSL kits, and materials are available at www.theunusualfavor.com