

Chapter 180

DECREASES + INCREASES = LACE

There are lots of effects that can happen when we combine decreases and increases. And those effects aren't always what we think they will be, especially if we're trying to design them by using charts.

If we page through any knitting book devoted to lace, we'll find an astonishing variety of shapes and forms that can be created with careful positioning of decreases and yarnovers. Many of those effects are created by separating the yarnovers from their corresponding decreases with one or more stitches.

A full-blown treatment of lace created in knitting is way beyond the scope of this book. (Sorry.) But we can at least look at some of the basics.

Lace Diamonds

These projects are similar to the purl-diamond project, where the diamond motif was made with purl bumps. In these versions, yarnover holes form the diamonds.

The Two Lace Techniques

There are disagreements over the terms used for the two different ways that knitters can create lace, *lace knitting* and *knitted lace*. If we look into a variety of knitting books and on the Internet, we'll probably see both terms as well as arguments about which of these two names should be applied to which technique.

Let's just focus on the two techniques themselves, which might be more accurately named *easy lace* and *hard lace*.

Easy Lace: Lace Action on Only Half of the Rows

In the easier technique, we make yarnovers and decreases only on public-side rows. Private-side rows are worked even.

If we knit back on private-side rows, we're creating a lace fabric in garter stitch. If we purl back, we're creating lace in stockinette stitch. If we're working in the round, every other round is usually simply knit, which will create the lace fabric in stockinette.

But the key thing is that we do not work any yarnovers or decreases on half of the rows (or rounds).

Hard Lace: Lace Action on All Rows

In the more difficult technique, we will have to do yarnovers and decreases on the private-side rows as well as on the public-side rows (on all rounds if working circularly). That means we have to pay very close attention on **every** row/round.

If we're creating lace in garter stitch, then the decreases we use on private-side rows are K2tog and SSK/SKP. If we're creating lace in stockinette stitch in the round, then we use K2tog and SSK/SKP.

If we're creating lace in stockinette stitch worked flat, then we will have to do the purling equivalents of K2tog and SSK/SKP on the private-side rows so that, on the public side, the decreases lean in the proper direction.

As we learned in chapter 160, anywhere we do a K2tog on the public side, we do a P2tog on the private side. In the same way, anywhere we do an SSK/SKP on the public side, we do an SSP/SPP on the private side.

Easy Version: No Lace Action on Private-Side Rows

Typical instructions might be

Easy-Lace Diamond

CO 19.

Rows 1 to 7: K.

Row 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 18 (WS): K3, P13, K3.

Row 9 (RS): K8, K2tog, yo, K9.

Row 11: K7, K2tog, yo, K1, yo, SSK, K7.

Row 13: K6, K2tog, yo, K3, yo, SSK, K6.

Row 15: K5, K2tog, yo, K5, yo, SSK, K5.

Row 17: K6, SSK, yo, K3, yo, K2tog, K6.

Row 19: K7, SSK, yo, K1, yo, K2tog, K7.

Row 21: K8, SSK, yo, K9.

Rows 23 to 28: K.

BO.



Let's do a cursory examination of the instructions.

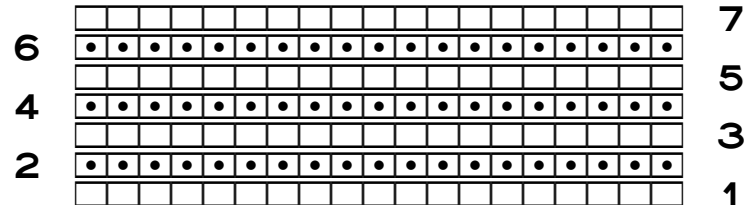
As with the purl-diamond project, it is difficult to tell exactly where the border stitches start and stop in the directions for rows nine through twenty-one. The first six rows and last six rows seem to be top and bottom borders in garter stitch. We can only hope the designer has three stitches of garter stitch for the side borders.

The "P13" on row eight must be where the center panel of stockinette starts, and row twenty-one is the last row with a yarnover, so row twenty-two (knitting patterns almost always have a private-side row after the last public-side row) is probably the last row of the center panel.

Let's check the design by charting it.

The Lower Border

Rows one through seven are easy; we've already learned how to chart garter stitch. Even though we knit every row, alternate rows have to show the purls that represent knit stitches made on the private side.

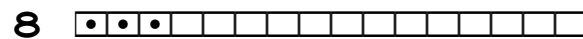


The Private-Side Motif Rows

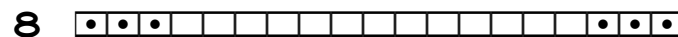
Row eight and the rest of the private-side motif rows start with three knits, which we must show on the chart as purls,



followed by a big chunk of purl stitches in the middle. On the chart, though, we add them as knit stitches, since the chart shows what the stitches look like on the public side.



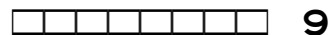
Then the private-side motif rows end with three more knits, which show as purls.



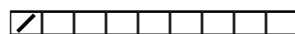
To make the complete project chart, we'll just add copies of row eight after each public-side motif row and fix the row numbers.

The Public-Side Motif Rows

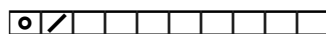
Row nine is where we start the diamond motif at its bottom point, which we make with a K2tog and a yarnover. So we work from right to left, starting with the eight knit stitches.



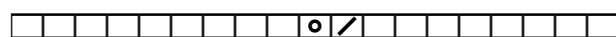
Remember that although a K2tog starts with two stitches, it winds up as a single stitch, so we'll use the typical convention of representing it with a symbol that's only one stitch wide. It's a right-slanting decrease, so we use the / key to type it.

 **9**

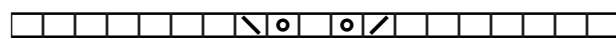
Then we do the yarnover, which is under the y key.

 **9**

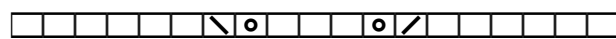
Since the yarnover makes up for the stitch lost in the K2tog, row nine remains nineteen stitches wide when we add the final nine knit stitches.

 **9**

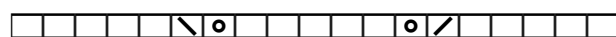
Row eleven has two decrease/yarnover pairs, and since each decrease has an increase, we still keep a total of nineteen stitches.

 **11**

Rows thirteen

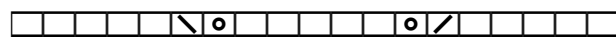
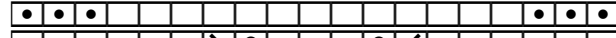

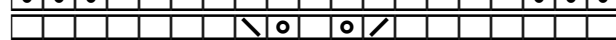
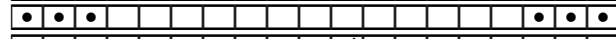
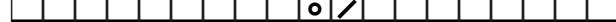

 **13**

and fifteen

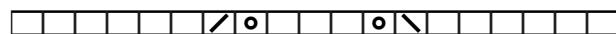
 **15**

are similar to row eleven; there are just more stitches between the decrease/yarnover pairs and fewer stitches at the beginning and end of the rows.

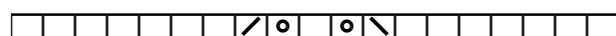
Let's put rows nine through fifteen together.

		15
14		
		13
12		
		11
10		
		9

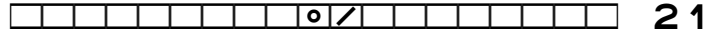
Row seventeen changes the pattern a bit, bringing the decrease/yarnover pairs closer together and switching which decrease is done where. Since we're bringing the yarnovers back toward each other, row fifteen must have been the middle row of the diamond motif.

 **17**

Row nineteen continues the new theme,

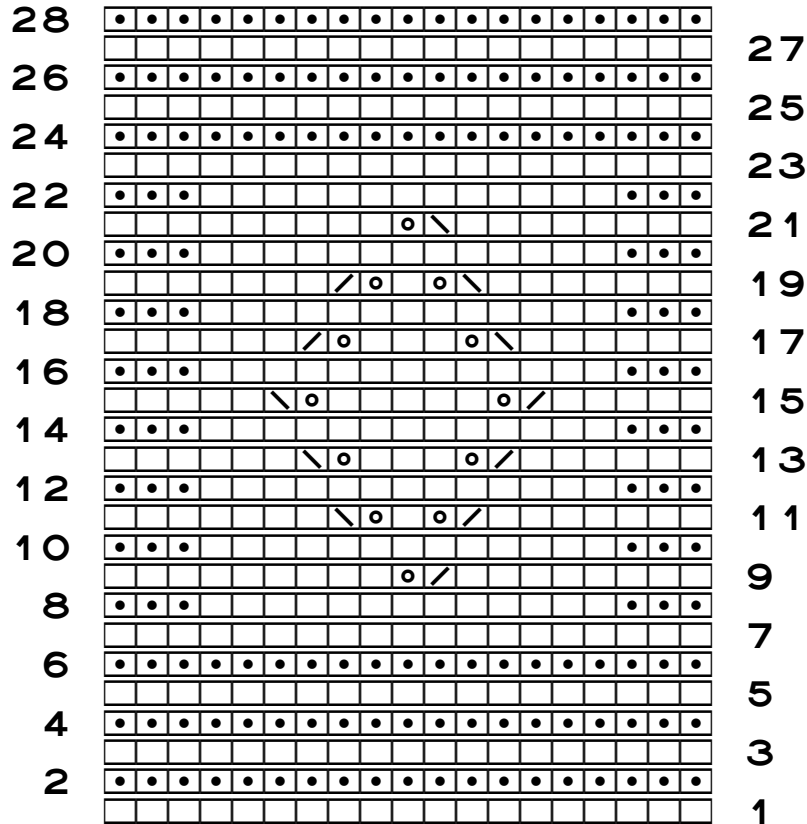
 **19**

and row twenty-one has only a single yarnover, which forms the top point of the diamond motif.



Easy-Lace Diamond Final Chart

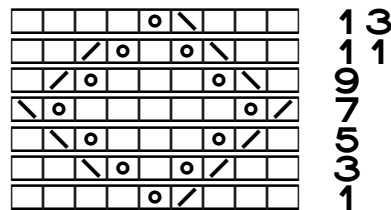
Putting all twenty-eight rows together gives this chart:



The chart clearly shows both the border stitches and the stitches that make up the lace diamond.

An Alternate Way to Chart the Easy-Lace Diamond

Since we are just purling back through the motif on the private-side rows, we could actually make this chart much more compact. If we eliminate all the rows and stitches for the borders, we really only need to show the stitches with the lace action.

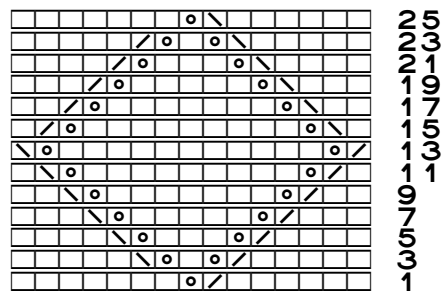


Then the instructions would simply specify that even-numbered rows are worked even within the motif (as purls if making stockinette flat, as knits if making garter stitch or working in the round) and that the pattern has a fourteen-row repeat (don't forget the private-side row that generally follows the last public-side motif row).

Leaving the borders off the chart allows us (or other knitters) to add whatever border we might want for each project that uses this motif.

Altering the Motif's Size

We can alter the size of the motif in exactly the same way as we did with the purl diamond, by adding rows and stitches to the motif area.



For “drawing” shapes with yarnovers, we can use the same procedure described at the end of chapter 130, substituting yarnovers for the purl stitches and keeping the number of stitches on each row the same by pairing a decrease with each yarnover.

Typing Up the Chart

Let's work with public-side row eleven.

Row 11: K7, K2tog, yo, K1, yo, SSK, K7.

We have two options for typing in public-side rows:

- ☺ read the written-out instruction line backwards, from the last group to the first group, or

- ☞ read the instructions in the normal way, but reposition the cursor to the left of each stitch group after we type it

Option 1: Read the Written-Out Instructions Backwards

For row eleven, the last instruction is to knit a group of seven, so we type

kkkkkkk

to start the chart line with what will actually be the last stitches we work.

The next “group,” as we read backwards, is a left-leaning SSK, so we type

Then, still reading backwards, we have a yarnover, so we type a lowercase

y

then we add a single knit stitch

k

and another yarnover.

y

We add a right-leaning K2tog with

/

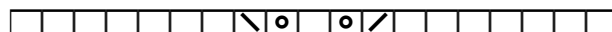
and we finish with seven knits.

kkkkkkk

So our complete row eleven as typed is

kkkkkkk\yky/kkkkkkk

This same line in the knitting font is



Option 2: Type a Group, Then Move the Cursor to the Left

Here's line eleven again.

Row 11: K7, K2tog, yo, K1, yo, SSK, K7.

Starting with the first group of the instruction line, we are supposed to knit seven, so we type the entire group at once

kkkkkkk

then move the cursor to the left of them all.

After the seven knit stitches, the next “group” is a K2tog, so with the cursor all the way to the left, we type a

/

to show the right-leaning decrease. We move the cursor to the left and type a lowercase

y

to add the yarnover. We move the cursor to the left, type a lowercase

k

move the cursor to the left, and add another yarnover with a lowercase

y

After we move the cursor to the left, we have an SSK, typed in with a

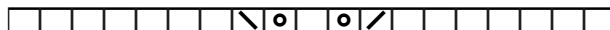
and we move the cursor to its left. Then, since we have a group of seven knit stitches, we can simply type them all at once

kkkkkkk

When we have finished we have

kkkkkkk\yky/kkkkkkk

which in the knitting font is again



Advantages of Easy Lace

Suppose we're making a project that uses this technique of decreases and yarnovers only on the public-side rows. We work a public-side row with lots of lace action, then simply knit or purl back, depending on whether the lace is in garter or stockinette stitch.

Fixing Errors Is Easier

As we work the next public-side row, there it is. We made some kind of mistake on the previous public-side row. A decrease and its yarnover are not in the right place.

Though there are knitters who would drop down only the stitches involved in the error, we are more conservative, so we're going to frog the entire public-side row with the error.

Picking up the private-row stitches, which will all be either knits or purls, after we frog the incorrect public-side row will be much easier than trying to retrieve yarnovers and the stitches that were decreased on the public-side row.¹

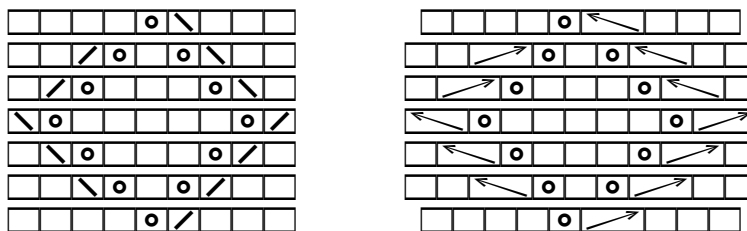
Half of the Rows Are Easy to Work

Of course, the other big advantage is that we can just cruise through the private-side rows, whether they're knitted or purled.

Two-Stitch-Wide Decrease Symbols Don't Work Well for Lace Charts

In chapter 160, we saw that we could use symbols that are two stitches wide to represent K2tog and SSK/SKP decreases for shaping mittens, sleeve caps, hats, and V necks.

That technique doesn't work well in lace, because it alters the relationships between stitches on adjacent rows. Here's the small chart with double-width decrease symbols substituted.



¹ Many thanks to my gifted knitting friend Rosemary for pointing out this advantage.

The Number of Stitches in Each Row Is Misleading

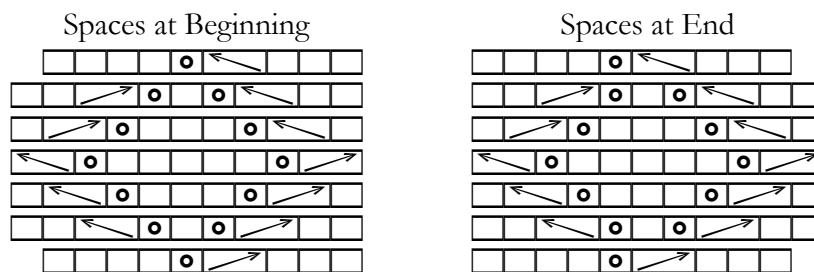
Note that the first and last lines of the pattern are shorter by the equivalent of one stitch, since there is only one decrease on those two rows.

The Relative Positions of the Stitches Are Misleading

This issue is related to the first. Since the number of stitches isn't quite right, then it's difficult to see the proper alignment between the stitches on adjacent rows.

What If We Add Spaces?

Putting the spaces at the beginning of the first and last rows does keep the yarnovers aligned, but it looks, incorrectly, like those pattern rows are one stitch shorter than the middle rows. Putting the spaces at the end of the first and last rows looks really bad.



But again, if this technique makes more sense to you, by all means use it. Just be aware that some of the advantages of using charts will be minimized this way.

Hard Lace: Lace Action on All Rows

If you looked closely at the photo of the typical easy-lace sampler, you might have noticed that it didn't seem, well, quite right.

That's because it isn't. I deliberately left some of it looking a bit messy, because trying to make it look perfectly symmetrical was an interesting exercise. If you're curious about all the details along the way, please check them out in appendix 525.

Because of all that experimentation, there are two swatches in this section, one with prominent decreases and one with minimized decreases. If you want to work the easy-lace diamond with either prominent or minimized decreases, then use the combinations of decreases and their positions relative to their yarnovers as shown in the next two charts.

Disadvantages of Hard Lace

The main disadvantages are obvious, because they're the opposite of the advantages of the easy technique:

- ☞ We have to pay strict attention on **every** row.
- ☞ If we need to fix an error, then ripping back, or even just dropping the involved stitches, will be much harder, as we have to make sure to retrieve all the yarnovers of the row before the one we're frogging. Even tinking can get tricky as we try to capture each yarnover.

Hard-Lace Diamond with Prominent Decreases

CO 25.

Rows 1 to 7: K.

Row 8 (WS): K3, P19, K3.

Row 9 (RS): K11, K2tog, yo, K12.

Row 10: K3, P7, SSP, yo, P1, yo, P2tog, P7, K3.

Row 11: K9, K2tog, yo, K3, yo, SSK, K9.

Row 12: K3, P5, SSP, yo, P5, yo, P2tog, P5, K3.

Row 13: K7, K2tog, yo, K7, yo, SSK, K7.

Row 14: K3, P3, SSP, yo, P9, yo, P2tog, P3, K3.

Row 15: K5, K2tog, yo, K11, yo, SSK, K5.

Row 16: K3, P4, yo, P2tog, P7, yo, SSP, yo, P4, K3.

Row 17: K8, yo, SSK, K5, K2tog, yo, K8.

Row 18: K3, P6, yo, P2tog, P3, SSP, yo, P6, K3.

Row 19: K10, yo, SSK, K1, K2tog, yo, K10.

Row 20: K3, P8, yo, P1, S2PP, yo, P8, K3.

Row 21: K11, *centered eyelet*, K11.

Row 22: K3, P9, P1B, P9, K3.

Rows 23 to 28: K.

BO.



Here are the chart and the symbol key:

Hard-Lace Diamond with Minimized Decreases

CO 25.

Rows 1 to 7: K.

Row 8 (WS): K3, P19, K3.

Row 9 (RS): K12, yo, K2tog, K11.

Row 10: K3, P7, P2tog, yo, P1, yo, SSP,
P7, K3.

Row 11: K9, SSK, yo, K3, yo, K2tog, K9.

Row 12: K3, P5, P2tog, yo, P5, yo, SSP,
yo, P5, K3.

Row 13: K7, SSK, yo, K7, yo, K2tog, K7.

Row 14: K3, P3, P2tog, yo, P9, yo, SSP, P3, K3.

Row 15: K5, SSK, yo, K11, yo, K2tog, K5.

Row 16: K3, P4, yo, SSP, P7, P2tog, yo, P4, K3.

Row 17: K7, K2tog, yo, K7, yo, SSK, K7.

Row 18: K3, P6, yo, SSP, P3, P2tog, yo, P6, K3.

Row 19: K10, yo, K2tog, K1, SSK, yo, K10.

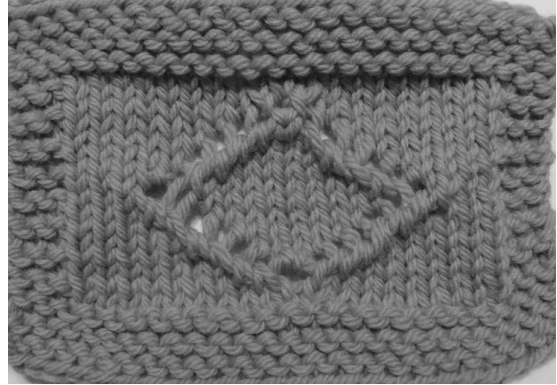
Row 20: K3, P8, yo, S2PP????, yo, P8, K3.

Row 21: K11, *centered eyelet*, K11.

Row 22: K3, P9, P1B, P9, K3.

Rows 23 to 28: K.

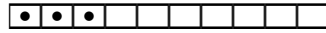
BO.

***The Chart with Minimized Decreases***

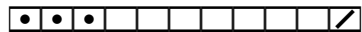
Here's the complete chart, which uses the same symbol key as for the prominent decreases:



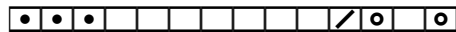
Then we have seven purls, which we show as public-side knits.



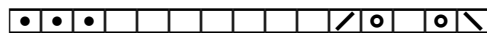
Now we come to the decrease and yarnover portion. Since we already know that a P2tog made on the private-side looks like a K2tog made on the public side, we have to use the right-slanting decrease symbol for the P2tog.



Then we add a yarnover, a private-side purl, and a second yarnover.



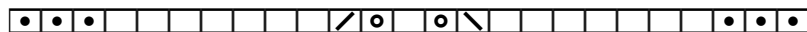
We have the other directional decrease next, which we'll have to work as an SSP (or SPP). Just like K2tog and P2tog go together, so do SSK and SSP (or SKP and SPP).



Then we finish up with P7



and K3 for the garter-stitch border.



We've Seen This Effect Before

In selecting decreases along diagonal lines of yarnovers, we see the exact same effect we saw in chapter 160 for shaping mitten fingertips.

If the decreases point at the diagonal line of yarnovers, the decreases will be much less apparent. If the decreases' slant runs parallel to the diagonal line of yarnovers, the decreases will be prominent.

Switching a Lace Chart to the Other Technique

The compact form of the easy-lace chart, which omits the private-side rows, looks exactly like a hard-lace chart.² If we look at the charts for hard lace, we could, for this particular mo-

² The specific decreases and where they're located with respect to their yarnovers are different than in the typical easy-lace chart because of the material in appendix 525.

tif, insert plain rows between each chart row, which would transform the project from hard lace to easy lace.

So if we have a lace pattern in one technique, then we **might** be able to switch it to the other technique by simply interpreting it the other way (it would be prudent to correct the row numbers, just so we don't get confused).

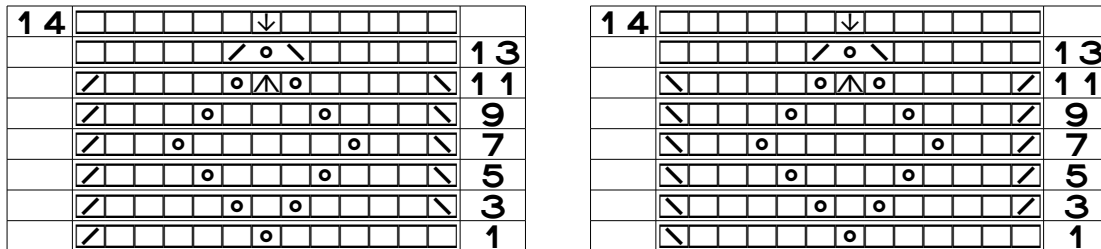
It all depends on exactly what the lace is supposed to be doing. If the lace forms a leaf or a flower, it's almost certainly has to be hard lace to get the full detail needed. In that case, switching it to easy lace by working the private-side rows plain would probably destroy the pattern.

For geometric shapes like the diamond, though, there's a good chance we could switch from hard to easy—or from easy to hard. How can we know for sure? Well, there we run into, yet again, the *s* word. The only thing we can do, really, is swatch and see what happens.

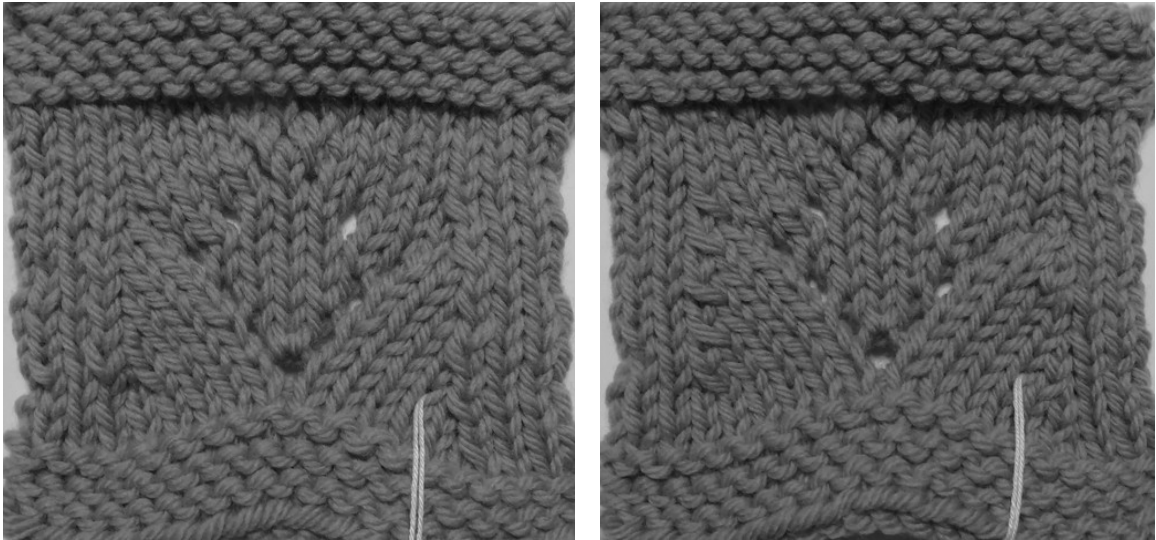
Other Decrease-Positioning Possibilities

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, lace's decreases don't have to be right next to the yarnovers. Separating the two means that the lean inherent in K2tog and SSK/SKP will slant the grain of the fabric quite obviously.

Let's look at the two possibilities, since we could make the decreases slant mirror-image in two ways.



Note that on both swatches, there is only one decrease on row one, since there is only one yarnover on that row. Neither swatch needs an edge decrease on row thirteen, since the centered eyelet makes three stitches from three stitches.



These two samples look nearly the same even though the decreases' positions are mirror-image. The main thing that's different is that the side borders of stockinette look one stitch wider on one sample than they do on the other, so here's another example of the chart not looking quite like the knitting.

Other Possibilities

These simple samples barely touch the possibilities of making lace with knitting. In addition to the diagonal lines shown in this chapter, we can add horizontal and vertical lines of yarnovers.

Countless motifs made with combinations of yarnovers and decreases have already been created, and countless more are waiting to be discovered.