

There is a large basket on a bench by our kitchen door. During the summer, any number of miscellaneous items may find a home there. When I emptied it this fall to supply it with winter goods, I found a cookie tin, several cloth bags that eventually migrate to the pickup to have handy when we go to a store, a water pistol, a pop bottle, and some baler twine. Now, though, it holds only its proper winter items—mittens, stocking caps, and scarves.

There is a red wool scarf my sister made for me, another “side-to-side” striped scarf with tiny felted balls scattered over it that I made myself, and the “temperature scarf” with color coded rows for each day of 2017, the hue depending on the morning temperature that day.

There are three stocking caps. One is plain red. One is my “February cap,” its stripes colored on the same idea as the 2017 scarf. I made this cap last February. The other stocking cap is my “November cap,” that I knitted this past fall. Instead of temperatures, this one is based on sky color at noon—blue for sunny, gray for rainy, gray/white for cloudy, and white for those days when snow was falling at midday.

But, mostly, the basket holds my mittens. I love my winter mittens, all for different reasons.

The mittens I wear most are homespun alpaca. I bought the wool at a fiber festival years ago. The wool was so pretty that I purchased two small bags, one a pale, subtle rose, the other a beige of the same unobtrusiveness. Neither made enough yarn for a pair of mittens. So, I made one mitten with a beige cuff and thumb, and the rest rose. The other was opposite—a rose cuff and thumb, and the main mitten in beige. I wear these most often because of all my mittens, they are the ones I would be least sad about losing, and losing mittens is not uncommon. We have all seen stray mittens here and there, probably permanently separated from their mates.

There is a pair of mittens I wear for “best.” These are red felt with artistically embroidered floral motifs. A friend made these mittens for me, and they are the prettiest I own—and probably the warmest.

My gray mittens get the most comments from others. I knit a pair of mittens of a coarse, gray homespun yarn. Then, using a hooked rug needle, I covered the backs of the mittens with curls of gray Gotland wool that was packing in a box from a friend in Sweden. Our old diplomatic corps friend was fascinated by these mittens, and if I’d had any more of that wool, I’d have made him a pair.

My “blue spruce” (the color on the dye packet I used) mittens are also homespun, but the yarn was not made on my spinning wheel. I made them from about all of the yarn I have ever spun on a hand spindle. I spun this yarn on airplanes, trains, buses, and in Runo’s mother’s kitchen in Sweden. And, after purchasing a set of needles there, I knit the mittens on the plane on the way home. There was a tiny piece of dark wool in the thumb, and it spoiled their looks, so I dyed them, using this blue/green dye. I call these my “mile-high mittens.”

The traditional black and white Norwegian mittens are also in the basket, and like the red felt pair, I am careful not to lose them. Our friends in Norway

gave them to me when we left after a visit in the 1990s. Someday, I am going to make another pair like them with homespun wool from our sheep, but that day has not yet arrived.

So, there is no reason to go out with bare hands during the cold season. All of my mittens fulfill their main purpose. They keep my hands warm, and also warm me with memories of friends and experiences over the years.