

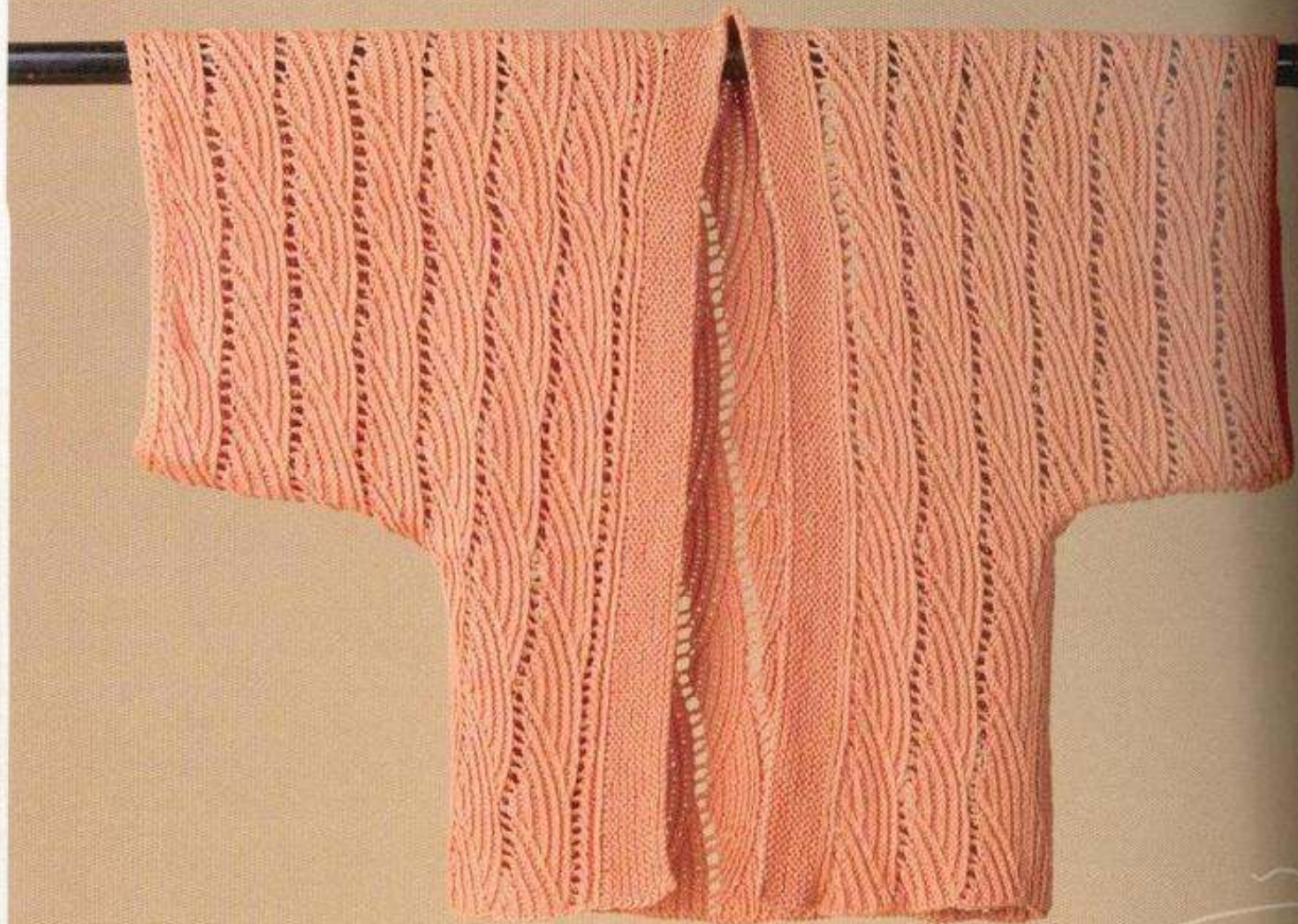
# KNIT KIMONO



**18 DESIGNS**  
with  
**Simple  
Shapes**

VICKI SQUARE

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INTERWEAVE PRESS

[interweave.com](http://interweave.com)

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**For Johnny, the love of my life**

# KNIT KIMONO



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I N T R O D U C T I O N



I have always been enchanted by the beauty and timelessness of the Japanese kimono. From casual to formal, the kimono shape has transcended time and for centuries has been a fashion cornerstone for peasantry and nobility alike. The classic rectangular, yet streamlined and elegant shape is recognized worldwide as an icon of Japanese life and culture.

As a history buff, I'm fascinated by how the kimono has lasted through the ages, yet remains contemporary. The craftsmanship and precision in detail is a reflection of the structure of their society, of the beauty of organization, and of the simplicity of function.

As a knitter, I'm drawn to the simple shape and construction of kimono. The rectangular pieces give me the opportunity to enjoy the peaceful meditation of knitting row after row without having to pause to think about shaping. Even the finishing involves just a few straightforward seams. If you've only knitted scarves, you can knit a kimono—think of it as a few straight scarves sewn together.

As a clothing designer, I can't help but marvel how so many simple geometric elements combine to create a garment that looks great on every imaginable body type—from short to tall, narrow to wide, and everything in between. With the right combination of yarn, stitch pattern, and gauge, kimono offers beautiful drape and fluidity of movement that's always in style.

As an artist, I'm intrigued by the way that the simple shape can become a canvas for color, pattern, and design. From just a touch of color at the edgings to a stitch or color pattern that covers the entire garment to artistic splashes of embroidery, the possibilities for design are endless.

Each kimono in this collection represents my knitted interpretation of a style or feature of traditional kimono. The styles and shapes of the garments run the gamut from short to long, rectangular sleeves to shaped, straight or overlapping front opening, with sleeves or without, casual to dressy. I've selected yarns and stitch patterns that drape and move as beautifully as their woven counterparts. The versatility of the kimono is showcased in this collection, where you'll find entirely wearable wraps from tops to jackets to light coats, all with a contemporary flair. Whether you want to follow tradition or invent your own style, you can't go wrong with a kimono.



VICKI SQUARE

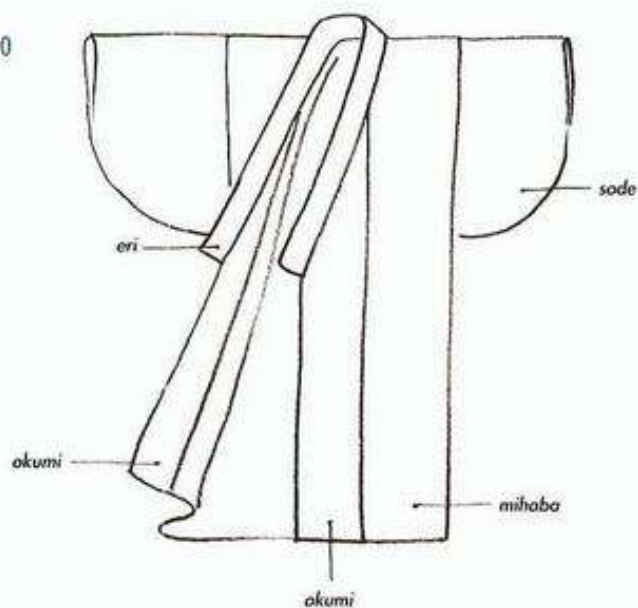
# Kimono Basics

The Japanese kimono is a timeless garment that is based on the simplest construction involving nothing but rectangular pieces of cloth. From simple work clothes to elegant formal attire for nobility, the kimono runs the gamut from subdued and practical to flamboyant and ostentatious. Add to this versatility the fact that a kimono looks good on any body type—from huge sumo wrestler to petite geisha—and you've quite possibly got the ideal garment.

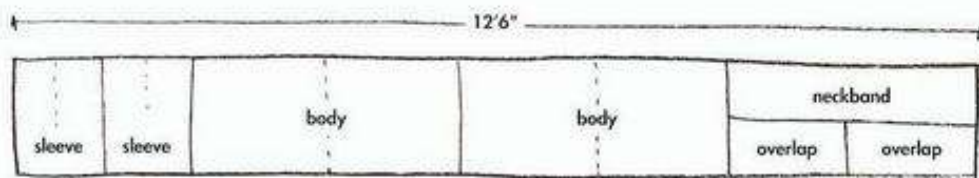
The kimono shape is certainly ideal for knitters. Even beginning knitters who haven't ventured beyond simple scarves can be ensured success with the first attempt. Think of the kimono as five large rectangular scarves—one for the back, one for each half of the front, and one for each sleeve. The only difference is that the rectangles are sewn (or in some cases, knitted) together. Experienced knitters can hone their skills by working intricate color or stitch patterns or by adding fine embellishments. Whatever your knitting expertise and whatever your shape, you'll find a knitted kimono a classic and sophisticated alternative to the traditional Western cardigan or jacket.



## PARTS OF A KIMONO



### TAN



## CONSTRUCTION

Kimono are generally constructed from rectangular pieces of fabric in standard widths. A bolt of cloth, called a tan, is cut into seven straight pieces: two long body panels; two sleeves; two overlaps; and a neckband. A standard tan is about 14" (35.5 cm) wide and 12 1/2 yards (11.5 m) long and will make one ankle-length kimono. The body panels (mihaba) are seamed (by hand) at the center back and sides, with an opening at the center front. There are no shoulder seams. One overlap (okumi) is sewn to each front panel. The neckband (eri) is a folded strip of fabric that is attached to the front overlaps and around the neckline. It generally reaches about a third of the way down each side of the center front. Sleeves (sode) are the full width of the bolt and are sewn to the sides of the body.

Very little fabric is wasted in the making of a kimono. If the garment

needs to be adjusted for a smaller body, deep seams are sewn along the sides and the extra-wide selvages remain uncut on the inside of the garment. Throughout the ages, various parts have been widened or narrowed, lengthened or shortened, and otherwise subtly altered. Nevertheless, the technique of cutting a single bolt of cloth into seven rectangular pieces and stitching those pieces together without further shaping remains unchanged.

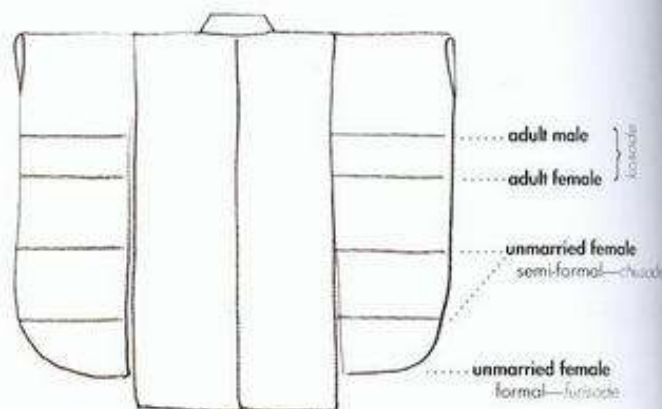
The spare shape of the kimono translates beautifully into knitted fabric. Cast on the number of stitches needed for the desired width of each rectangle, then knit for the desired length. Along the way, take a cue from Japanese artisans and add your own expressions of color, texture, and embellishment. Then sew the pieces together (by hand, just like the Japanese), and enjoy a garment that never goes out of fashion.

## The Meaning of Kimono

In a traditional sense, the particular color, cut, and design of a kimono conveys social messages: gender, life/death, season, age, formality or occasion, and propriety. A kimono worn by a man is generally more conservative in both pattern and color—black, brown, gray, or dark blue—while a woman's kimono is a showcase for pattern and color. Bright colors are typically worn by young women, while more subdued colors are associated with maturity. In life, a kimono is always lapped left over right; for burial only is it lapped right over left. Understandably, an unlined, light open-weave silk kimono is worn in the summer months, while a lined, quilted *hanten* is saved for the winter season. The type of fabric, placement of design, and inclusion of crests can indicate a sense of formality. In a more abstract sense, the cut of a kimono can reflect an awareness of social etiquette. In Japan, where the nape is an erotic part of the body, the collar is worn closer to the nape for young, shy, and inexperienced females. The farther away the collar is from the nape, the greater the statement of maturity, sophistication, and even sensuality. Sleeve length implies gender, formality, and age. In traditional kimono, the depth of the sleeve from shoulder to armpit signifies social responsibility. An adult male, who has the most responsibility, wears the shallowest sleeves. An unmarried female, who is considered to hold the least responsibility, wears deep sleeves that can reach all the way to the floor (called *furisode*).

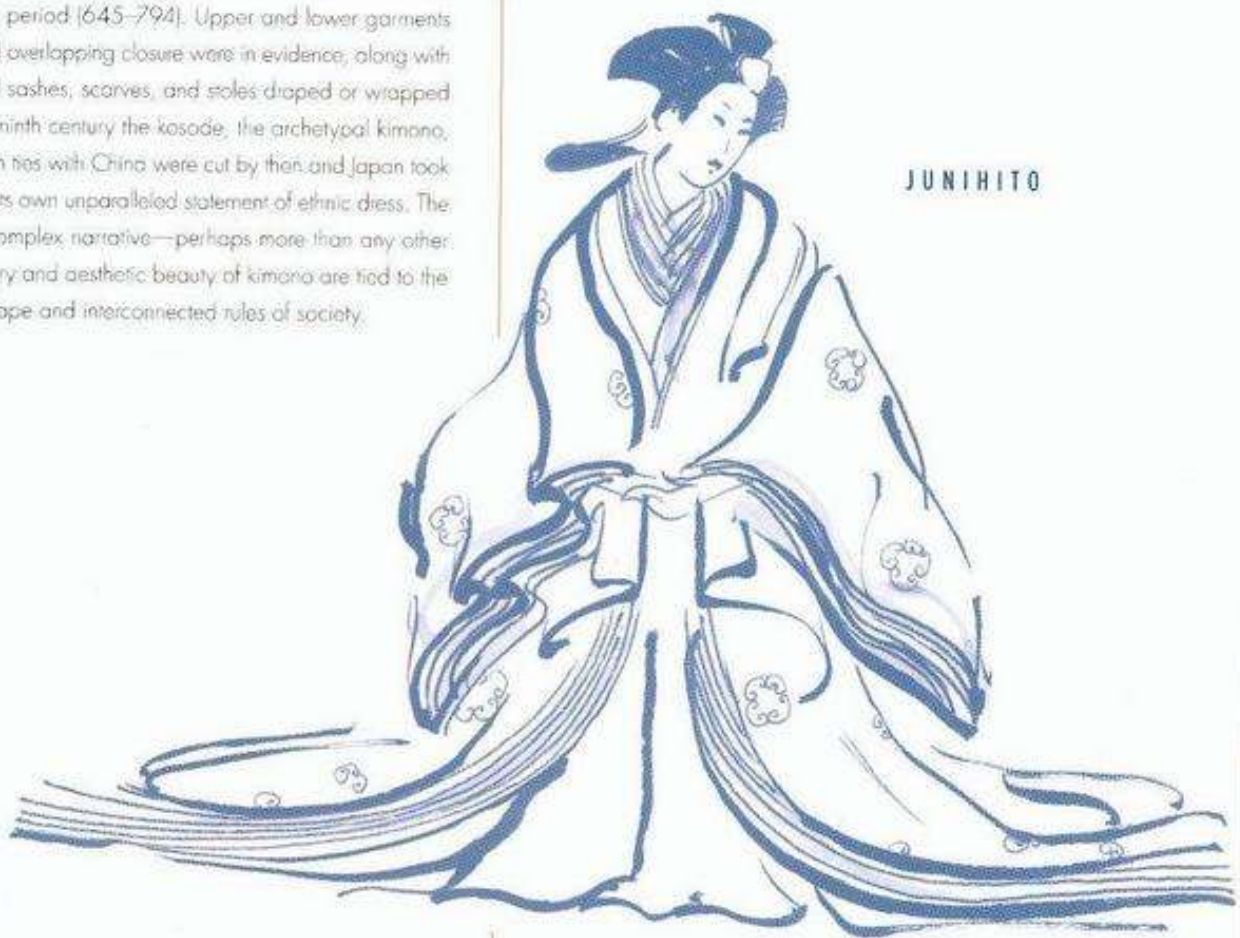
As contemporary knitters, we're free to adapt or ignore any of these guidelines. Today's fashions encourage a play of contradictions—the finest silk is at home with faded blue jeans; cut-and-slash jackets are paired with designer dresses on fashion runways. Take inspiration from the traditional or break away into your own design ideas.

## DESIGNATION OF SLEEVE LENGTH



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE KIMONO

In ancient and primitive Japan, clothing can be traced back to the influential continent of China. No complete garments have been preserved, but from priests' robes and paintings it is possible to reconstruct the style of dress up to and through the Nara period (645–794). Upper and lower garments with a rectangular cut and overlapping closure were in evidence, along with front and back skirts, and sashes, scarves, and stoles draped or wrapped around the body. By the ninth century the kosode, the archetypal kimono, was born. Communication ties with China were cut by then and Japan took the opportunity to evolve its own unparalleled statement of ethnic dress. The kimono has a rich and complex narrative—perhaps more than any other culture in history, the artistry and aesthetic beauty of kimono are tied to the changing political landscape and interconnected rules of society.

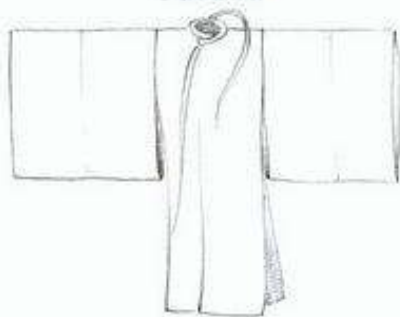


JUNIHITO

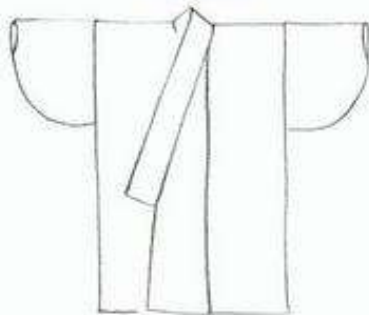
### OSODE



### SUIKAN



### KOSODE



### Heian Period (794–1185)

The Heian period marked the age of *osode*, which translates literally to “large sleeves.” During this time, formal dress was a spectacular display of colorful layers called *jūnihito* (*jūni* means “twelve”; *hito* means “unlined robes”). Noble women of the court took this concept to voluminous proportions, often wearing more than twelve layers of rather stiffly woven silk *osode*—each one a different color—layered on top of one another in a lavish visual display. The large, loose sleeves of *osode* had side wrist openings equal to the entire depth of the sleeve, allowing each layer to show through. The layers were also visible at the neckline and along the front edges where they swept back in beautiful curves. Specific color combinations held special meaning that related to the spirits of nature, including the seasons, geographic directions, personal virtues, and earthly elements. In paintings of the period, Heian beauties are almost completely enveloped in the billowing folds of their garments. *Osode* are still used in the imperial court for ceremonies and theatrical performances, such as *bugaki* (masked dance) and *Noh* dramas.

Commoners during the Heian period wore *suikan*, a garment having a double width of fabric for the sleeves with a cord used to draw up the sleeve opening. The *suikan* also featured side slits, open from hem to waist, to accommodate movement and allow the garment to be tucked into pleated pants called *hakama*.

The outermost robe of the *jūnihito* was a decorative large-sleeved robe called *uchigi*. The innermost robe—the *kosode*—was a plain white undergarment with small sleeves made of simple plain-weave fabrics (commonly ramie and silk). During Japan’s middle ages (1185–1868), *kosode* shifted from private to public view and, as such, were made from more elaborate fabrics such as silk twills (*ayayori*), figured satin (*rinzu*), and crepes (*chirimen*). The basic shape of *kosode* has remained unchanged since the late Heian period, but fabric design and embellishment techniques have undergone many innovations in response to a series of all-embracing political changes. *Kosode* became the canvas on which Japanese artisans lavished their most creative visions:



UCHIGIE

### Kamakura Period (1185-1333)

During the Kamakura period, the military class came to power and the capital was moved from the traditional central imperial seat of power in Kyoto to Kamakura in eastern Japan. All aspects of extravagant and opulent court life were replaced by a more restrained existence. The multilayered junihito was replaced by simpler ensembles of perhaps just one or two layers. Elaborate dress was reserved for warriors, who wore a two-piece hitatare under their armor, made from brocades decorated with floral designs, figured silks, and tie-dyed fabrics.



HITATARE

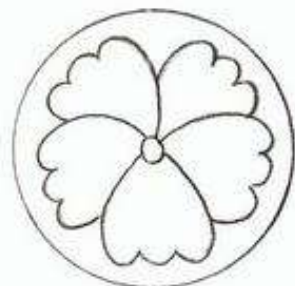
### Muromachi Period (1333-1563)

The Ashiga dynasty of the shoguns dominated the Muromachi period, during which time the samurai ruled the military. The uchikake was the most elaborate outer garment of the kosode style, with small wrist openings, worn by upper class women of the ruling military class. Hitotatare was the standard garment worn by males and motifs woven or dyed into the fabric evolved into largescale and more flamboyant patterns. The family crest, called a mon, became a popular ornamental feature as a way of establishing a clan or family (similar to a coat of arms) or as a way to honor and identify a particular accomplishment. A mon is a roundel encircling a stylized design of a traditional theme, such as flowers, bamboo, or fans. In a graduating scale of formality, a kimono may have one, three, or five crests. A single crested kimono displays the mon at the mid-back a few inches below the neckband. A three-crested kimono adds one to the back of each sleeve. A five-crested kimono adds one to each side of the front, placed just below the collarbone. Crests are not placed on komon, or small all-over patterning, kimono. Crests may be placed on asymmetrically decorated kimono, but most formal of all is the unpatterned monochrome kimono with five crests.

### HAORI



### CRESTS



Ivy Crest



Triple Comma Crest



Bamboo Crest