

Wool — From Fleece to Usable Yarn

Process raw fleece into spinnable, usable wool

DIFFICULTY Moderate
TYPE Seasonal batch technique
TIME Many hours per fleece, spread over sessions

 DIFFICULTY Moderate	 TIME Many hours total	 COST Low-moderate (tools)	 BEST SEASON After shearing	 FREQUENCY Once or twice a year per animal
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01 Skirt, wash, card, spin

Raw fleece goes through several distinct stages before it's usable — skirting out unusable edges, washing out grease and dirt, carding to align fibres, and finally spinning into yarn.



02 What you'll need

- Raw fleece from shearing
- A skirting table or clean flat surface
- Wool wash/scour and warm water for washing
- Hand cards or a drum carder
- A spinning wheel or drop spindle

03 Method

1. Skirt the fleece, removing heavily soiled, matted, or short edge sections that won't process well.
2. Wash in warm (not hot, to avoid felting) water with a wool-specific scour, handling gently to avoid felting.
3. Dry thoroughly before further processing.
4. Card the wool (by hand or with a drum carder) to align fibres into a workable, even form.
5. Spin into yarn using a spinning wheel or drop spindle, then set the twist before use.

04 Troubleshooting

- **Wool felting during washing** — water too hot or too much agitation; use warm water and handle gently, minimising movement.
- **Difficulty carding** — fleece not clean enough, or has too much remaining vegetable matter; wash more thoroughly and pick out debris beforehand.
- **Uneven spun yarn** — normal while learning; consistency in drafting (drawing out fibre) comes with practice.
- **Fleece quality poor overall** — quality varies significantly by breed, nutrition, and health of the animal; consider this when selecting or breeding for fibre production.

05 Timing & maintenance

BEST TIME	Process fleece reasonably soon after shearing, before it accumulates more contamination in storage.
DURATION	A full fleece can take many hours across skirting, washing, carding, and spinning, often spread over multiple sessions.
MAINTENANCE	Not applicable per event; ongoing skill development improves speed and consistency over time.
SIGNS OF SUCCESS	Clean, aligned fibre that spins evenly into a consistent, usable yarn.

06 Tips & variations

PAIRS WELL WITH

Sheep (animal guide)

COMMON MISTAKES

Using water too hot during washing, causing the fleece to felt

Rushing the carding step, leading to a difficult, uneven spin

PRO TIP

A drop spindle is a genuinely good, low-cost way to learn spinning before investing in a spinning wheel — the fundamental technique transfers directly.