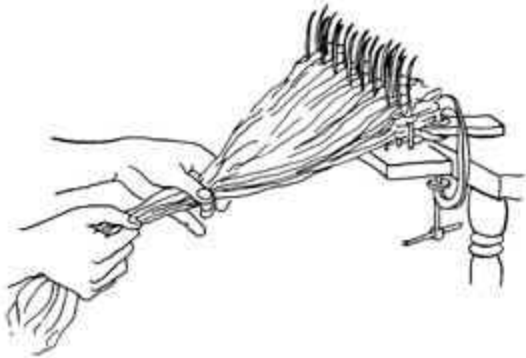
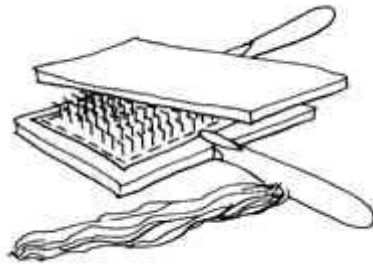




Special tools have been designed for preparing wool and other fibers. A **flicker**, **flick carder**, or **pet comb** (average cost under \$10) is excellent for loosening individual locks and pulling out any short or weak fibers. **Flicking** works best for a fleece with distinct locks and a staple length of 4 inches or more. **Mini-combs**, **Viking combs**, and **English wool combs** (cost \$50 to \$150) also work best for wool with locks that are at least 4 inches long. You can comb several locks at a time.



Combing is a separating process-it removes any shorter fibers as it loosens and aligns the longer fibers. After combing, the long fibers are pulled into a smooth, continuous strand called a top (the short fibers are set aside for a different use or discarded); fibers can be pulled off with your fingers, or through a tool called a diz. A few mills are set up to do combing, and sometimes you can buy commercially combed tops of wool or other fibers.



Hand cards or carders

(average cost \$30 to \$60) are good for preparing medium to short wool (staple length 4 inches or less); **drum carders** (cost \$150 to \$500 or more) can handle short, medium, or long wool, depending on how they are set up.

Carding is a blending process, good for evening out the variations in color, crimp, or length between different parts of a fleece; for blending different colors of dyed fleece; and for combining wool with mohair, angora, or other fibers.

Wool can be lifted off a carder as a fluffy, pillowlike, rectangular **batt**. Spinners sometimes roll batts into slender

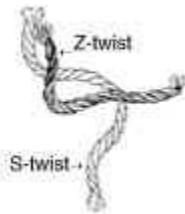
tubes called **rolags** or pull them lengthwise into long strands called **slivers** or **rovings**. The carding process can easily be automated, and there are dozens of small mills around the United States that sell carded batts or rovings; some will custom-card wool that you supply.

Making Yarn



Many kinds of spinning tools are available today-everything from simple wooden handspindles to high-tech electric spinners, from antique wool and flax wheels to modern wheels. The diversity of spinning tools is a wonderful story in itself, but it's important to remember that in **handspinning**, it's the skill and sensitivity of the spinner's hands that shapes the yarn. The spinner is in control; the tool is just an assistant.

No matter which tool you use, the process of spinning is basically the same. The first step is **drafting** or pulling fibers out of the prepared lock, top, batt, or roving. Drafting just a few fibers at a time makes a very thin yarn; drafting many fibers makes a thicker yarn. **Twisting** the drafted fibers makes yarn. Twist holds the fibers together so they don't slip apart or rub loose; one of the spinner's skills is determining the appropriate amount of twist for a given yarn. At the start, you want enough twist that the yarn is strong . . . and not so much that it makes itself into independent corkscrews. After drafting and twisting a length of yarn, you can let it **wind on** to the bobbin of the spinning wheel or wind it onto a spindle by hand, then start drafting and twisting more yarn. When you finish spinning one batch of fiber, you make a join by splicing on a new supply. A careful join is invisible in the finished yarn.



Turn the wheel (or spindle) one way and you get **Z-twist** yarn. Turn it the other way and you'll have **S-twist** yarn. By convention, most spinners turn the wheel clockwise (Z) to make yarn from loose fiber, but the only rule is that if you start spinning in a given direction you need to keep going that way until you've finished with that bobbin- or spindle-full of yarn (reversing directions untwists your work).



Depending on what type of fiber you're spinning and how you use your hands, the steps of drafting and twisting may be done separately and in sequence, or they can flow together into a continuous process. Spinners working with combed, long-staple wool often draft by moving their hands just a few inches-about half the length of the fibers-in a gesture called a **short draw**. Then they deliberately guide the twist into the drafted fibers, making a smooth, dense **worsted** yarn. Spinners using short-staple wool that has been carded and rolled into rolags may use a **long draw**, moving one hand back and forth with a full swing of the arm, simultaneously drafting and twisting up to three feet of fuzzy, puffy, **woolen** yarn before winding it on. You'll see many variations and combinations of these techniques if you watch different people spin; as with most decisions in spinning, what's "right" is whatever works best for the individual spinner and the fiber. Because they can be so unique, there is no precise, consistent way of describing drafting methods.



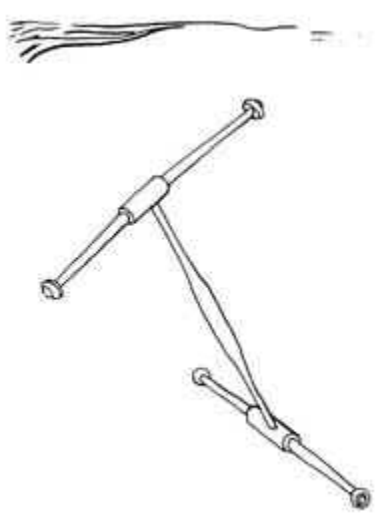
When you turn loose fiber into yarn, you make a **singles** yarn (a single strand), with the fibers all twisted in the same direction. Singles yarn can be finished and used as is, but spinners often take an extra step, twisting two or more strands of singles together to make **plied** yarn, which is usually stronger, more uniform, and easier to handle. The simplest plied yarn twists two singles together in the opposite direction to their original spinning (Z singles, S plied). A **balanced** yarn is a special type of plied yarn, where the twist used in plying exactly balances the twist used in spinning and straightens out the fibers. A balanced yarn is very calm and doesn't kink at all.

Basic spinning and plying techniques produce "plain vanilla" yarn, lovely in itself and useful for all kinds of knitting, weaving, and other projects. A plain-vanilla spinner can achieve plenty of variety simply by using different types of wool (in natural or dyed colors), by varying the thickness and twist of the singles, and by choosing whether or not to ply the yarn. For



even more variety, there are advanced techniques for making fancy **designer** yarns, with unique texture and color effects.

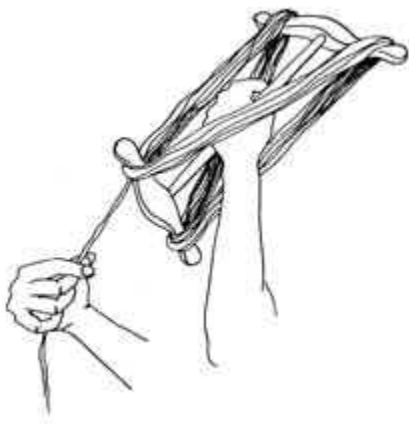
Finishing Wool Yarn



After plying-or after spinning, if the yarn will be used as singles- make the yarn into a **skein** by winding it onto a **niddy-noddy or skein winder**. Tie the skein in at least three places before you remove it from the niddy-noddy. Wool yarn usually gets softer and puffier when you wash and dry it, and it also **shrinks** in length- usually 10 to 25 percent, but sometimes even more. It's a good idea to wash yarn and let it shrink before you knit, weave, or do something else with it.

down gently again. Remove the

To **wash** the skein, fill your sink with comfortably warm water and add a squirt or two of dishwashing liquid or shampoo; set the skein on top of the water and press it down gently to get it wet. Let it soak for a few minutes. Lift the skein out of the water, drain the basin, and run in rinse water of the same temperature. Set the skein in the water and press down gently again. Remove the skein, drain the water, and repeat the rinse. Squeeze the skein (don't wring it) to remove excess water, and then let the skein dry on a towel or rack.



Felting happens when you agitate or rub wet wool fleece, yarn, or fabric. It's wonderful to make felt on purpose, but to avoid accidental felting when you're washing any wool product, be careful to handle it as little and as gently as possible.

If the yarn looks wrinkly or kinky after you wash it, you can smooth it out by **steaming** it, like you would steam wrinkles out of a garment. Use a travel steamer or steam iron, or pass the skein over the spout of a steaming teakettle; five to ten seconds of steaming is enough to smooth most yarns.

Admire your skein. It's some of the best yarn in the world!



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