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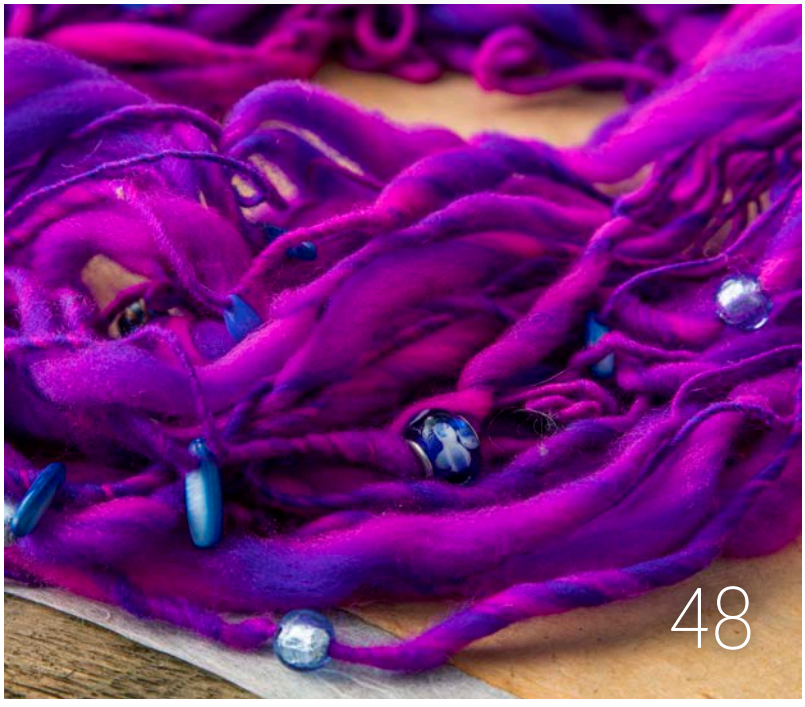
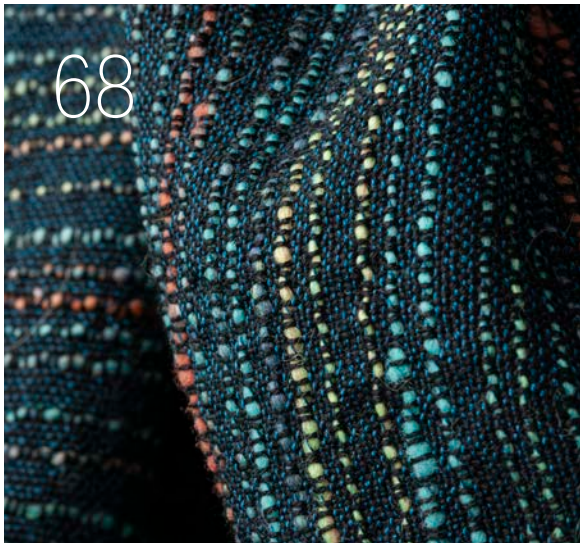
THE TEXTURE ISSUE

FEATURES

PROJECTS





DEPARTMENTS

On the cover: Katie Weston explores how to create handspun halo using various luxury fibers (page 32).

Photo by Matt Graves

spinoffmagazine.com

- Calls for Entries • Corrections
- Index of Past Issues

Super slubby, smooth and silky, soft and fuzzy—handspun texture offers us a lifetime of exploration. Endless options for manipulating texture in our fibers, yarns, and finished textiles means there is always something new to try, no matter how wild or tidy our personal aesthetic. Some spinners add vibrantly dyed nepps and noils to their batts and yarns, while other spinners carefully comb wool locks to achieve noil-free perfection. Both are creating intentional texture.

This summer, we are taking a closer look at the touch and feel of our beloved handspun. **Katie Weston** walks us through four luxury fibers known for their soft halos and fuzzy fabrics, and **Cindy Ellen Hill** shares her love of cordage, nature, and tool-less twisting. **Emily Wohlscheid** takes a deep dive into thoughtful blends designed to mimic the natural world. Have you ever seen a luna moth expressed in batt form? It's fantastic.

Texture explorations are for all spinners, whether beginners or advanced. **Riley Kleve**'s tutorials on adding and removing slubs are fundamentals every spinner should have in their toolbox. **Beth Showalter** discusses options for adding texture to four-ply cable yarns and shares her notes on more than 10 multistep variations to try.

Susan Z. Douglas is back to broaden our ideas about spinning for knitting once again. Check out her article on the design opportunities of combining yarns of different grists into familiar knitting patterns, including garter stitch and brioche. I've already cast on—join me!

Wishing you peace and perfectly filled bobbins,

Gretchen Huggett's chunky yarn for fine cloth. See page 68.

Photo by Matt Graves

Spin Off®

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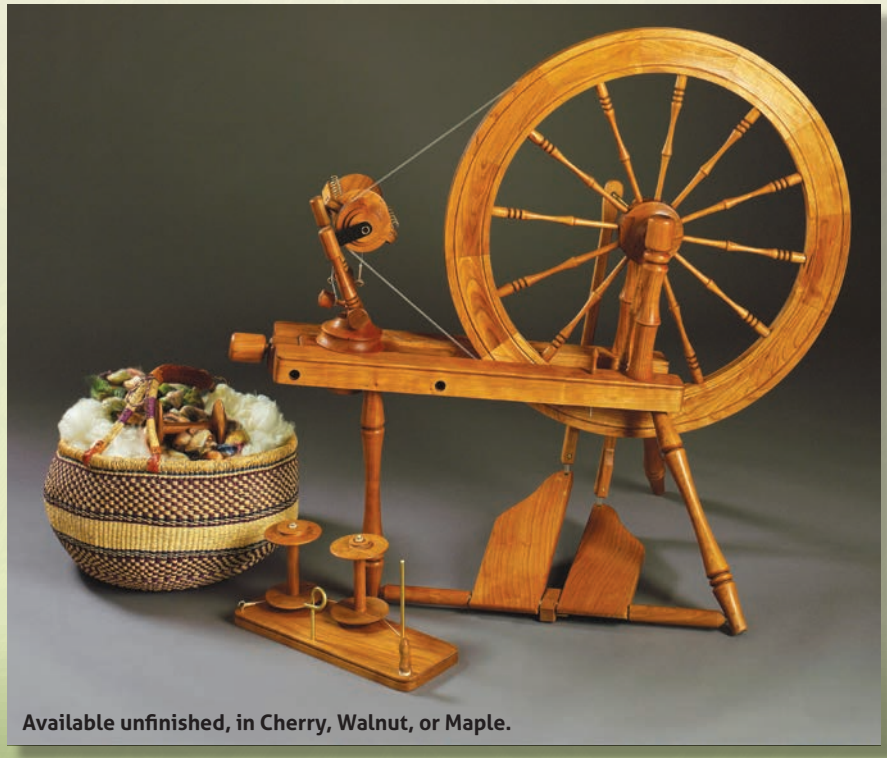

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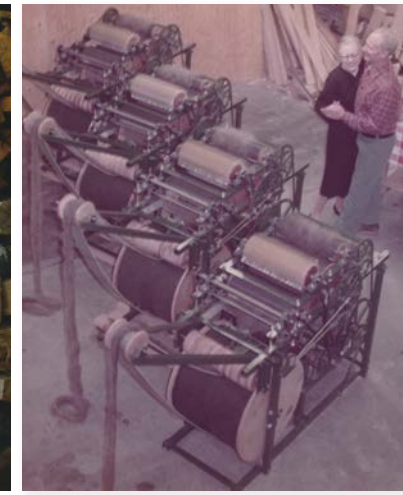
It's a Wonderful Life

Paula Simmons Green

KAREN SELK



Courtesy of Karen Selk

PAULA SIMMONS and Patrick Green influenced the resurgence of handspinning for five decades, beginning in the 1970s. Paula was the mentor for those of us yearning for anything fiber, natural, and aligned with the back-to-the-land ideal. She authored many books to share her knowledge: raising sheep, spinning and weaving with wool, even cooking with green tomatoes and too many zucchini. Her vast knowledge as a shepherdess/spinner was clearly conveyed in her books. *Spinning and Weaving with Wool*, first published in 1978, remains a valuable resource today.

With an engineer's inquisitive mind and a builder's heart, Patrick liked the challenge of designing and making things. When the spinners in his area inquired if he could make a drumcarder, he spent many nights after work experimenting and getting feedback, which resulted in the legendary Patrick Green carder and other tools custom designed to suit almost any need.

I had the honor of attending a memorial at their home and workshop in Chilliwack, British Columbia, recently, following Paula's death in January. Those gathered shared stories of their extraordinary lives and the gifts they bestowed upon us.

Paula Simmons Green and Patrick Green met rather late in life. They squeezed every minute of their precious time together into creating an idyllic existence revolving around spinning, weaving, inventing, gardening, cooking, and dancing.

You can imagine that a pair with so much energy, creativity, and vision would make their dream lifestyle a reality. Patrick's motto was, "If it's worth building, it's worth overbuilding." Instead of 10 apple trees, they planted 300. Why take their apples to a local press to make juice, when Patrick could build a five-ton stainless steel press to do the job? Building 48 three-foot-high concrete raised beds for vegetables to make Paula's heart sing was no problem. They turned the upstairs of the house into their "ballroom" for after-dinner dancing to big band music, just the two of them. They were a pair who worked very hard with a light footprint on the earth and who knew how to play with grace and dignity.

Stopping in for a visit was like a step back in time. Paula would greet us wearing a flouncy, home-sewn dress with kitten-heeled shoes. She had one pattern she used again and again with different fabrics for teaching, traveling, or planting veggies. I never saw Paula dressed any other way. She and I would shell peas or pot up tomatoes, while Terry, my husband, would help Patrick in the workshop. Lunch was always on time with warm homemade buns, delicious vegetable dishes, and fresh fruit with homemade yogurt. After lunch we would tour the property and see what new and wonderful projects they had on the go. Dinner was always served by candlelight with Patrick's homemade wine, whether they had guests or not. They would load the car before our good-byes with fresh produce, baked goods, and plants.

Paula and Patrick Green are legendary for their contributions to the spinning world. Terry and I remember and admire their commitment to a wholistic lifestyle and their generosity as well. They will be missed for all their virtues.

Karen Selk and her husband, **Terry Nelson**, founded Treenway Silks in 1977, transitioning the business to new ownership in 2011. They live on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia. Karen is the author of *In Search of Wild Silk: Exploring a Village Industry in the Jungles of India*. It will be published by Schiffer Books in November 2022.

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Merino Shout-Out

I ENJOYED THE MERINO FACTS SERIES on spinoffmagazine.com. This is a shawl I am working on that is all done in Merino. The pattern is called the Chimera Triangular Scarf by Jennifer Renaud, and this is the free version of the pattern. I am also currently spinning some white Merino, which I will blend with some brown Manx Loaghtan to create a gradient for a shawl. This is going to be a yearlong project using the fiber I get from a fiber-of-the-month club, and so far, I have been lucky—all of the fiber has been Merino!

—Debra Lucero, Via email

MANY YEARS AGO, and for some reason that I do not know, my grandfather cut the legs of a wooden chair down about six inches. My grandmother used it to sit in and do needlework. The chair was then passed to me, and I found it perfect to use at my spinning wheel. I placed a cushion on the seat and found that sitting lower at my wheel keeps me from slouching over, and my legs are quite comfortable stretched out more in front. I can now sit and spin for hours.

—Martha Janzen, Via email

Editor's note: Finding the perfect spinning chair can be a challenge! Learn more in Mary Egbert's article, "At Your Ease: Spinning Chairs, Posture, and Finding the Right Fit" in Spin Off *Fall 2019.*

Spin-Along 2022

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE 2022 TOTE-ALONG? Send us your pictures! We will share some of your handspun baskets, bags, and bowls in Spin Off *Fall 2022. Learn more about the spin-along on our website.***

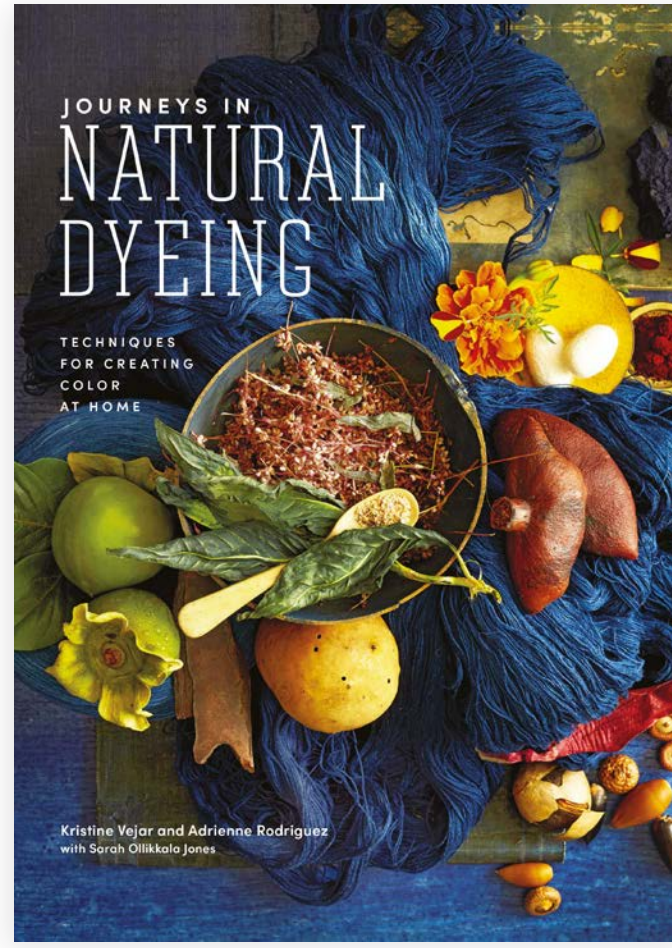
Do you have any special tools that have been passed down to you or that you could not live without in your spinning practice? We would love to hear from you! Please send your stories and emails to **spinoff@longthreadmedia.com**.

CORRECTIONS

"Wool and Wood: Natural Storage Bobbins," Fall 2021. The wood shown in the photo with the Japanese saw is buddleia (summer lilac) as opposed to elder.

Journeys in Natural Dyeing:
Techniques for Creating Color at Home

Kristine Vejar and Adrienne Rodriguez



I HAVE NEVER BEEN as excited and inspired by a natural-dyeing book as I was after reading *Journeys in Natural Dyeing* by Kristine Vejar and Adrienne Rodriguez. It is a beautiful book filled with interesting and artful photography. More importantly, it contains clear and easy-to-understand instructions for basic natural-dye techniques for wool, silk, and cotton along with further explorations, such as composting Japanese indigo for creating an indigo vat, using mushroom dyes, eco-printing and batik, and cold-bath dyeing.

Courtesy of Abrams Books

Tiled color samples

Each chapter features the authors' experiences during their visit to one of the four locations this journey took them to—Iceland, Mexico, Japan, and Indonesia—in addition to the dyers, dyestuffs, and techniques that were used there. Vejar and Rodriguez lay out a palette of colors inspired by each location to show the reader how to pair dyestuffs and techniques with mordants, overdyeing, and modifiers to expand the range of colors available. The chapters also include recipes and projects using the colors and techniques.

I came away with a much clearer idea of the possibilities that can be derived from natural dyes and how to achieve them, as well as a desire to create a palette of color that's specific to my location and landscape. If I had to choose only one natural-dye book to have in my library, I would choose *Journeys in Natural Dyeing*. It combines the basic information I need for reference as an intermediate natural dyer with inspiration provided by the interviews and interactions with traditional natural-dye cultures. The additional techniques shown in the book, such as batik and other resist approaches, give me endless opportunities to explore.

—Devin Helmen

**New York: Abrams Books, 2020.
Hardcover, 240 pages, $29.99.
ISBN 9781683359890.**

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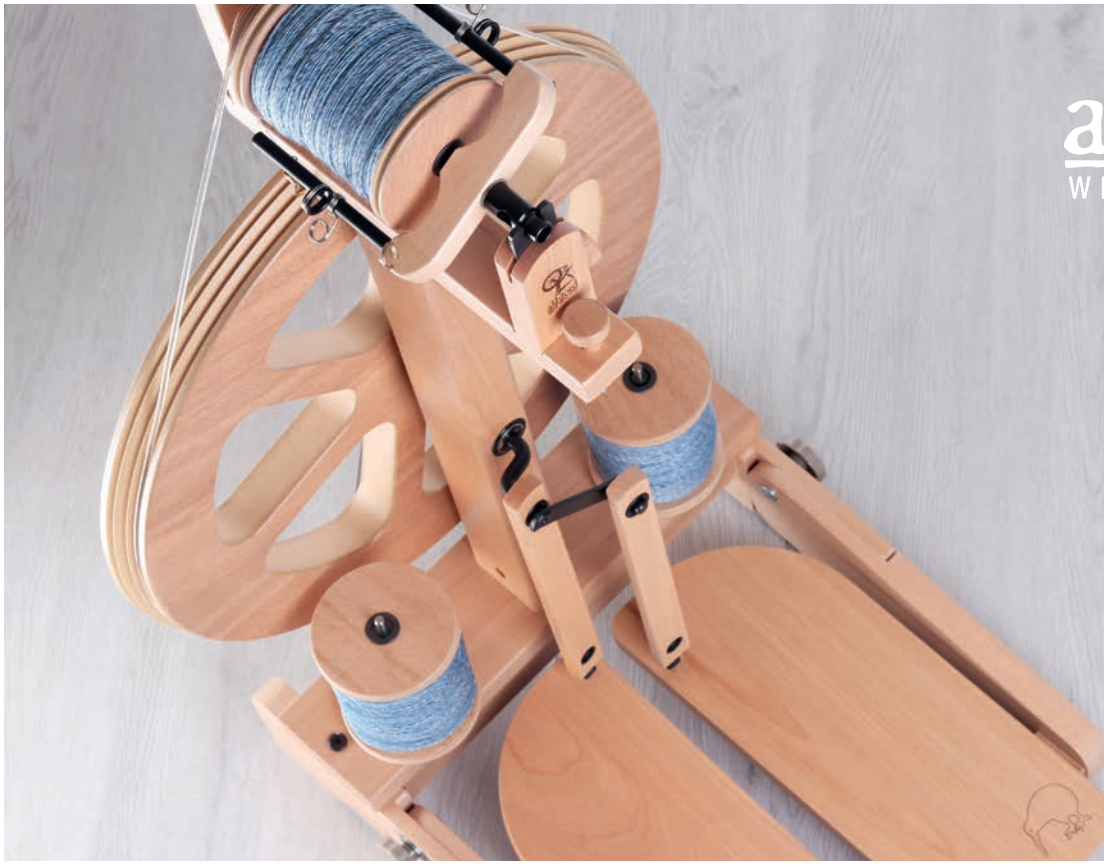

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A wonderfully squishy Summer Sunset Batt Combo from **Colibri Studio** is proof that you can have a smooth prep and fun locks at the same time. The 1.4-ounce batt (Merino, silk noil, bamboo, and Bluefaced Leicester) comes with 1.5 ounces of dyed locks. The combinations are endless! **colibristudio.etsy.com**

Luscious Valais Blacknose sheep locks can add silky texture to any project. Sold in 25-gram bundles, these staples from **Fluffy Fox Fibers** can be used for felting, spinning, and more. The bouncy waves are about 7 inches in length. **fluffyfoxfibers.etsy.com**

For winding skeins while on the go, try the travel niddy-noddy from **Girl on the Rocks**. The two pieces of flat bamboo come apart and fit into the drawstring bag, making it easy to slip into a larger travel bag. A 1-inch groove makes measuring wraps per inch a cinch. **girlontherocks.etsy.com**

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Fergus Shrug

AMANDA RUSSELL

Designer and pattern Bonnie Baker, Fergus Shrug.
Fiber Frabjous Fibers Bluefaced Leicester, Cathedral and Stained Glass plied together for the edging. Locally sourced alpaca yarn used for the body of the shrug.
Wheel Kromski Fantasia.
Singles direction Z-spun.
Plying direction S-spun.
Yarn classification/weight DK/worsted.
Hook H-8 (5 mm).
Gauge 15 stitches and 12 rows = 4" in DC ribbing.

Amanda beams in her Fergus Shrug.

Photo by Debra Hruska

The Fergus Shrug is the first sweater I've made with handspun. I wanted something loose fitting because I found myself feeling self-conscious after the birth of my daughter, and trying to figure out how to dress my new shape proved to be difficult. What I liked about this shrug was that it did not require a ton of yardage, the construction was simple, and the pattern didn't need much fitting.

The spin for my shrug took me a couple of years to complete. I received the Bluefaced Leicester fiber as a wedding gift in 2019 and used Cathedral and Stained Glass colorways by Frabjous Fibers. I started spinning the Cathedral first and finally completed the spin in the summer of 2020 after my son was born. Then I started spinning the Stained Glass colorway and finished after my daughter was born in 2021. I knew I wanted to ply the colors together and was not disappointed with how it turned out. I do not know my yardage, but it filled almost two full bobbins and resulted in a DK-weight yarn.

I wanted to use my handspun to make a project that would also stash-bust some of my commercial yarn; the brown I selected for my shrug is a locally sourced alpaca yarn I purchased at a Celtic festival. This shrug is the third sweater I have made but only the second one that has fit, and none of the others I've made have used handspun. I crocheted it flat in a rectangle shape and then sewed the ends together to create armholes. The ribbing was added last.

What I like about this shrug is that it has a shape that complements several different body types. I am so pleased with how it came out! The colors are gorgeous, and I got to use the garment tag I received in my Paradise Fibers fiber-of-the-month box this month—it matched the vibe beautifully. This shrug has given me the confidence to spin for a full sweater.

Have a finished object to share? Tell us about it! Contact **spinoff@longthreadmedia.com** to submit your project.

Photos by Amanda Russell

Barbados Blackbelly from Springwood Farm

Photos by Matt Graves

Spinning Fiber from Hair Sheep:
Adding Texture with Rare Breeds

ERIKA ZAMBELLO

"I'm in over my head," I said aloud as Barbados Blackbelly fleece—a mix of hair and wool—dried on a table on the back deck. When someone says "sheep fleece," what pops into your mind? Is it a woolly, soft expanse of fiber? Springy to the touch? This was definitely not it. The dark hair and wool stuck out in all directions after washing, and now I needed to try spinning this fiber combination.

Barbados Blackbelly fiber is not an obvious choice for spinning into yarn because it is not a breed *meant* for yarn. Hair sheep often have fleece characteristics more like the ancestors of domestic sheep, not the fluffy silhouette we associate with today's domesticated breeds.

I decided to try my hand at working with fiber from this sheep breed because it is part of the Livestock Conservancy's Shave 'Em to Save 'Em program, which encourages crafters to use fiber from rare breeds. The conservancy explains on its website that the Barbados Blackbelly sheep of today "descend from crosses of African hair sheep and European wooled breeds that were brought to the [Caribbean island of Barbados] beginning in the mid-1600s." These sheep needed to withstand both heat and humidity and now are "excellent foragers, highly resistant to disease, and can tolerate a higher worm load without requiring chemical intervention." Raised primarily for food, the sheep needed to survive in a more extreme climate and were not necessarily a source of wool. As a result, modern Barbados Blackbelly sheep (brought to the United States in the early 1900s) retain these characteristics, but that doesn't mean the wool they do produce is unusable.

On my first attempt at working with this fiber, I used handcards to combine the hair and wool into one fluffy pile and used a drop spindle to create a thick twist of the combined fibers. It worked! The wool held the hair together, and I crafted a rather ungainly stuffed animal for my son.

The same preparation and spinning method worked for the next hair breed I tried: St. Croix. Similar to the Barbados Blackbelly, the St. Croix line developed on its namesake Caribbean island from a combination of hair sheep from West Africa as well as woolly breeds from Europe. Like the Barbados variety, they shed and don't need to be sheared—which is helpful in the heat—and historically, their manure provided nutrients to local sugarcane fields.

Unlike the Barbados Blackbelly, my batch of St. Croix fiber was made up almost exclusively of hair in a bright white hue. Still, the singles yarn held together with few breaks for another stuffed animal.

I wanted another crack at making Barbados Blackbelly yarn and ordered more fiber. This time, I carefully separated out the thickest clumps of hair before spinning. I didn't remove all the hair because it provided an interesting contrasting color and texture. Hair breeds may be challenging to spin, but the skeins they produce are unique in both feel and texture.

Is spinning fiber from hair breeds into yarn easy? No. Do I recommend it? Absolutely! Spinning brings us closer to human history, to our ancestors who originally domesticated the sheep and created a proliferation of breeds suited for specific environments. At the very least, spinning hair breeds gives a peek into the mindset of those who sought to make cloth from the fiber of these multicolored ungulates. As for me, I have an order of Wiltshire Horn—another hair breed—arriving this spring, and I can't wait.

ERIKA ZAMBELLO is an environmental communications specialist living and working in north Florida. She is a strong proponent of spinning and knitting outside, working on her projects while walking, hiking, and exploring. Follow her adventures on Instagram @knittingzdaily.

Erika made a quick stuffed animal for her son. St. Croix fiber from Hemmer Hill Farm

From Plume Moss to Luna Moths

Nature-Inspired Carding

EMILY WOHLSCHEID

Photos by Matt Graves unless otherwise noted

For more than a decade, I have been creating batts inspired by textures and colors of vintage fabric prints, movie posters, children's book illustrations, and the works of art I admire. More recently, the challenge to re-create natural life and objects has become one of the main focuses of my work.

When building these batts, I start with a selection of fleeces and fiber types, basing my decisions on fiber structure and natural color. I dye these various fibers as needed before blending them on a drumcarder. Each fiber component plays an important part in the blend; the crimp of a CVM (California Variegated Mutant) fleece could be just as important to the final result as a custom dye mix or the type of carding cloth I use. I have been through a lot of trial and error and certainly had my share of failures, but when a blend comes together the way I envisioned, it is pure magic to me.

PLUME MOSS

One of the first colorways I explored using this nature-to-fiber concept focused on replicating the look of vibrant green moss growing among the undergrowth of a forest. This method of nature-inspired carding is pretty straightforward, relying solely on colors and textures that are easy to emulate. To mimic plume moss, I began with several natural-colored, fine fleeces, including Merino cross and CVM/Romeldale in shades of brown and gray. These would act as a base layer for various shades of bright to yellow-leaning greens to "grow" atop the natural-color wool. Highlights of burnt-orange wool and a pinch of salvage threads complete the representational illusion of moss.

For a batt such as this, I like to keep things minimally processed so that the textures of the natural fibers remain intact. To achieve this, I prefer drumcarders with a coarse to medium-coarse cloth—about 46 tpi.* This means the cloth has fewer teeth per inch (tpi). A similar effect could be achieved on a medium-cloth drumcarder (up to 72 tpi) and slightly less effectively on a fine-cloth drumcarder if the fibers are applied directly to the main drum. No matter what type of cloth I am using, I make sure

The plume moss blend: Merino cross, CVM/Romeldale, and salvage threads

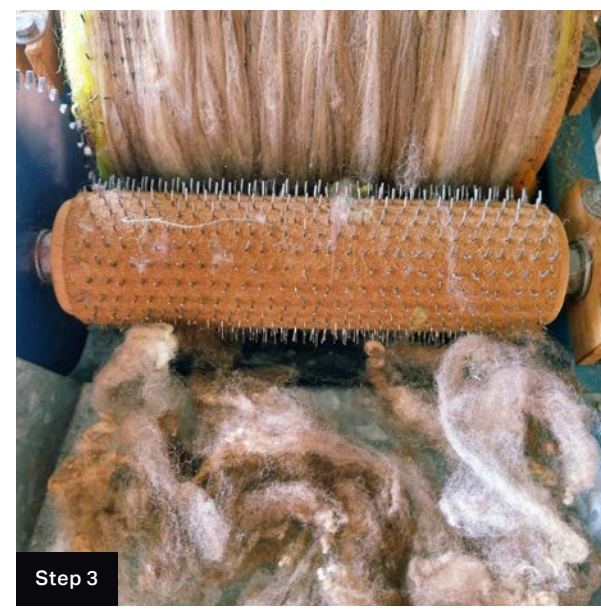
To see Emily's drumcarding technique in action, check out her online course, *Drumcarding Basics and Beyond* (2020), available at learn.longthreadmedia.com.

to open up my fiber a bit and spread it thinly on the drum. I also burnish my fibers (compress them with a specialty brush to pack more fiber onto the drum) between the layers as needed.

I began by applying most of the mossy green fibers (Step 1), alternating between bright-green alpaca, small bits of yellow-green CVM fleece, and a bit of burnt-orange wool that I hand-mixed with upholstery salvage threads. Yarn scraps and thrums from weaving make great alternatives to using upholstery salvage but need to be cut down to 1- to 2-inch lengths to prevent damage to the cloth of the carder. I finished the moss layer by adding a small amount of green fiber I had reserved along with a larger amount of the orange fibers that remained (Step 2). Finally, I fed the natural brown and gray fibers onto the drum in thin layers until all were packed on the drum (Step 3). I would choose to spin this fiber as a core-spun yarn or a rustic two-ply.


Step 1


Step 2


Step 3

Photos by Emily Wohlscheid


Plume moss

Courtesy of NPS Photo (National Park Service)/Peter Nelson

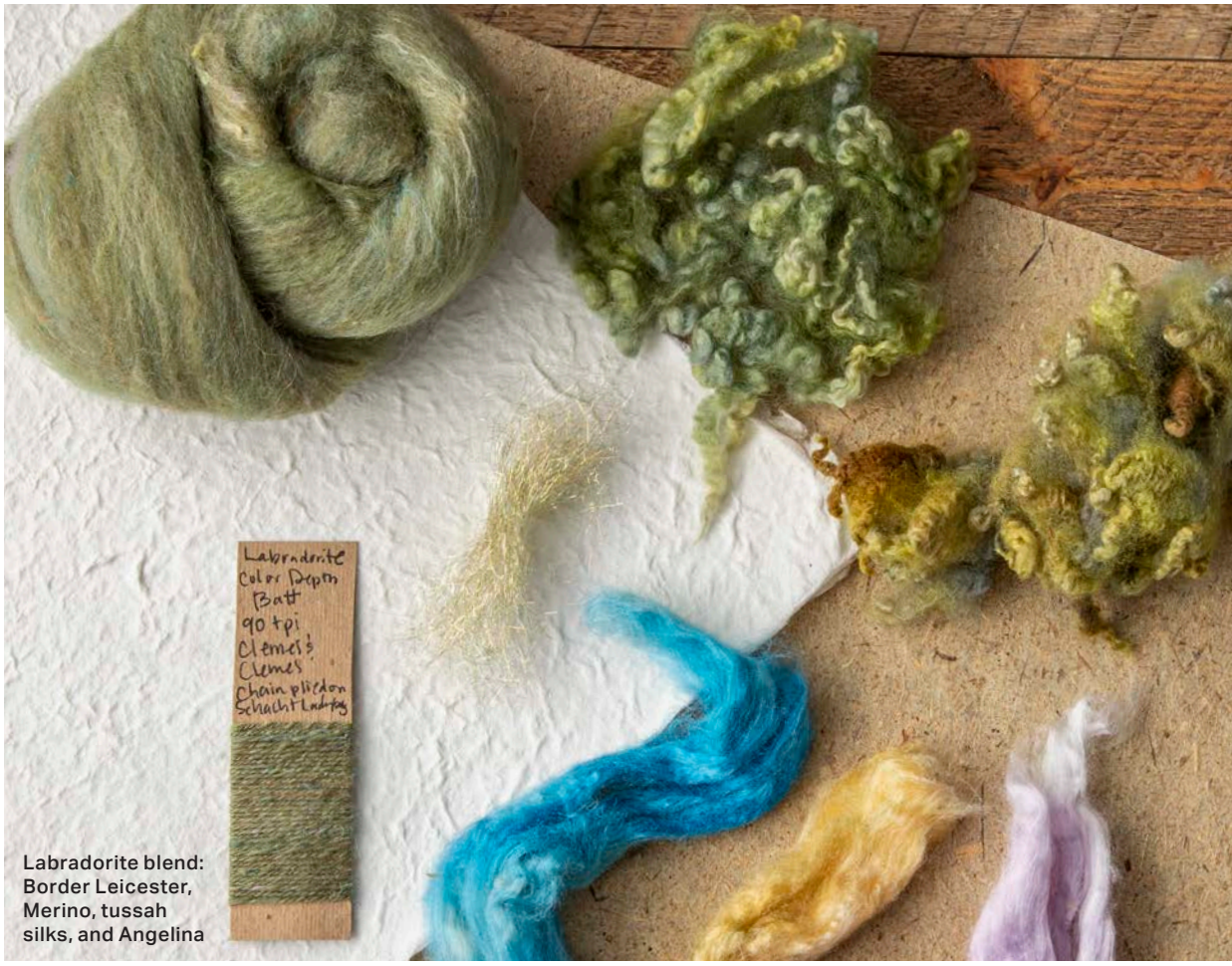
LABRADORITE

Recently, my love of rock hounding and lapidary work from my jewelry making has begun to bleed into my fiber practice. I was excited to re-create several types of feldspars that have iridescent flash when held in the light. The most challenging of these was labradorite, which also happens to be one of my favorite stones to work with. I closely examined both the polished and unpolished specimens I had in my stash and came to the surprising conclusion that the base of the stone was actually a deep sage green.

To emulate the look of a polished labradorite stone, I chose to use Border Leicester fleece as a base fiber due to its lustrous qualities. The other half of the base was a brown Merino-cross fleece that I overdyed, creating a rich sage color and providing a soft, lofty component. The flash in this stone, called labradorescence, can present itself in several colors including cerulean blue, lavender, and golden shades of yellow, orange, and green. I chose to use tussah silk dyed in several of these colors to mimic this effect for an overall luxurious blend.

Labradorite

Photo by Terriell Scrimager on Unsplash



Labradorite blend: Border Leicester, Merino, tussah silks, and Angelina

Photo by Emily Wohlscheid

Emily adds Angelina fiber directly to the drum.

To complete the illusion of flash, I included a dusting of Angelina sparkle in a pale golden-green iridescent shade. The ratio of wool to silk in this batt is 80/20 with each wool type in equal parts and equal parts of each color of silk.

The key to creating the flash effects in this blend is creating depth with color and layers. In conjunction with carding the fibers at least twice, I've found that a medium-to-fine-cloth drumcarder, 72 tpi and above, creates the most successful results. To disperse the fibers evenly and avoid any clumps of color, I organized the fibers in five piles to prepare them for carding. Three piles consisted of one-third of each type of wool, and the other two piles were made up of half of each of the silks and a healthy pinch of Angelina. I opened the wool fibers up as much as possible before sending them through the carder via the infeed tray. Next, I added the silk and the Angelina. I like to try to send my silk through the drums, but if it has too much static, I will add it directly to the main drum with the Angelina.

I continued to alternate between the wool and silk fiber piles until they had all been added, then removed the batt, tore it into strips, and pulled it into several smaller pieces to prepare it for a second carding pass. I spread the fibers thinly and arranged them so that they would go straight onto the drum as parallel to one another as possible for a semiworsted preparation, burnishing as needed, until they had all been back through. The presence of the silk and sparkle between the layers along with the shine of the Border Leicester wool results in a light flash that is about as close as fluff can get to the look of a polished stone. I hoped the semiworsted prep of the batt would add even more sheen—especially if spun with a worsted-style short draw—and I was not disappointed.

LUNA MOTH

My obsession with moths started a few years ago in the jewelry studio. I have been sculpting wax silk moths for casting and cutting silhouettes to create lapel pins, so looking at their wings for color inspiration was not far behind. The luna moth is an obvious favorite with its large shapely wings and lush green color. I wanted to be sure that the batt reflected the symmetry of the moth's wings, so I planned for a mirrored striping effect. I chose silk and bamboo to create a luxurious blend befitting a silk moth, mohair to mimic its fluffy

Photo by Kirsten Hengstberger on Pixabay

Luna Moth

The luna moth blend

body and fuzzy-looking wings, silk noils to set apart the "eye" of the moth wings, and fine wool for the raspberry and green base colors.

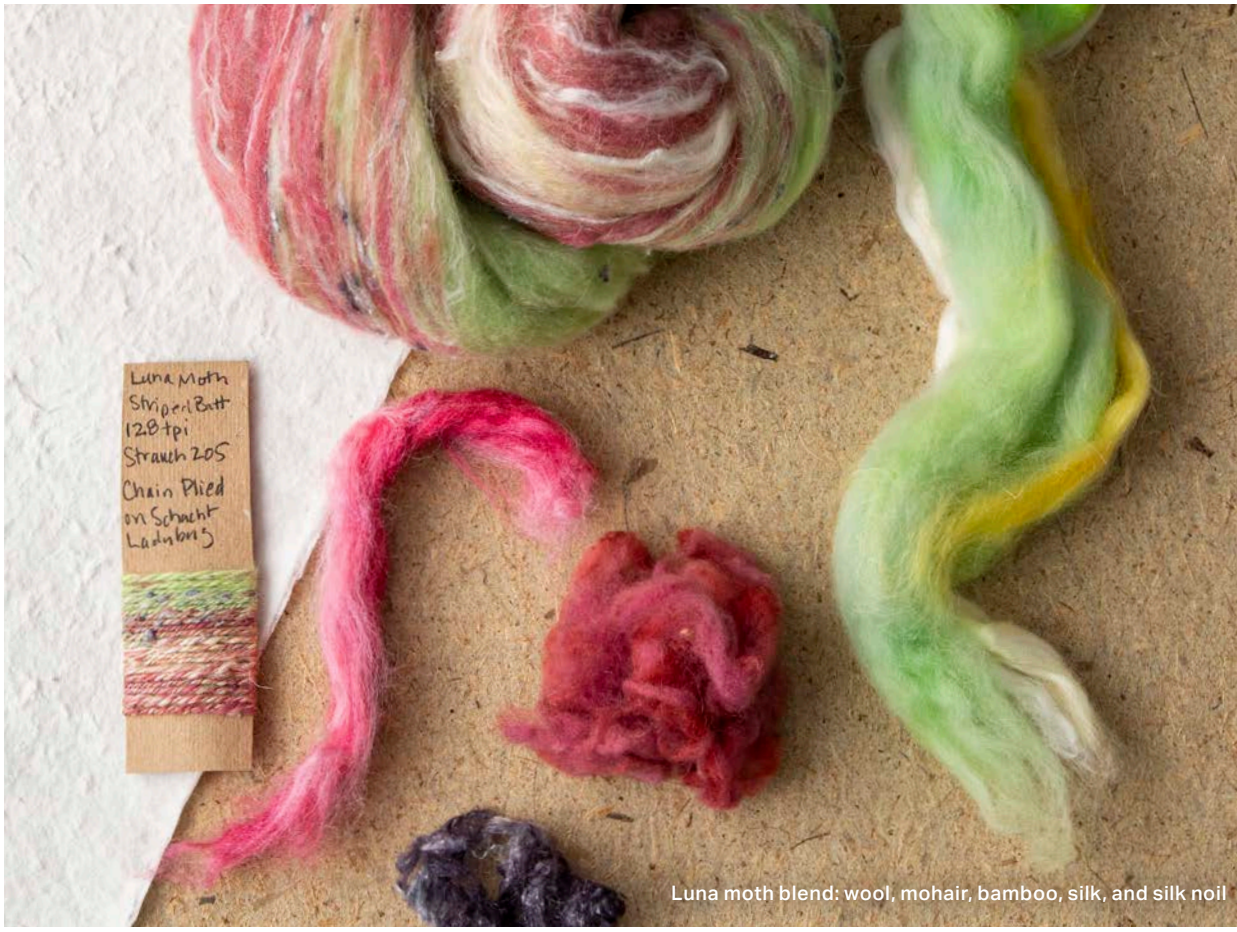
To mimic the pattern in the moth's wings, I created piles of fibers in this order: green wool top alternated with yellow mohair; white and yellow bamboo together; black silk noils: raspberry wool fleece and silk; and white and yellow bamboo with yellow mohair. I repeated this sequence in reverse order to create a mirrored palette. Next, I added the fibers to the drumcarder in layers, switching between the infeed tray and painting onto the drum if fibers had too much static or I wanted more control. Finally, I removed the layered batt, tore it into strips, and opened the strips sideways to reveal the layers before sending each layer back through the carder. The final batt—if folded in half lengthwise—is a mirror image. If spun in strips or zigzagged into a roving, the singles could be chain-plied to create a yarn that would allude to the beautiful colors, patterns, and subtle textures of the luna moth.

EXPLORE MORE

These complex colorways have challenged me to push the boundaries of what can be achieved with blending fibers. I find myself getting out in the open air more to find inspiration. There is something really fitting about using natural fibers to allude to nature itself.

** Depending on the manufacturer, 72 tpi carding cloth might be described as "coarse" or "standard," or using a different identifier. The tpi value allows you to compare carding cloth density from one maker to another.*

Emily Wohlscheid is the fiber and jewelry artist behind Bricolage Studios. She works out of a cooperative studio in west Michigan and teaches online and in person around the country. You can find out more at bricolagestudios.bigcartel.com.



Luna moth blend: wool, mohair, bamboo, silk, and silk noil

Photos courtesy of Aimee S. Lee

Handmade paper, torn into strips and twisted, is knitted into pages for Lee's series of poetry books.

Aimee Lee Makes Hanji

LINDA LIGON

Excerpted from The Long Thread *(2020), edited by Linda Ligon. longthreadmedia.com*

For Aimee Lee, it started with books, making books, making artists' books. Books that combined writing, imagery, and storytelling. This was at Oberlin College in the late 1990s. But the paper! Who made the paper?

In graduate school at Columbia College Chicago, she learned to make her own paper in the classic European way, pulp on mould, and to bind her books according to European tradition. And this was good. But there was Korean paper, *hanji*, that spoke to her family origins, and no one in the United States was making it. Japanese and Chinese methods were being practiced, yes, but Korean ways didn't attract the same attention and respect. As was usually the case, Korea was "in the shadow" of these more culturally prominent nations.

So Lee went to Korea on a Fulbright Fellowship in 2008–2009 to learn all she could. "I milked the Fulbright for all it was worth," she says, "and why not?" She not only learned the history, the skills, the

discipline, the craftsmanship, but she also documented everything. Her acclaimed book, *Hanji Unfurled: One Journey into Korean Papermaking*, was published a short three years later in 2012 by The Legacy Press. Yet another way to make a book.

She used her hanji to make books, as one would expect, but there was all this leftover scrap. Her mother grew up poor, her father was frugal, so in her background, even the scrap had value. Late in graduate school, she began to experiment with spinning the scrap into thread, first with her fingers, much later with a bobbin winder, and even later with a drop spindle. During her Fulbright year in Korea, she learned another way of twisting and plying paper into cords, and then twining this cordage into splendid, sturdy baskets with classic or whimsical shapes, or both. Her series of woven ducks plays on a Korean wedding tradition but with an affectionate twist.

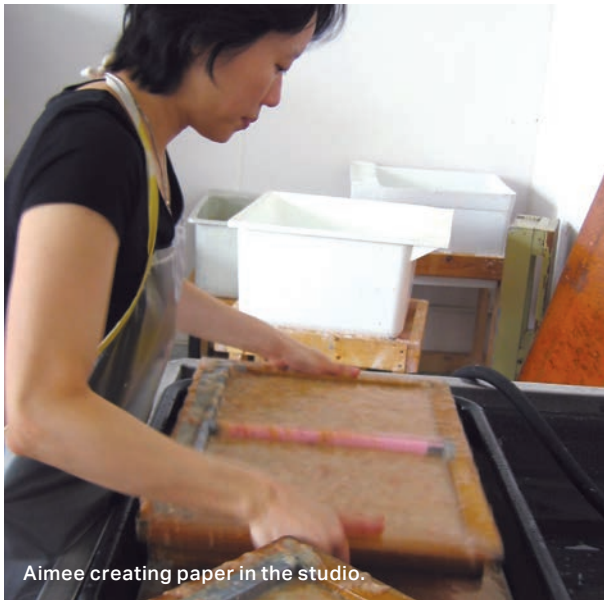
Korean paper, known as hanji, is made from the strong, lustrous fibers of the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree, but Lee uses many other plant sources: other types of paper mulberry (from Thailand, China, Japan, Korea, and Florida), milkweed, sometimes abaca or yucca, and more. A favorite is the long, strong fiber of milkweed stalks that she collects only after the monarch butterflies have left for their annual migration south. She also colors her paper with plant dyes.

KNITTED BOOKS

But let's circle back a bit. Before going to Korea, before learning hanji, Lee began making knitted books, that is, small, precious books with knitted pages. She used long strips of paper, sometimes spun in the Japanese *shifu* way, sometimes barely twisted at all. Purling with loose tension was her technique of choice given the unforgiving, inelastic nature of the paper "yarn."

The pages are naturally ambiguous; the knitted structure is all holes and gaps. The technique informs the content: she makes books about a friendship breakup, about growing up between languages, between cultures. Pages fold back on each other or spill out of their bindings. Some have fragmentary ideas typed on paper and stitched to the pages; some have intricate poems in the spiraling, challenging Italian sestina format. They are perfect examples of meaning and form coming together.

Lee often chooses the complex and rhythmic Italian sestina poetry form for her books.



Aimee creating paper in the studio.

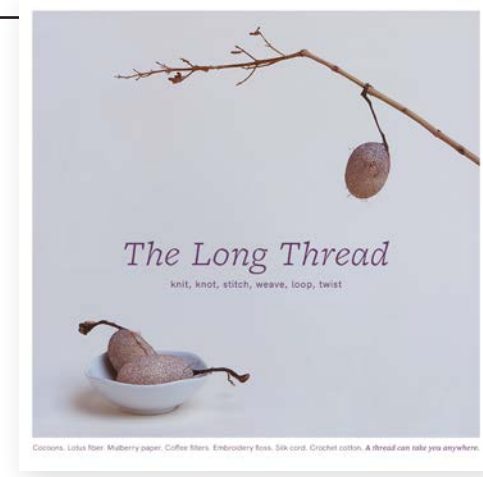
WHAT NEXT?

For all its relative fragility, paper is hard work in the making. It is physically demanding, from harvesting and stripping the inner tree bark, to cooking it to neutralize acidic elements and balance the fiber's pH, to beating and agitating, to forming the sheets, to pressing, parting, and drying, to burnishing by hammering to smooth and compact the fibers. Each step requires meticulous, muscular attention. And the baskets demand great, punishing hand strength.

Lee considers that, given the physical demands of her craft, she has perhaps 20 more good years of active practice, so she spends more time teaching, more time designing and stitching paper garments and collages. She gives more thought to pacing herself and is actively thinking of her next book: about the makers of the hand tools and machines of the craft of papermaking.

In the end, she will listen to the materials to see where they take her, as she has always done. On a visit to Japan, an older papermaker said to her of his earlier years, "I would tell the mulberry to be the paper I wanted it to be . . . But that is going all backward. You must ask the mulberry what it wants to be."

To see more of Lee's work and the learning opportunities she offers, go to www.aimeelee.net.



The Long Thread
knit, knot, stitch, weave, loop, twist
Edited by Linda Ligon
(2020), ISBN: 9781735008806,
longthreadmedia.com

Camel down is a fine fiber with a big halo.

Photos by Matt Graves

I Can See Your Halo, Halo!

KATIE WESTON

I have a weak spot when it comes to fluff. Particularly in the winter months, I can't think of any situation that can't be improved by encasing myself in something with a beautifully soft, fuzzy texture.

There are lots of ways to produce warm, inviting textures. Wool can be spun soft and fluffy, but here, I'm focusing on the superstars of fluff. These are the fibers that deliver fuzz that is completely over the top. This can be done either by spinning the fibers by themselves or by combining them with wool.

FLUFFY FAUNA

So, who are my best non-wool fluff creators? Here are my favorites, in no particular order.

Kid Mohair

Angora goats produce long, curly, shiny mohair locks. Look for the kid grade produced by young goats as this is the softest and least likely to cause prickles. This grade should have a micron count between 20 and 30, so it is pretty compatible with most of the wools we commonly use (for example, Bluefaced Leicester is 24 to 28 microns). The staple length will vary depending on your fiber source and how often the goat was shorn, but it will typically be 3 to 6 inches—again, compatible with most wools. The fluff from this fiber will also have luster, which can give an attractive contrast when used in a project.

Cashmere

Cashmere is another fiber produced by goats, but not a goat of any specific breed. In fact, any breed except Angora goats can produce cashmere. "Cashmere goats" are from genetic lines that have been selected to produce larger quantities of fine down. Much of the world's cashmere comes from goats grazing at high altitudes, such as in the Himalayan Mountains. The insulating down is designed to trap air and protect the animal from the cold. This is a fiber with some controversy, however. The increasing demand for cashmere in commercial garments has led to overstocking and overgrazing in delicate environments, but it is possible to find cashmere from sources that are less harmful to the environment.

If you have sensitive skin, then this is the fluff for you. The micron count of cashmere should be between 14 and 19. The staple length can be quite short, so using enough twist is a must if you want to make an item that won't develop pills. The resulting yarn doesn't tend to be particularly elastic, and the short staple length can make blending a challenge.

Angora

This fiber comes from a variety of rabbit breeds and can be harvested from a rabbit three or four times a year. This is usually done by combing, plucking, or sometimes shearing. If you buy from a breeder, you may have to spend time picking out the stiffer guard hairs, but in combed top form, the processing has been done for you. The fiber itself is incredibly fine, ranging from 8 to 15 microns, and the halo this fiber develops is outstanding—so much so that it's very unusual to use pure angora fiber. Instead, it's often blended, which can help overcome one of angora's drawbacks: very little elasticity.

Camel

A slightly less conventional choice than my first three selections, camel undercoat is fluffy, very soft, and highly insulating. In many ways, it works in a similar way to yak or bison down, which you could easily substitute for camel. Depending on the grade, camel undercoat usually has a short staple length (1 to 3 inches) that can make blending or spinning a challenge, but at 16 to 18 microns, it can make an ideal alternative to cashmere.

By allowing the twist into the drafting zone, you can use the twist to hold these short, often slippery, fibers together as you draft against the twist to create the thickness you desire.

CREATING A SAMPLE SET

For all of these samples, I used commercially prepared fibers. It's possible to buy these fibers raw and process them yourself, but you can also get great results from commercial preparations. And given the challenges of dehairing, letting machinery do the hard work could be seen as advantageous. All my fibers were sourced from UK suppliers; depending on your location in the world you may have access to different sources, whose fibers may differ slightly in their characteristics.

To commence my experiments, I chose to spin the pure fibers with a level of twist I felt was appropriate. I spun all the yarns relatively fine but did not concentrate on matching thicknesses exactly. Many of these fibers have a relatively short staple, so learning a form of point-of-twist draw (also called woolen draw) makes spinning them much easier. The exact spinning method you use doesn't really matter, so long as it's one you can do comfortably.

By allowing the twist into the drafting zone, you can use the twist to hold these short, often slippery, fibers together as you draft against the twist to create the thickness you desire. The nice thing about a halo is it also disguises slight inconsistencies once your yarn is turned into fabric, so be kind to yourself and don't worry about being perfect.

Kid mohair can be a good fiber to start with as it's typically a longer staple than the others described here. I spun my sample from the fold as that gives a better grip for silky, slippery fibers, and it also maximizes the


Kid mohair


Cashmere


Angora


Camel down

Wool and kid mohair

Wool and cashmere

Wool and angora

Wool and camel down

fluff factor. However, if spinning these fibers by themselves is beyond your current skill set, fear not—you can still get that halo by blending with some wool, and that is going to be much easier to spin.

Blends

I blended my fibers with Merino wool in a dark navy to make the halo effect visible and went for a 50/50 mixture of wool and nonwool fibers. This, of course, is one of the variables that you could experiment with endlessly by changing the ratio. For these small samples, I used my Ashford Student handcards with a cloth with 108 tines per inch (tpi). This is a bit denser than the cloth on many cards, and I find it helpful when working with fine, short-stapled fibers like these. The tines are also very thin and flexible, and combined with the light weight of the carders, this makes the blending job much easier.

If I want larger quantities, I reach for my drumcarder. My carder has a coarse 72 tpi cloth, but in my experience, I can still blend fine-stapled fibers and get a perfectly acceptable result with good carding technique. The trick is to create sandwiches—by putting the fluff fiber in between two pieces of wool—and this is true whether you're handcarding or drumcarding. For these halo-producing fibers, you need a light layer of wool on your carder before adding your nonwool fiber and then topping it off with more wool. Don't overload the carding cloth; it just makes

Wool blends are much easier to spin than pure fluff fibers. You can get away with using a short-forward or short-backward draw, though you may still find it useful to let some twist into the drafting zone.

Cashmere skein with wool and angora swatch

Halo is something that develops over time, so if you experiment, don't judge your swatches immediately.

the process slower to get an even mix. For these samples, I chose not to bother about rolling neat rolags and instead made a stack of blended fiber and spun straight from that fiber mass.

Wool blends are much easier to spin than pure fluff fibers. You can get away with using a short-forward or short-backward draw (also called worsted draw), though you may still find it useful to let some twist into the drafting zone. When it comes to twist quantity, you need to use enough to hold the short-staple fibers in place; otherwise, your finished item will shed and pill. However, the wool helps stabilize everything, so you can use slightly less twist than you could if you were spinning only fluff fibers.

RESULTS

All four fibers are very different, and all created a different sort of fluff. Halo is also something that develops over time, so if you experiment, don't judge your swatches immediately. I have a handspun cashmere jumper that has developed the most incredible halo over the past six months; wearing it is exactly like being wrapped up in a cuddly cloud. (Photographs of soft, fuzzy yarns never really do them justice—that elusive halo is hard to capture on camera.)

The pure angora sample feels divine, and it also developed its halo most quickly. The camel and the cashmere are remarkably similar, though the camel does have a few of the longer guard hairs. If you are after a budget-friendly option with fewer concerns about overgrazing, baby camel is a fiber that's well worth considering in your quest for fluff. Pure kid mohair develops a very different sort of halo. It is a shiny, shimmering fiber, so the fluff factor catches the light. Kid is also the most likely fiber on this list to be prickly, so that is something to bear in mind if you have sensitive skin.

The angora/wool blend developed the most halo of all the blended samples, rivaling the pure angora swatch for the fluff factor. The blend was easier to spin than angora by itself, and the wool added elasticity to the yarn. The blended cashmere swatch is also fluffier than the pure swatch, benefiting from a slightly lower twist level that allows the cashmere fibers to escape from the yarn's surface. The same is true of the baby camel swatch. The blended kid mohair has much less halo than the pure swatch. I'd be tempted to make a two-ply yarn using a singles of wool and a singles of mohair; this would reduce carding time and, as with the other blends, it would allow more of the mohair fibers to escape and create that halo.

I tend to have a fairly fearless attitude when it comes to approaching new projects with different materials. I'm usually more than prepared to go at it, see what happens, accept how it turns out, and wear the resulting item until it wears out, treating the entire project as one big lesson. If that concept horrifies you, then swatching and sampling is the way forward. There is only so much you can learn and understand from the written word and images. Items such as cowls are excellent for creating small-scale samples that are useful, while giving you an idea about how a yarn wears and feels and works as fabric. ●

Resources

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North American Cashmere Goat Association, "Cashmere Goat FAQ." cashmeregoatassociation.org.
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Katie Weston is based in the hills of southern Snowdonia, Wales. She runs the fiber business Hilltop Cloud and also teaches online and in person.

Photos by Matt Graves

Through Thick and Thin

Spinning to Reveal New Knitting Effects

SUSAN Z. DOUGLAS

I started knitting as a young newlywed and then discovered the wonders of wool yarn. After 20 years of knitting wool, spinning found me. Now that I have been spinning for more years than the age of my newlywed self, I cannot imagine separating the two crafts. By combining the two, I continue exploring.

As I was recently noodling about, thinking about new knitting stitches to try, I thought, "What if instead of varying colors to achieve an effect, I alternated a skinny yarn with a heavier yarn?" Would this create sheer areas juxtaposed with solid within the knitted fabric? It seemed like an interesting and underexplored concept, so I set off for adventure.

THICK YARN: HOW THICK? HOW SOFT? HOW HEAVY?

I wanted a bold distinction in thickness to contrast with a thin yarn, and I had lots of options in my stash—more than 20 years' worth of options, in fact. Multiple plies, heavy cord-like worsteds from earlier days, puffy soft two-ply yarns . . . I found plenty in the range of 40 to 60 yards per ounce that would make interesting contestants. I ended up choosing a light, puffy two-ply yarn made of a mix of wools. Fortunately, my hangtag notes on the skein reminded me about how it was spun.

Spinning the Thick Yarn

The yarn consisted of a mix of undyed commercially prepared fiber—Merino top with smaller amounts of Cheviot and Polypay—and just enough commercially dyed black Corriedale to achieve a light smoke-color yarn. I remember that, at the time, I was trying to conserve the Merino by adding the Cheviot and Polypay, but in this case, it worked to the yarn's advantage, giving it a bit of body and bounce that it might not otherwise have had if I'd used only Merino.

To release their crimp and energy, I rinsed all the fibers in hot water, allowed them to air-dry, and then

What if instead of varying colors to achieve an effect, I alternated a skinny yarn with a heavier yarn? Would this create sheer areas juxtaposed with solid within the knitted fabric?

blended them three times through my drumcarder. I spun using a very low speed on my HansenCrafts classic miniSpinner (nine o'clock on the dial) and a modified long draw. I concentrated on letting a consistent amount of fiber enter the twist area and then wound on quickly to avoid adding too much twist. I wound the singles onto two weaving bobbins for plying. Plying from bobbins works easily for me, with none of the inherent problems possible when plying from a center-pull cake.

SKINNY YARN: HOW SKINNY IS SKINNY?

I didn't have anything in my stash, or in my experience even, that matched what I contemplated for my thin yarn. I had an ounce of some precious two-ply qiviut yarn that I had spun at about 187 yards per ounce, but I wanted something thinner. How thin beyond that could I go?

I experimented with a bit of undyed Targhee top blended with a small amount of commercially dyed Corriedale fiber, managing to make a two-ply yarn of just over 300 yards per ounce. It made me laugh to coax 300 yards of two-ply yarn out of a measly 1 ounce of fiber. I reckoned that this yarn was plenty thin enough for what I needed to contrast with my thick yarn. If you want to follow along with your own experiments, the thinness is up to you. The contrast with the thicker yarn is what is of interest here.

Susan used handspun laceweight and worsted-weight yarns to create new effects with familiar knitted stitches.

Spinning the Fine Yarn

First, I blended nonrinsed Targhee and Corriedale (about 90% and 10% by weight, respectively) three times through my drumcarder. Not only did this thoroughly blend the fibers and colors, it formed my favorite spinning preparation—a light, soft batt. I like to spin while the batt is still fresh, within a week or so of it being carded, since day-to-day humidity changes here in the northeast can affect the how the fibers grab.

I spun with a modified long draw by pulling out the fibers as the twist entered, pinching and holding the finished yarn 6 to 8 inches from the point of twist, and pulling it toward the orifice a few inches at a time. Holding the yarn at a distance from the point of twist

Not only did this thoroughly blend the fibers and colors, it formed my favorite spinning preparation—a light, soft batt.

ensured that the yarn just formed was strong enough to hold together. I kept my eye on the fiber being pulled from the point of twist, making sure it looked like a consistent amount for the thin yarn I was trying to produce. I used my HansenCrafts classic miniSpinner and a fast speed (12 o'clock on the dial) because it takes a bit of twist to make a fine yarn. I used a take-up as light as I could manage because I didn't want the yarn to pull in before all the needed twist was inserted. I transferred

Top: Thick yarn and batt. For the sample batt here, Susan used 14 grams of Merino and 2 grams each of the Cheviot, Polypay, and Corriedale (shown below) to make a 20-gram batt with a 70/10/10/10 ratio. *Bottom:* Thin yarn and batt. Susan took 18 grams of unwashed, undyed commercially combed Targhee top and blended it with 2 grams of commercially dyed black Corriedale fiber for a 90/10 ratio.

the singles to two weaving bobbins and plied on my Ashford Traveller wheel because the e-spinner was busy. I treadled away, making sure to add enough ply twist so the finished yarn wasn't straggly.

CHOOSING SUITABLE KNITTING PATTERNS

Editor's note: Instructions and detailed images of the stitch patterns discussed are on page 42.

Garter Stitch and Garter-Stitch Ridges

My first thought was garter stitch, alternating single rows of thick and thin yarn. Working back and forth turned out to be a bit problematic, but I was delighted by the resulting fabric. The ridges and heaviness common to garter stitch all but disappeared, replaced by a new homogeneous mystery fabric. I then tried one ridge (two knitted rows) of heavy garter stitch alternating with two rows of sheer stockinette stitch for a nice stable fabric with a bit of airiness to it.

Box and Honeycomb

Next, I tried to imagine alternating thick and thin stitches throughout, as in Fair Isle knitting, but I quickly realized that the heavier yarn carried behind the thinner yarn would show through the work, negating the effect I wanted to achieve. I reasoned that slip stitches might be suitable for the alternating thick/thin yarn concept. If a heavier yarn was slipped when working thin rows, it would extend the thick yarn over the sheer area but wouldn't impede the transparency behind it.

Three/One Slip Stitch

Another slip-stitch experiment involved less distinction between the thin and thick areas for a more complex-looking fabric. The vertical lines created by columns of slipped stitches all but disappear in the backlit swatch.

Half Brioche

Lastly, I felt that brioche should be represented in the testing. I tried a simple pattern that alternated two rows of heavy yarn with two rows of thin. The resulting fabric spread widthwise and was row rich, as is

usual with brioche. I found the piece to be docile and stable, with a good bit of overall airiness attributable to the thin yarn.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

I'm not done yet. I want to try contrasting colors and yarn weights, tighter and looser gauges, and alternating needle sizes within a pattern according to yarn thickness. I want to find what other suitable stitch patterns are out there. Slip stitches are especially intriguing, but I'm also curious about how more basic knit/purl patterns will react to alternating thin and thick yarns.

What would happen if the difference in yarn thickness was widened or narrowed? Perhaps I could stretch my bit of soft qiviut by alternating it with a thicker wool yarn that would lend body and structure, like that first garter-stitch fabric, for example. Intarsia might be interesting. What about darned squares worked on a gossamer background? Sheer short-rows might be fun on a heavier background.

Perhaps I will build up lots of thin, thin handspun yarn in my stash, a distinct possibility since it is so much fun to make. Then there's always the option of using thin yarns in multiples or maybe carried along with a kid mohair commercially spun yarn. Oh, and there's crochet to consider.

Susan Z. Douglas is newly retired, and although dishes still need to be washed and floors must be swept, at least occasionally, she is now free to chase rabbits for *almost* as much time as she likes. She enjoys her fine adventures wandering in their warrens.

Create new textures with familiar knitted stitch patterns.

Photos by Matt Graves

Through Thick and Thin

A Stitch Guide

SUSAN Z. DOUGLAS

Most spinners are familiar with thick-and-thin yarns, which repeatedly undulate between gauges. When knitted, these yarns create varying degrees of bumpy, textured fabric. What happens when we separate the two, creating a thick yarn and a thin yarn for intentional texture in knitted fabrics? After blending and spinning (see page 38), I tried several knit/purl patterns, slip-stitch motifs, and brioche to see what would happen.

THE SWATCHES

I chose to match the colors of the yarns to emphasize the effect of the contrasting thicknesses in the knitting patterns. For the sake of conformity, I used the same needle size (US 7 [4.5 mm]) to knit most of the swatches. I chose this needle size to correspond with the thicker yarn, and I used the same size for knitting the thin yarn.

In these instructions, A refers to the thick yarn, and B refers to the thin yarn. The transparency of the swatches is one of the most important aspects of this technique, so the stitches are shown both with and without backlighting.

Some of the patterns that are worked back and forth with single rows of alternating yarns require that double-pointed (dpn) or circular (cir) needles be used. This is indicated when the pattern requires. If not specified, single-pointed needles can be used.

> Visit **spinoffmagazine.com/spin-off-abbreviations** for terms you don't know.

Knit/Purl Patterns

Garter Stitch

The simplest pattern, at least in concept, is garter stitch. Using alternating rows of thick and thin yarns takes a little more effort, but the resulting fabric is worth it.

Use dpn or cir to work the pattern back and forth. CO any number of sts.

Row 1 (RS) With A, knit; do not turn. Slide sts to other end of needle.

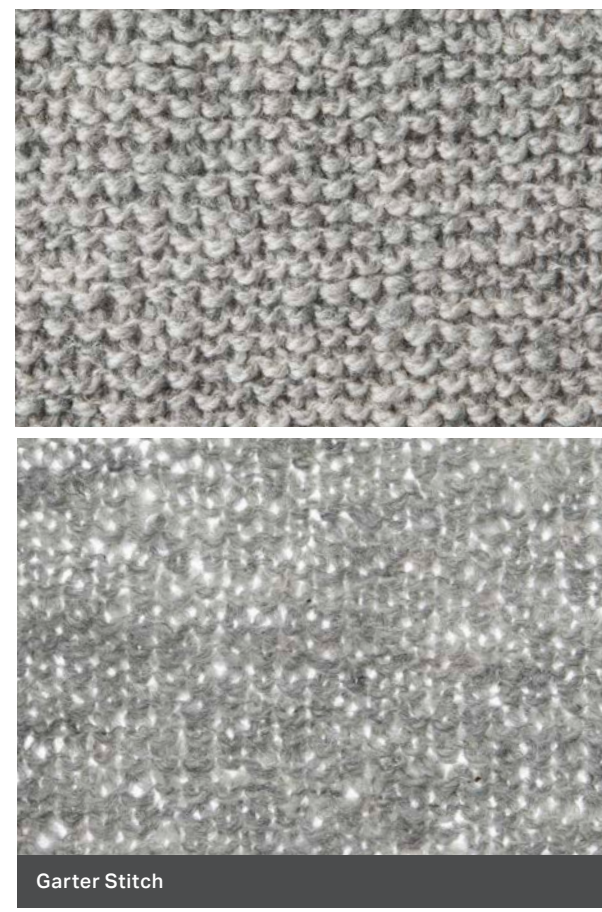
Row 2 (RS) With B, purl; turn.

Row 3 (WS) With A, purl; do not turn. Slide sts to other end of needle.

Row 4 (WS) With B, knit; turn.

Rep Rows 1–4 for patt.

(Note: To work in the round, knit one round with A and purl one round with B; it's as easy as that.)



Garter Stitch

Garter-Stitch Ridges

Another simple pattern, this one consists of a garter-stitch ridge (two rows) in thick yarn followed by two stockinette rows in thin yarn.

CO any number of sts.

Rows 1 and 2 With A, knit.

Row 3 (RS) With B, knit.

Row 4 (WS) With B, purl.

Rep Rows 1–4 for patt.

Slipped-Stitch Patterns

The next three patterns include slipped stitches. I found them to be easily executed, and they produced lightweight and intriguingly textured fabric. The nonpublic sides were interesting as well. Single-pointed needles can be used for all. Making charts of the patterns might be helpful if you wish to translate them to rounds.

Boxes

CO a multiple of 3 sts.

Rows 1 and 2 With A, knit.

Row 3 (RS) With B, k1, *sl 1 pwise wyb, k2; rep from * to last 2 sts, sl 1 pwise wyb, k1.

Row 4 (WS) With B, p1, *sl 1 pwise wyf, p2; rep from * to last 2 sts, sl 1 pwise wyf, p1.

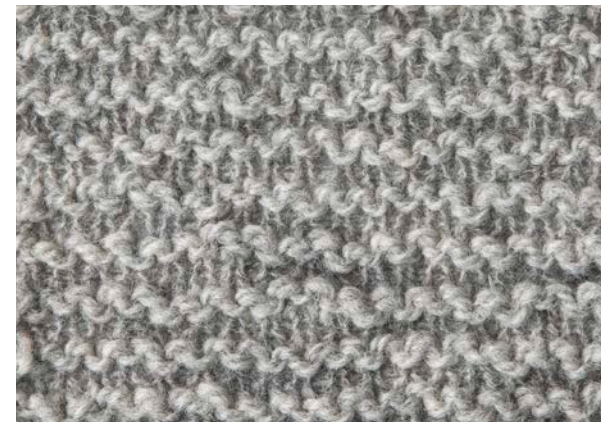
Rep Rows 1–4 for patt.

Project idea! Boxes Scarf

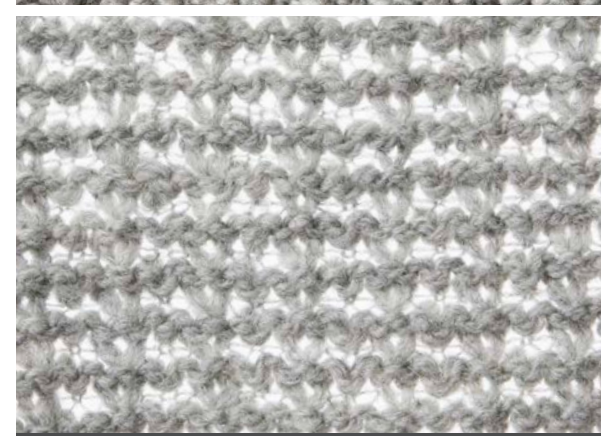
1. Spin a fine, high-twist, two-ply silk yarn.
2. Spin a DK- or worsted-weight yarn in a soft, bouncy wool.

Knit a swatch, trying several needle sizes until you find the one you like best. Wash your swatch and allow it to dry before measuring stitch gauge. Determine stitches per inch.

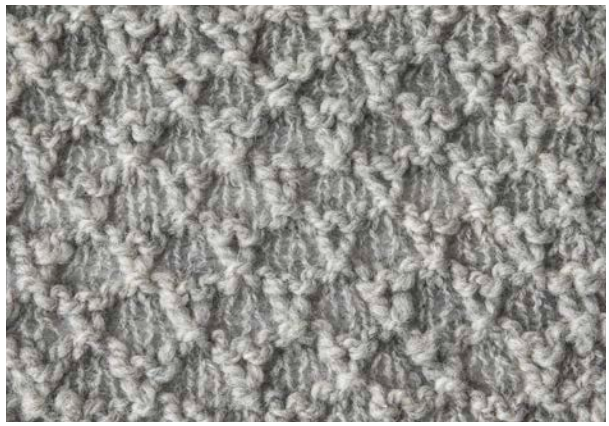
Decide how wide you would like your scarf to be—let's say 8 inches. Next, multiply the number of stitches per inch from your swatch by 8. Round the resulting number up to a multiple of three. Cast on and get knitting!



Garter-Stitch Ridges



Boxes



Honeycomb

Three/One Slip

Can You Imagine?

- Try the Garter Ridges pattern with a fine yarn in gray wool and a heavy yarn that is a vibrant, chain-plied color-shifting beauty.
- Try Honeycomb in handspun cottons. Choose two different natural colors for a gentle palette of velvety soft yarns.
- What would happen if the heavier yarn were textured? What would slub yarns or core-spun singles do in the different patterns?

Honeycomb

CO a multiple of 4 sts plus 1.

Rows 1 and 2 With A, knit.

Row 3 (RS) With B, sl 1 pwise wyb, *k3, sl 1 pwise wyb; rep from * to end.

Row 4 (WS) With B, sl 1 pwise wyf, *p3, sl 1 pwise wyf; rep from * to end.

Rows 5 and 6 Rep Rows 3–4.

Rows 7 and 8 With A, knit.

Row 9 With B, k2, *sl 1 pwise wyb, k3; rep from * to last 3 sts, sl 1 pwise wyb, k2.

Row 10 With B, p2, *sl 1 pwise wyf, p3; rep from * to last 3 sts, sl 1 pwise wyf, p2.

Rows 11 and 12 Rep Rows 9–10.

Rep Rows 1–12 for patt.

Three/One Slip

I bumped up one needle size for this one because of its tendency to tighten.

CO a multiple of 4 sts plus 3.

Foundation row (WS) With A, purl.

Row 1 (RS) With A, k3, *sl 1 pwise wyb, k3; rep from * to end.

Row 2 (WS) With A, p3, *sl 1 pwise wyf, p3; rep from * to end.

Row 3 With B, k1, *sl 1 pwise wyb, k3; rep from * to last 2 sts, sl 1 pwise wyb, k1.

Row 4 With B, p1, *sl 1 pwise wyf, p3; rep from * to last 2 sts, sl 1 pwise wyf, p1.

Rep Rows 1–4 for patt.

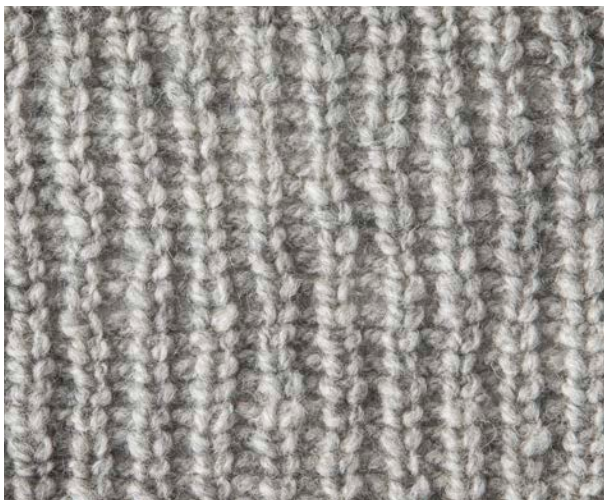
Project Idea! Brioche Cowl

1. Spin a smooth, fine, two-ply yarn. Try a handpainted fiber with variegated color.

2. Spin a DK- or worsted-weight yarn in a high-crimp wool in a solid color.

Cast on the desired number of stitches using a provisional cast-on method. This can be as many or few stitches as you like as long as it is an odd number, as indicated in the stitch guide *(right)*.

Knit until desired length, ending with Row 4. Leave sts on the needle. Remove provisional cast-on and place sts on a separate needle. Graft using Kitchener stitch to join.



Half Brioche

Brioche

Half Brioche

It will help if you're familiar with brioche for working the yarnover/slip movement and the brk and brp. Dpn or cir is required to work the pattern back and forth.

Yfsl1yo: Yarn forward between needles, sl 1 pwise wyf, yarn over needle to back.

Sl1yof: Sl 1 pwise wyf, yarn over needle to back, then between needles to front.

Brk: Knit st tog with its companion yo.

Brp: Purl st tog with its companion yo.

CO an odd number of sts.

Foundation row (WS) With A, knit; turn.

Row 1 (RS) With A, k1, *yfsl1yo, k1; rep from * to end; do not turn. Slide sts to other end of needle.

Row 2 (RS) With B, k1, *brp, k1; rep from * to end; turn.

Row 3 (WS) With A, p1, *sl1yof, p1; rep from * to end; do not turn. Slide sts to other end of needle.

Row 4 (WS) With B, p1, *brk, p1; rep from * to end; turn.

Rep Rows 1–4 for patt. ●

Resources

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The Harmony Guide to Knitting Stitches. London: Lyric Books, 1983.

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Photos by Matt Graves

Adding Beads to Bulky Singles

MARY BERRY

If you are a spinner who is drawn to sparkly beads and baubles and who loves to spin a bulky or thick-and-thin singles, this technique is for you! Preparing the beads and managing the technique might feel fiddly, but the extra work goes quickly once you get the hang of it, and the results are worth the effort.

I use two techniques when adding beads to thick singles yarns. Which technique I use depends on the size of the hole in the bead, but in both cases, I use plastic dental-floss threaders—available at most pharmacies—to thread the beads on tufts of fiber so that they can easily be added to the bulky singles yarn.

ADDING BEADS WITH TINY HOLES

Beads with tiny holes are the easiest to add to a bulky yarn. To thread the beads on fiber tufts, begin by pulling out a 3-inch tuft of fiber from the top or roving that is enough to fill but not jam the orifice of the bead. Using a floss threader, fold only the smallest bit of the tips of the fiber through the loop end. Truly, only three or four fibers right at the tip of the tuft are enough. Thread the straight end of the threader through the bead and transfer it to the fiber, pushing it until about 1 inch of fiber is on one side of the bead and 2 inches on the other. Repeat until you have a group of threaded beads prepared. Now you're ready to spin.

1 Spin about a yard of bulky singles yarn to get started.

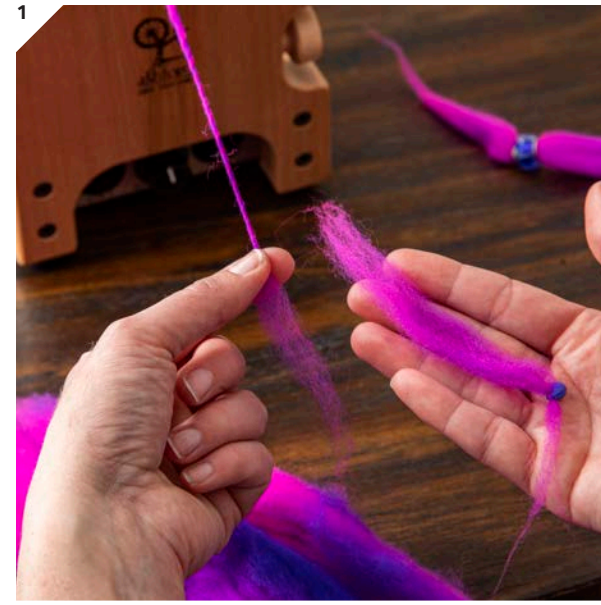
2 When you are ready to add a bead, stop adding twist. Join the longer end of the tuft to your roving. Add twist slowly to secure the join. *At the same time,* pinch the short tuft of fiber so that it does not gain twist.

3 Once the leading join is secure, rejoin your fiber source to the shorter tuft on the near side of the bead. Be sure to join enough fiber to continue spinning a bulky singles yarn. Because your yarn is larger than the hole in the bead, the beads will stay where you place them in your finished yarn.

Pro Tips

- Don't let go of your fiber supply during or right after adding a bead. The escaping twist will undo all your fancy handiwork! If you must walk away from your wheel, secure the yarn by wrapping it around a peg or hook to keep the twist in place.
- Plan where and how frequently to place your beads. Lampwork beads add considerable weight to the yarn. Because I weave with my handspun yarn, I add heavier beads to the handspun singles that will form the beginning and end of woven shawls where I would like additional weight.
- Small beads typically add very little weight and can generally be spread throughout your yarn and added more closely together.

1



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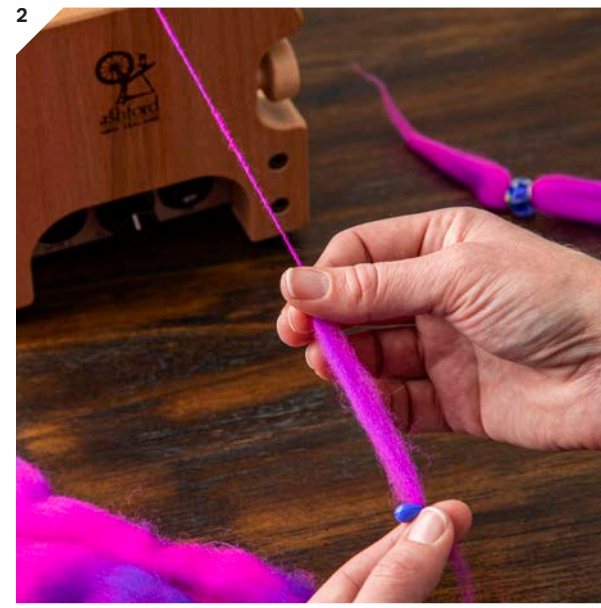

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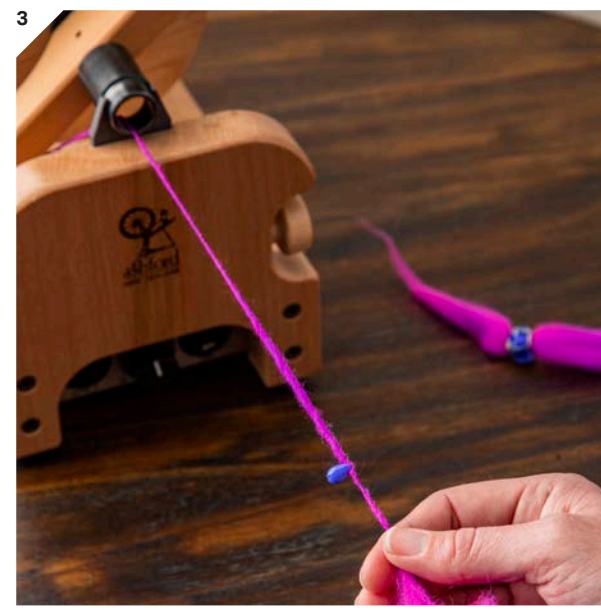


Full Your Beaded Yarn

If you are going to spin this style of yarn often, I recommend making a PVC niddy-noddy to help with wet-finishing. Unlike a wooden niddy-noddy, PVC can be fully immersed in water.

After winding your beaded yarn onto a waterproof niddy-noddy, give it a plunge into a bucket of hot water followed by a plunge in very cold water. This will full the yarn to settle the twist and increase durability while keeping the yarn organized and under tension.

Alternatively, you can cover a wooden niddy-noddy with plastic wrap and spray your yarn with hot water to finish. Either way, allow the yarn to dry before removing the yarn from the niddy-noddy.

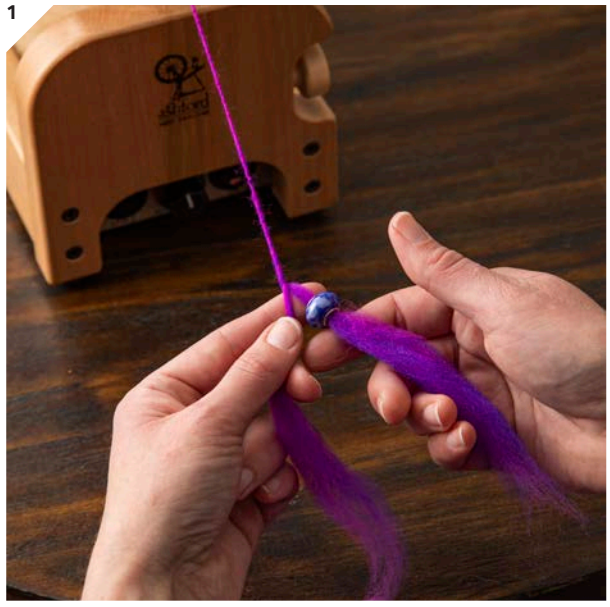
Do not put ties on the skein until it is dry but do put ties on before removing. Beaded singles yarn makes spectacular tangles should you happen to drop an untied skein!

Why full your beaded singles? The term "fulling" when used by spinners usually refers to processes that increase fiber entanglement and beginning stages of felting.

Fulling can improve your singles yarns in two important ways. First, as the fibers entangle, any active twist in the yarn is stabilized. Secondly, yarn with a fulled surface is more durable. In this case, fulling helps the singles yarn in general and strengthens the fibery joins around the beads.

Use a dental-floss threader to pull fiber through the beads before spinning.

1



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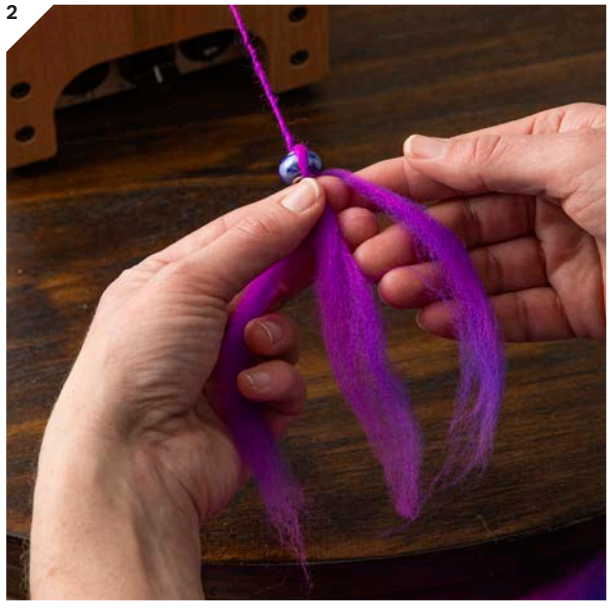

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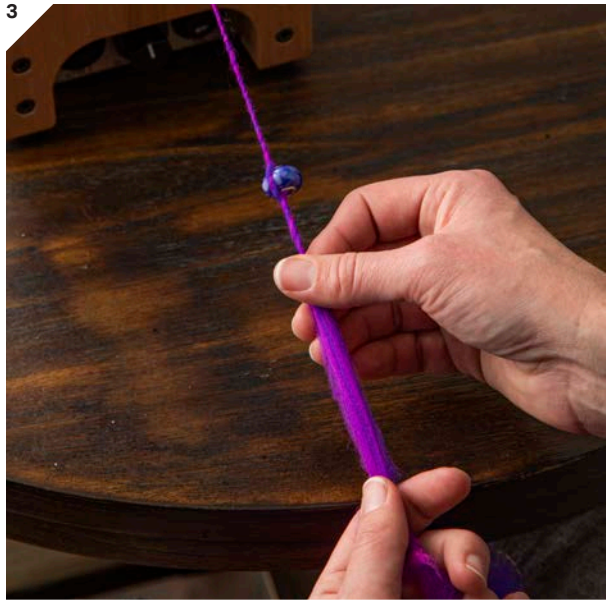


ADDING BEADS WITH LARGE HOLES

Big, bright, beautiful beads with large center holes are easy to set up but fiddly to spin. This technique is a bit different from the first method because a bead with a big hole must be anchored with twisted fiber both through and around the bead. The objective is to have twist in the fiber outside your bead as well as through the bead, with the joins tight against both sides of the bead. Believe me, reading about how to do it is harder than actually doing it!

Start by pulling out a sizable tuft of fiber from your roving or top with an overall length of 3 to 4 inches. This should be enough to fill the bead orifice but not jam it. Using a floss threader, pull the fiber through until the bead rests in the center of the fiber strip.

1 Spin a yard or so of singles yarn and stop when you're ready to add a bead. You will be working with the fiber supply in one hand and your bead tuft in the other. Join your beaded tuft to the bulky singles. Make sure that the fiber supply is sufficiently long enough to go around the outside of the bead and rejoin on the other side.

2 Shift your hands so that the fiber supply is directly in front of you and able to accumulate twist, while the beaded tuft is 45 degrees to one side. Next, shift your hands so the bead tuft is centered and under more tension and the fiber supply now wraps around the bead. Split the bead tuft into two and insert the fiber supply.

3 Add twist slowly to join as you begin to draft the fiber to your preferred gauge.

Mary Berry is the resident teacher and owner of the Fancy Fibers Fiber Arts Center in Farmersville, Texas, where she teaches spinning, weaving, dyeing, and rug hooking. She is happiest when she sees her students succeed in following their creative visions.

The Many Twists and Turns of **Textured Cables**

BETH SHOWALTER

From top: multiple-grist yarn, scribbled yarn, wool/bamboo blend, and bouclé

Photos by Matt Graves unless otherwise noted

In my spinning practice, I like combining a variety of techniques and skills—both simple and complex—to create interesting yarns. The classic four-stranded cabled yarn structure is a perfect starting point for intentional yarn design, and I am fascinated by the many ways that texture can be incorporated in the constructions of cabled yarns. Cabled yarns have at least four plies and two plying passes, all of which can be modified in different combinations, so there is an endless diversity of yarns waiting to be explored.

CLASSIC FOUR-STRANDED CABLED YARN STRUCTURE

A standard cabled yarn is constructed with at least three layers of twist and has a texture unique to this yarn structure.

A cabled yarn can be spun in either direction, depending on whether you begin with Z-spun (clockwise) singles or S-spun (counterclockwise) singles. Both structures will work well, but depending on your textile construction method, you may find that one version works better for you than the other. Personally, if I know that I am going to spin a large knitting project with cabled yarn, I design the yarn to end with a layer of S twist (last pass through the wheel is to the left); otherwise, my yarn will tend to untwist as I am knitting. Before you commit to spinning for a large project, try spinning yarns with both twist directions and make samples using the intended textile structure to see if there is a difference for you.

In the last decade or so, there have been a number of excellent books and articles published that outline how to spin a standard four-stranded cabled yarn. If you are just coming to spinning cabled yarns for the first time, I recommend doing a bit of background reading and spinning. There are several approaches to managing and measuring twist, and I suggest experimenting with different methods. Gayle Vallance's article in *Spin Off* Summer 2021 outlines three approaches, ranging from intuitive to technical (see Resources). Here, I will share the approach that I use.

BUILDING TEXTURE IN YOUR CABLED YARNS

Textural design techniques vary in both difficulty and

Classic Cable Recipe

Stage 1: Fiber Selection

Fibers respond to twist in different ways. A crimpy wool can hold more twist than a combed silk. All fibers can be used to create cabled yarns, but if you are new to cables, wool in a smooth, worsted preparation is a good way to start.

Stage 2: Singles Twist

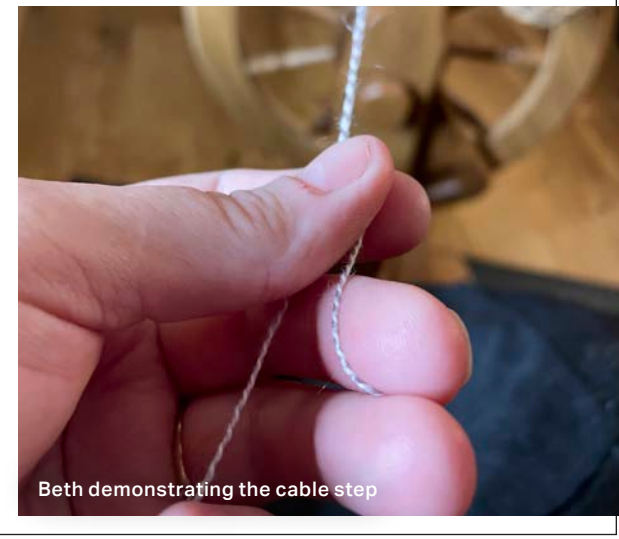
Start with the wheel ratio you would typically use to create a regular two-ply yarn with the fiber you are using. Spin at least two singles on separate bobbins in readiness for the next stage. (This will become a four-ply yarn, so the singles yardage should be a bit more than four times that of the finished yarn.)

Stage 3: Ply Twist

Ply the singles together using the ratio you would choose to make a standard two-ply yarn with these singles. Move the bobbin of plied yarn back to your lazy kate and take the two-ply yarn through your wheel a second time in the same direction (plying) using the same ratio and rate of speed. Spot-check the amount of twist by pulling a section of yarn off your bobbin and letting it twist on itself; make any wheel adjustments if needed. The two-ply yarn should now have about double the ply twist. When you have overplied about half of the yarn, switch to a second bobbin. You should now have two two-ply yarns on two bobbins.

Stage 4: Cable Twist

Cable-ply the two two-ply yarns in the same direction you spun the singles. ***Tip:*** Try using two lazy kates, one on either side of you with a bobbin, to help manage the active twist. At the end of this step, you have a finished cable-plied yarn.



Beth demonstrating the cable step

Courtesy of Beth Showalter

Fiber-prep texture: (*from top*) Corriedale/sari silk threads blend plied with Corriedale and then cabled; superwash Merino, ramie, angora, and alpaca blended and plied with Merino and then cabled;superwash Merino, ramie, and alpaca blended and plied with Merino, then cabled

The way the plies pop into a cable in the final ply is magical. Properly executed cable yarns are long wearing and round, and when knit, they provide superb stitch definition. Be forewarned: it takes at least four plies to create a cable, so if the project that you are planning is large, the time invested in creating these yarns is significant.

—Sarah Anderson, *The Spinner's Book of Yarn Designs*

visual effect. Even simple techniques can create subtle or dramatic textural effects. Choose a technique that matches your skills, and as you gain more confidence, try another technique or two. The end results are well worth your efforts.

The following sample sets are grouped by the stages of the spinning process and correspond to the cabled-yarn recipe used here, focusing on Stages 1 through 3. I hope these explorations inspire you to try your own!

Stage 1: Textured Fiber Prep

This is the first stop along the way to subtly incorporating more texture in your spinning. The following two fiber-prep methods are relatively easy to try using a pair of handcards, or you can use a drumcarder for a larger project.

Blend textured inclusions. I typically blend noils, various types of sari silk, threads, or other inclusions with a base fiber, such as wool top. Sandwich the inclusions between layers of the main fiber and lightly blend the fiber to distribute.

Blend diverse fibers. You can blend fibers with different

characteristics but similar staple lengths, such as wool and bamboo or tussah silk. The less you blend, the more you will see individual fibers in the final yarn, creating visual texture.

Stage 2: Textured Singles

Adding some texture to your handspun singles is an easy way to create a strong impact.

Spin singles from different fibers. Fibers with different visual qualities and characters will create contrast and texture in your finished yarn. For example, spinning one singles with a shiny fiber such as silk will create contrast when it is plied with a down fiber, which tends to have a matte appearance.

Spin singles of different grists. A fine singles and a heavier singles plied together will create a gently undulating yarn. When two of these yarns are plied together, they create a bumpy but regular texture.

Add slubs into one or more singles. A singles with slubs paired with a consistent singles creates a fun texture. This kind of yarn can either be cabled with itself or used as a fine two-ply. Each produces a different texture. (See page 84 for a slub tutorial.)

Stage 3: Plying Techniques for Texture

Plying techniques can add a lot of textural personality to your cabled yarns! I will typically add more twist (use a higher ratio on my wheel) when spinning the

When a classic four-strand cable yarn is formed into a stitch, it acts quite differently than a plied yarn—the yarn opens up and lies side by side as if it were two two-ply yarns.The result is a smooth, silky surface.

—Judith MacKenzie,
The Practical Spinner's Guide: Rare Luxury Fibers

Textured singles: (*from top*) blended Merino/angora singles plied with tussah silk and then cabled; heavy-gauge Corriedale singles and fine-gauge sari silk singles plied and then cabled; blended Corriedale/tussah silk singles plied with a Corriedale slub singles and then cabled

Textured plying techniques: (*from top left*) blended Corriedale/sari silk threads spun into a heavy singles that was spiral-plied with fine tussah silk singles and then cabled; blended superwash Merino, ramie, and alpaca spun into a heavy singles that was bouclé-plied with a fine ramie singles and then cabled; blended mohair and wool singles that was bouclé-plied with ramie and then cabled

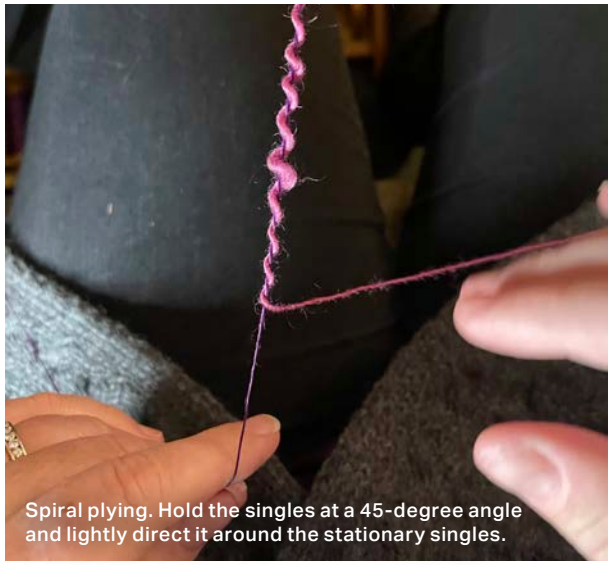
From top right: wool slub singles that was spiral-plied with a fine tussah silk singles as the slubs were pushed up into beehives before cabling; and Merino/sari silk singles that was scribble-plied with tussah silk and then cabled

singles that I intend to hold under tension (the singles that the other will wrap around). The reason for this is to give my hands more time to apply the texture in these ply methods; otherwise, the singles under tension may untwist and drift apart. You will likely need to spin more of the singles you use to apply texture in the two-ply.

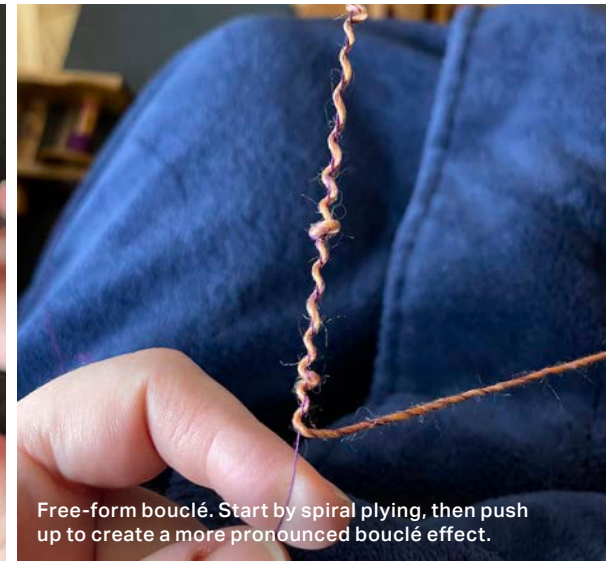
Spiral plying. Hold one singles under tension (usually the thinner one) and let the other singles spiral around the first at a consistent angle of twist, about 90 degrees or so.

Free-form bouclé. Hold one singles under tension, let the other singles spiral around the first as for a spiral yarn, and then push the spiral up at intervals. More pushing creates more loops and texture. If you are plying a slub yarn, try pushing up the slubs to create cocoons or coils.

Scribbled yarn (also called wraps or Turkish knots). Hold one singles under tension (spun with extra singles twist) and direct the other singles back and forth along the first singles; you determine how many times you will scribble the singles back and forth and how often wraps occur.



Spiral plying. Hold the singles at a 45-degree angle and lightly direct it around the stationary singles.



Free-form bouclé. Start by spiral plying, then push up to create a more pronounced bouclé effect.

Scribbled plying, also called Turkish knots, is created when the wrapping yarn is moved up and down over sections to create wrapped areas.

Scribble cabled yarn in process, showing finished wrapped area during plying.

Courtesy of Beth Showalter

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES!

These techniques are a solid starting point for creating additional texture in your cabled yarns. As you design your four-stranded cabled yarns, you have many opportunities to incorporate texture. Here are a few prompts:

- Will all four singles be spun from the same fiber?
- Will all four strands be of the same grist, or will you use multiple grists or uneven grists?
- Will you add texture(s) with plying effects?
- Will both two-ply yarns use the same kind of singles or three or four different singles?
- How does the yarn look when you use it in knitting, weaving, crochet, and more?

As you construct various yarns, try to remember to save yarn samples, make swatches, and make short notes about what worked and what needs to be adjusted so that you have a record of your experiments and thought process for your future self. There are many more textural techniques to explore!

Resources

Anderson, Sarah. *The Spinner's Book of Yarn Designs: Techniques for Creating 80 Yarns.* North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing, 2012.

Vallance, Gayle. "Cabling: Opening the Door to Designer Yarns." *Spin Off,* Summer 2021, 78–83.

Beth Showalter completed the Ontario Handweavers and Spinners Spinning Certificate Program in 2014 with distinction and is now an instructor in the program. She is a spinner who enjoys experimenting, sharing ideas, learning new techniques, and following spinning tangents. See more at bethshowalter.ca.

Multiple-grist cabled yarn featuring thicker Merino singles contrasted with finely spun tussah singles

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Photos by Matt Graves

Mod Handspun Pillow

KATE LARSON

I am a spinner who loves making all sorts of yarns—from fine to bulky, smooth to textured. However, I tend to knit with traditional yarns for fine-gauge lace shawls and Fair Isle sweaters, so I'm always looking for great ways to use the handspun yarns that I like spinning but not wearing. Since most of us are spending more time at home these days, I decided to knit a bright, cheerful pillow that celebrates the many textures of our spinning lives.

The pattern included here is written for the heavy worsted/light chunky yarns that I used, but the concept is a recipe that you can easily adapt to almost any combo of yarn and pillow form you wish. The pattern starts with a knitted square, and stitches are picked up on three sides. The square is then worked outward in the round with increases in each corner. You can adjust the number of stitches in the central square or the number of body rounds to make it your own.

SPINNING NOTES

My pillow uses two very different textured yarns that are both basic two-ply yarns. The first is a two-ply spiral yarn—one of the easiest textured yarns to make. I started with singles of different gauges. The heavier, more textured singles began as a stunning batt made by Stacey Croomes of Stacey's Stash (learn more in *Spin Off*, Fall 2020). I pulled the generous batt into chunky strips and spun a lightly slubbed singles with moderate to high twist. The second singles was a fine, smooth yarn spun from Abundant Earth Fiber's hand-dyed US Merino. When these two singles were plied together with even tension on both, I created a lightly textured spiral. Spiral yarns—more than most yarn constructions—can change considerably when washed or steamed. As the fibers relax and open, the singles settle into place. Washing a quick sample of even a yard or two will give you loads of info.

The second yarn is special to me because I used lamb locks from my own little sheep, Ruby. After washing Ruby's fleece, I lightly teased handfuls of the short locks to start. Curly lamb locks like these, which range between 2½ and 3 inches in length, can be tricky to work with. I teased the locks carefully to start to open the fibers but not lose too much of the distinct curl. By spinning into a worsted-weight or larger yarn, I avoided those annoying thin spots that occur when working with mostly intact locks. I added plenty of singles twist to prevent drifting. The textured singles, when plied into a two-ply yarn were quite stable. I washed the yarn in warm water, giving it some firm squishes and a bit of agitation to gently loosen more of the little curls to the surface of the yarn. While it was still wet, it took two trips through my backdoor indigo pot.

I keep this little pillow in my spinning chair at home, and I smile each time I sit down to spin. I think of sweet Ruby as a lamb, I think of Stacey's creative journey, and I think about my life as a spinner. I hope you will be inspired to spin your own story, too!

MATERIALS

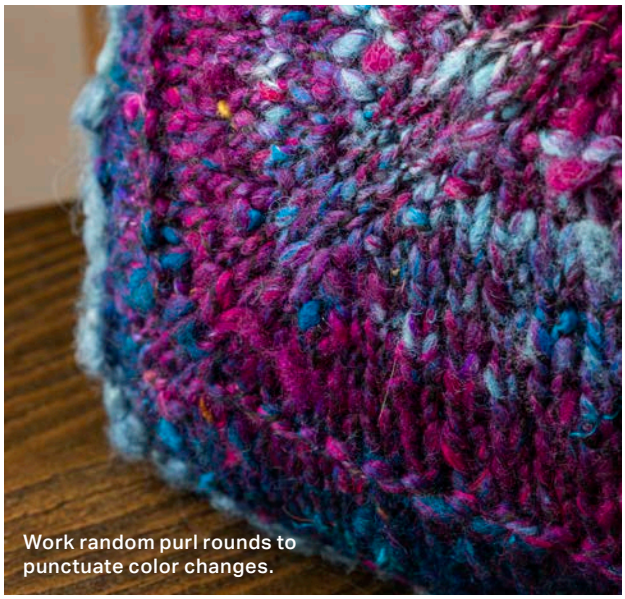
Fiber MC: 2½ oz Stacey's Fiber Stash Spinning Batt (Cormo, tussah, silk noil, and sari silk); 1 oz Abundant Earth Fiber hand-dyed US Merino in Moss; CC: 6 oz indigo-dyed Border Leicester locks.
Yarn MC: Textured 2-ply; 120 yd; 550 ypp; 5 wpi; worsted weight. CC: Lockspun; 110 yd; 350 ypp; 7 wpi; chunky weight.
Needles Size 6 (4 mm); see Notes. Adjust needle size if necessary to obtain the correct gauge.
Notions Markers (m); spare cir needle or waste yarn for holding sts (see Notes); tapestry needle; 18" of ⅛" ribbon or similar; 14" square pillow form.
Gauge 16 sts and 24 rnds = 4" in St st with MC after blocked and on pillow. Gauge is not critical.
Finished Size 14" × 14" square when slightly stretched over a 14" square pillow form.

Visit **spinoffmagazine.com/spin-off-abbreviations** for terms you don't know.

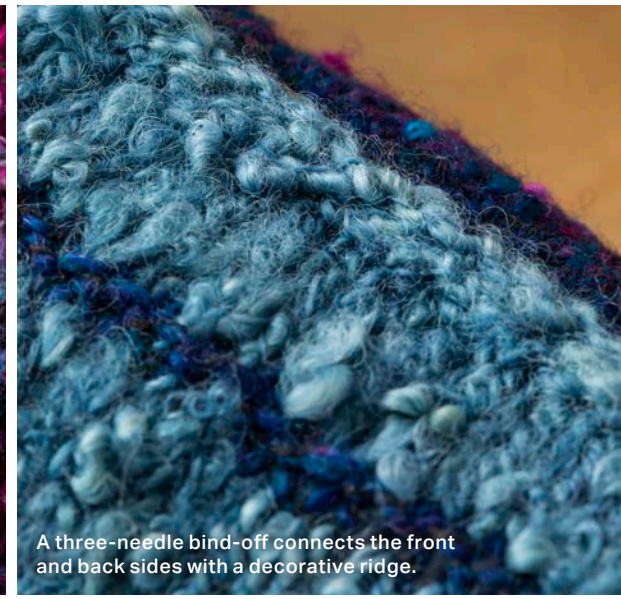
Notes

- Use a combination of circular (cir) and double-pointed needles (dpn) as desired. I prefer working the center and pick-up round on double-pointed needles and changing to a 16" circular when possible. When the piece becomes too large, I change to two 24" circular needles, which provides enough space for the remainder of the body increase rounds. You can use any combination of needles you have at hand.
- Stitches are picked up and knitted along two sides of the center square by inserting the needle between the first and second stitches from the edge. One full stitch is turned to the wrong side, which creates a cleaner edge to the center square when using high-contrast colors.
- Three sides of the pillow are joined with a three-needle bind-off edge. The center stitches of the fourth side are worked with a standard bind-off to leave an opening for the pillow form to be inserted.
- If you use different yarns for the front and back of the pillow, you might need to work a different number of body rounds to make the front and back the same size. If they are very different, bind off each piece separately, then assemble by working a running stitch or whipstitch at the outer edge.

The other side of the pillow shows the colors reversed.



Work random purl rounds to punctuate color changes.



A three-needle bind-off connects the front and back sides with a decorative ridge.

PILLOW FRONT

Center

With CC and dpn or 2 cir needles, CO 12 sts.

Row 1 (RS) Knit.

Row 2 (WS) Purl.

Rep these 2 rows 4 more times, ending with WS row—10 rows St st.

Body

Change to MC.

Set-up rnd K2tog, k8, k2tog, do not turn, place marker (pm), pick up and knit 10 sts along side of square (see Notes), pm, pick up and knit 10 sts along CO edge, pm, pick up and knit 10 sts along side of square—40 sts total. Pm and join in the rnd.

Note: Garter ridges are worked randomly at the same time as increases are worked; read the foll section all the way through before proceeding.

Rnd 1 Knit.

Rnd 2 *K1f&b, knit to 2 sts before m, k1f&b, k1, sl m; rep from * 3 more times—8 sts inc'd.

Rep these 2 rnds until piece is same size as pillow form when slightly stretched.

At the same time, add garter ridges when desired as foll:

On an odd (knit) rnd, *k1, purl to 1 st before m, k1, sl m; rep from * 3 more times.

When piece is desired size, end with an even (inc) rnd, then cont as foll:

Next rnd Purl to end, sl m, sl first 5 sts of next rnd to right needle. Break yarn. Set aside or sl sts onto spare cir needle if needed.

PILLOW BACK

Work as for pillow front, but reverse MC and CC and stop before final (purl) rnd.

When piece is desired size, end with an even (inc) rnd, then cont as foll:

Next rnd Purl to end, sl last 5 sts of rnd to left needle. Break yarn.

FINISHING

Join pillow front and back

Place WS of pillow front and back tog with 5 sl sts from each piece tog. Join CC and, beg with 5 sl sts and working toward corner, work three-needle BO as foll (see Notes):

BO 5 sts, remove m, [BO all sts to m, remove m] 3 times, BO 5 sts. Stop working three-needle BO and BO all sts only on pillow piece facing you; turn work; BO rem sts on other pillow piece.

Weave in ends. Wet-block. Lightly press center square if needed.

When dry, insert pillow form carefully. With tapestry needle and narrow ribbon, sew a running st or whipstitch to close opening. Working this seam with ribbon allows it to be easily removed if needed for cleaning. Secure with a knot and push ribbon ends to inside of piece.

Kate Larson is the editor of *Spin Off* and *PieceWork* magazines. She teaches handspinning around the United States and shepherds a flock of cheerful Border Leicesters.

Photos by Matt Graves

Heavy Handspun, Fine Cloth

GRETCHEN HUGGETT

I am a weaver who also enjoys spinning. I tend to spin what I call "Gretchen yarn," which can be a singles, a two-ply yarn, or chain-plied but is always a smooth, fine yarn. Sometimes this smooth, fine yarn is an energized singles for weaving collapsed dimensional cloth, and sometimes it is a thin silk singles for weaving a gauzy fabric.

I share studio space with Emily Wohlscheid of Bricolage Studios (see page 20), and you can't be around her for long without thinking about adding

texture to a project with her batts. The challenge became how to make something other than Gretchen yarn and how to use it in a way that still fits in my weaving comfort zone. I wanted to spin heavy yarn and weave fine cloth.

EXPLORING TEXTURE

I typically weave with fine millspun weaving yarns, and I decided to experiment with adding textured handspun to the weft. There are many handspun yarn constructions that would work, and I settled on a textured singles that would be plied with a thread of silk. I wanted the resulting handspun yarn to have intermittent sections of texture so that it would pop through the gauzy fabric when woven. This would be a textural/Gretchen-yarn hybrid. I acquired two types of batts from Emily—one with more texture than the other—and planned my method for spinning them.

I split each batt into thirds by eye, so I had six batt strips. I spun the singles on my Lendrum folding wheel using the 12:1 ratio, alternating the two batts as I worked through the six strips of fiber. Letting go and embracing the bumps was difficult for me. I was comfortable while spinning from the less textured batt, but the more heavily textured one made me a little antsy. Alternating between the two created a final product that was consistently inconsistent.

Because the smoother batt weighed more than the other one, there were long sections of the smoother thread and shorter sections of the textured areas, which was just what I wanted for a result. After spinning the singles, I plied the yarn with the millspun silk that would also be used as my fine weft yarn. I made this choice so that the resulting yarn would allow the textured spots to pop. The resulting plied yarn was 9 to 10 wraps per inch (wpi).

Gretchen spun a Bricolage Studios batt in Neon Dream and plied it with 60/2 silk to create a textured yarn for weft.

AT THE LOOM

I chose to warp the loom using black 30/2 silk that I had purchased from Henry's Attic (see page 68). Normally, I sett it at 40 ends per inch for a twill structure, and through experimentation, I've learned that using the formula of two-thirds of a twill sett will give a gauzy, thin fabric. I did the following math: Two-thirds of 40 is 26.67, which I rounded up to 28 ends per inch (epi) because when using an 8-dent reed and alternating 3 and then 4 threads in each dent, it ends up at 28 epi. This is an easy denting pattern to remember and results in a fabric without noticeable reed marks.

My plan was to weave the cloth with 1 pick of the textured yarn followed by an area of plain weave, which would allow the gauzy sections to set off the textured yarn. I wanted to use a thread similar to the warp but that would coordinate with the weft yarn colorway. I wound a strand of 60/2 black silk with a strand of 60/2 in Pacific.

I didn't want to have the same number of solid-colored picks between each pick of the textured yarn, so I decided I would use 2, 3, or 5 picks between each textured pick. I did not stick to any specific pattern for the number of picks; I just went from one weft pick to the next in no particular order, sometimes repeating several times before moving on. The resulting fabric has a liveliness to it because of the texture and the non-uniformity of the weft order. It is also gauzy and has great drape considering it is plain weave. Generally, a plain-weave cloth is less drapey than a cloth woven in a twill structure.

This project, which I named Betty's Wrap after the Betty Batts that give it so much texture and color, taught me that I can go out of my comfort zone and make Gretchen/non-Gretchen yarn hybrids that push my weaving practice to be more spontaneous. I am anxious to try this with other textured batts and maybe try creating some blends myself. I would love to continue to push myself to try other handspun yarns, such as energized singles, using this weaving structure to see what kind of drape I could achieve with a fabric that is textured and also collapses. Stay tuned.

See page 68 for the full instructions for Betty's Wrap.

Gretchen Huggett is head of the fiber department at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, where she teaches floor-loom weaving and the occasional dye class. Because she loves combining her knowledge of weaving, spinning, and dyeing, collapse fabrics and woven shibori are some of her favorite combos.

Betty's Wrap in the Patina Colorway

Gretchen wove a second wrap in an alternate colorway:

Fiber: Bricolage Studios Scrappy Batt and Betty Batt, Patina.

Yarns: ***Weft:*** 20/2 rayon that is no longer available. Substitute Valley Yarns (WEBS) 60/2 silk used double; 14,800 ypp; Coffee, 2,000 yd total.

Patina colorway

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Spin thick yarn to weave thin cloth.

Photos by Matt Graves

Betty's Wrap

GRETCHEN HUGGETT

My intention for this wrap was to use a textured, thick weft in a way that would showcase the texture and also be gauzy and drapey. To accomplish this, I used a fine warp and weft with a textured handspun. For the textured weft, I split each batt into three parts and alternated between the two batts to make the resulting yarn more regularly textured. I spun the singles using a short-forward draw on my folding Lendrum wheel set at a 12:1 ratio.

I plied the textured singles with the equivalent of a 30/2 thread, 60/2 silk in Black and Pacific (WEBS) held together for Betty's Wrap. After plying, I washed each yarn with mild soap and dried them with no weights. I wound my warp of 30/2 silk (Henry's Attic) and threaded the loom at 28 ends per inch (epi) for a 22-inch weaving width. After beaming and threading for plain weave, I spread the warp using a similar-weight yarn for the header and began weaving an inch of the thin weft. I used a ski shuttle for the thick weft and a boat shuttle for the thin weft. I varied using either 2, 3, or 5 picks of the thin yarn between each pick of the thick, carrying the weft along the edge between picks.

A note on beating for a gauzy fabric: The sett is two-thirds the normal sett of this yarn for twill. Both the thin and thick wefts will pack in if the beat is too hard. It is best to just press the beater up against the fell for each pick rather than actually beating the cloth.

Gretchen used a ski shuttle (middle) to weave her textured yarn, but a stick shuttle could also be used. Yarn shown in the Patina colorway (see page 66)

You may want to add an additional 12 inches or so to the warp to get the hang of this technique and also check your picks per inch to make sure you are not beating too heavily. It is easy to get into a rhythm with it after a bit, but it is slower than actually beating it, I think. Also, the ski shuttle will slow you down, so this is a slower cloth to weave than, say, a towel.

Tip: You can tie a bungee cord from each end of your beater to the castle. Make it long enough that the cord stretches some when your reed hits the fell of your cloth. This will help with nudging rather than beating the weft.

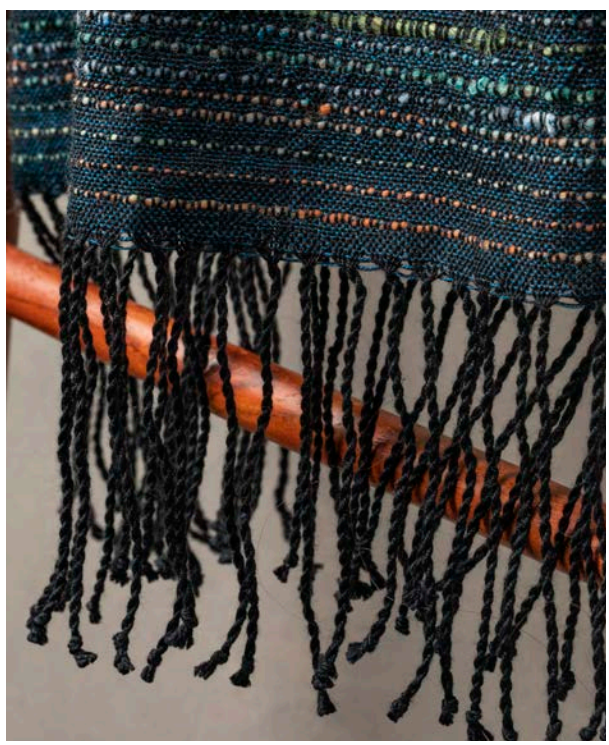
Resources

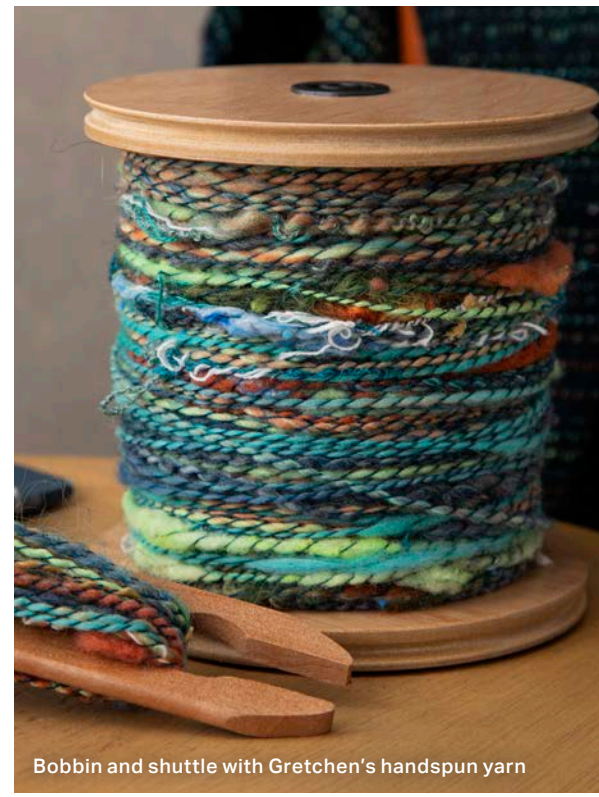
Bricolage Studios, bricolagestudios.bigcartel.com.
Henry's Attic, available through retailers.
WEBS, yarn.com.

MATERIALS

Fiber Bricolage Studios Scrappy Batt, 3 oz. Betty Batt, Teeswater/CVM/Merino/BFL/selvedge/mohair locks, 2 oz, Neon Dream.

Yarns ***Warp:*** Henry's Attic 30/2 silk; 7,440 ypp; black, 2,310 yd. ***Weft:*** Valley Yarns (WEBS) 60/2 silk; 14,800 ypp; Black and Pacific, 1,000 yd each. Textured weft: 9–10 wpi; about 350 yards spun and plied as described.





Bobbin and shuttle with Gretchen's handspun yarn

Equipment 2-shaft loom, 22" weaving width; boat shuttle and bobbin; ski shuttle; 2 bungee cords (optional). ***Note:*** A stick shuttle will work in place of a ski shuttle.

Structure Plain weave.

Warp Length 616 ends 3¾ yd (135") long (allows 9" for take-up, 36" for loom waste; loom waste includes fringe). Add 3¼ yd (117") for an additional wrap.

Setts ***Warp:*** 28 epi (3-4/dent in an 8-dent reed). ***Weft:*** about 17 ppi.

Dimensions ***Width in the reed:*** 22". ***Woven length:*** (measured under tension on the loom) 90" plus 7" of fringe for each shawl. ***Finished size:*** (after wet-finishing) 20" × 80" plus 4" fringe.

INSTRUCTIONS

1 Wind a warp of 616 ends 3¾ yd long (use 7 yd for two wraps). Warp the loom using your preferred method and thread for plain weave. Centering for a

weaving width of 22", sley 3-4 ends per dent in an 8-dent reed for 28 epi.

2 Tie the bungee cords from each end of the beater to the castle so that there is resistance when you beat the weft into place.

3 Wind a bobbin for a boat shuttle with Black and Pacific 60/2 silk held together for the thin weft. Wind the handspun textured weft on a ski shuttle. Leaving at least 7" for fringe, spread the warp with scrap yarn.

4 Weave 1" of plain weave using the thin weft, nudging the weft into place rather than strongly beating. Begin with 1 pick of your textured weft. Continue alternating 1 textured pick with either 2, 3, or 5 picks of your thin weft for 90" and carrying the textured weft up at the selvedge edges. Vary using 2, 3, or 5 picks; don't try to make a consistent order. Weirdly, this is more difficult than following a set rotation of picks. End with 1" of plain weave using the thin weft. Weave a few picks of scrap yarn to protect the weft.

5 Leaving 8" for fringe on both ends, cut the fabric from the loom. Trim the fringe to 7". Prepare a twisted fringe using 8 ends in each fringe.

6 Wet-finish in warm water by gently agitating and leaving the wrap to soak for 20 minutes. Lay flat to dry. Lightly iron on wool setting as needed.

Gretchen Huggett spins, dyes, and weaves in Kalamazoo, Michigan. She is a studio artist and head of the fiber department at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts where she teaches floor-loom weaving. She shares studio space with Emily Wohlscheid (Bricolage Studios) and Rita Petteys (Yarn Hollow) where they get into all things fibery.

Small floats punctuate the wrap's edge.

Cordage *(from left):* corn silk, milkweed, and garlic leaves

Photos by Matt Graves

Turning Back Time

Cordage by Hand

CINDY ELLEN HILL

People created twine, yarn, and fine sewing thread long before there is evidence of spinning equipment in the historical timeline. Spindle whorls appear in the archaeological record in the Neolithic period, about seven thousand years ago, while three-ply cordage made from tree bark fiber has been found dating to nearly fifty thousand years ago. Paleolithic "Venus" figurines show women wearing textile belts and hair coverings. Other archaeological finds include string skirts and garments with beads that may have been valued for the sound they made when walking or dancing. Millennia before the evolution of spinning as we know it today, our ancestors turned cordage by hand.

CORDAGE OBSESSION

I first learned to spin in the 1970s on a wheel using bits of handcarded raw fleece. Since then, handspinning has followed the arc of the textile industry, embracing modern technology to produce a glittering range of color, texture, and design. This time-forward journey has created expansive space for artistic expression, and spinners today produce a dazzling array of bright, bold textiles.

But I had come to spinning out of a sense of connection with the earth, much in the same way I gravitate toward eating food grown in my garden. I felt called to explore turning the wheels of time backward toward textile's origins. I soon found I was joining a groundswell of museum personnel, historians, reenactors, and textile artisans, all seeking to forge a deeper connection between fiber, ancient history, and the local natural landscape.

Among the prominent individuals in this burgeoning neo-Neolithic textiles community is Sally Pointer, heritage educator and experimental archaeologist from Bodenham, England, whose forthright YouTube videos on early textiles and what she calls "hedgebothering" have garnered tens of thousands of views. In workshops, reenactment events, and online, Sally has become the pop icon of cordage making. "People have been making textiles to carry things since they first had things to carry," Sally says. "Once you made cordage, you can lash things together or make a net or a basket or a bag. Cordage was a survival skill."

Sally launched the #threenettlechallenge on social media: Pick three wild stinging nettle stems, extract the fiber from them, turn it into cordage, and make some object from it. I did, turning out a small netted bag to hold the rosin for my violin. Overnight, I became obsessed with cordage.

MATERIALS

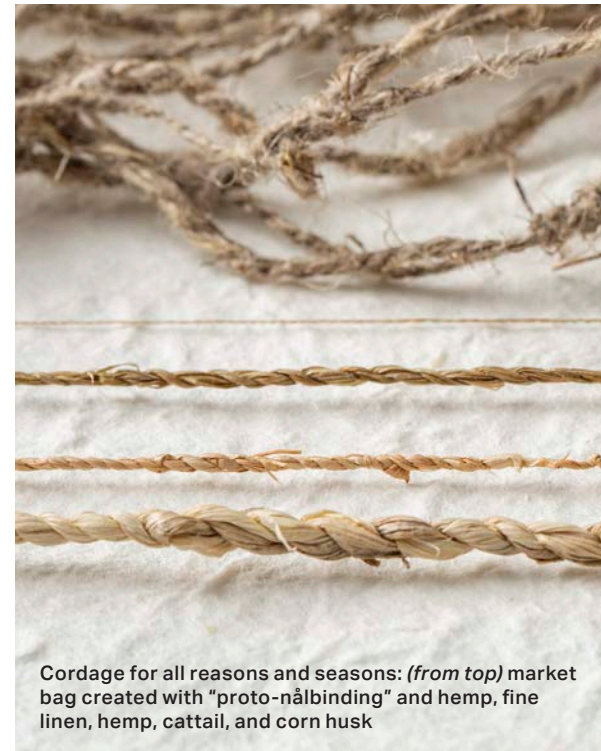
The earliest textile evidence is cordage from tree bark fibers such as linden bast, which is stripped from the bark and retted. Cordage can be made from wild-gathered bark from cedar and even oak trees. Native bast fibers that also appear early in the archaeological record include nettle, dogbane, and milkweed stems. Each of these can yield coarse twine or fine linen depending on how they are processed. They can be split and scraped when green, or retted, dried, and hackled much like flax.

In areas with wetlands, thin "wings" at the base of cattail stems yield a fine cordage, while thicker parts of the stems are twisted for mats and basketry. In desert regions, yucca fibers are used. Every ecosystem has its fiber plants.

Gardens yield crops of cordage. Corn husks, garlic leaves, and leaves from flowers such as crocosmia and daylilies make textured, full-bodied cordage for coasters, placemats, and coiled or rib-woven baskets. Corn silk and even rhubarb can be turned into fine, colorful cord. Leaves work best if dried first, then dampened until pliable; if worked green, they tend to shrink considerably as they dry.

Gathering local plant material pays homage to the ancient roots of cordage and can shift our perspective of the natural world; I find myself assessing the cordage potential of every plant and leaf. But the cordage obsession refuses to remain outdoors. Strips of scrap paper, packing material, and commercial raffia from a package ribbon or flower arrangement are all prime cordage-making fodder.

Fiber in your stash or purchased from spinning-fiber purveyors provides an easy entry into making cordage without the need to forage. Stick with longer, stiffer fibers than you'd use for spinning. Very long-staple raw fleece yields a cordage yarn suitable for weaving, while natural flax, hemp, or nettle fiber provides a close approximation to wildcrafted bast.



Cordage for all reasons and seasons: *(from top)* market bag created with "proto-nålbinding" and hemp, fine linen, hemp, cattail, and corn husk

Cindy explores cordage of all kinds.

PROCESS

1 Turning cordage by hand is a simple, meditative process. Start with a few strands of a long, relatively stiff fiber and twist an inch or two in the middle of its length.

2 Fold the length of fiber in half in the middle of the twisted bit. It will tend to twist on itself.

3a The two halves of the long piece of fiber are now the two plies of the finished cordage. If you are right-handed, hold the folded bit between your left thumb and index finger. With your right thumb and index finger, twist the upper segment of the fiber away from you.

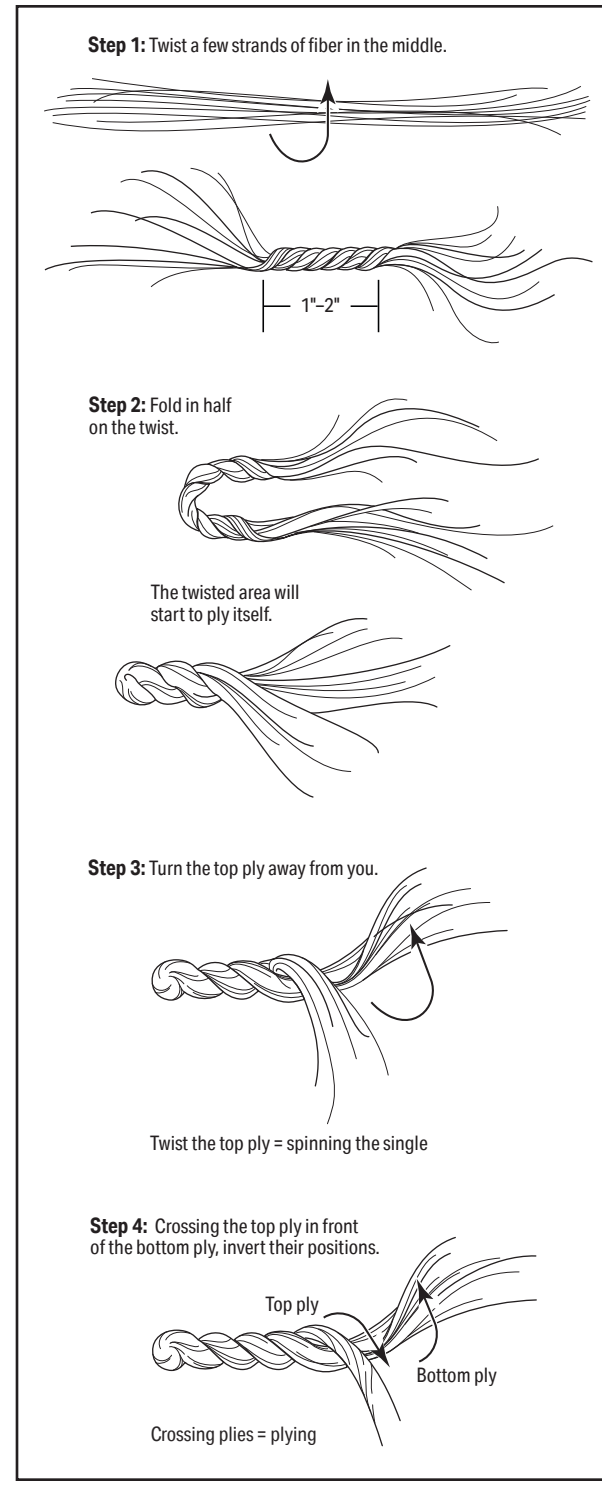
3b Grasp the lower segment of fiber with the other fingers of your right hand. I grab the lower strand between my middle and ring fingers, but using your ring finger and pinkie, or some other configuration, may be more comfortable for you.

4 Move the lower segment of fiber back and up while crossing the upper ply forward and down, swapping the positions of the two plies. Now the twisted part becomes the lower ply, and the untwisted part is the upper ply.

Keep going, consistently turning the top ply away from you (the functional equivalent of spinning a singles) then crossing it in front of the lower ply to switch their positions (the functional equivalent of plying).

If you are left-handed and this pattern of holding and turning is not comfortable for you, try reversing your hold on the fiber, then turn the lower ply away from you and bring it up behind the upper ply.

How much to twist each ply is a matter of feel and depends on the nature of the fiber and its intended purpose. In general, the answer regarding twist is "very little." A half rotation of twist—not several times around—is a useful starting point. Experiment and see what works best for the material you are working with.

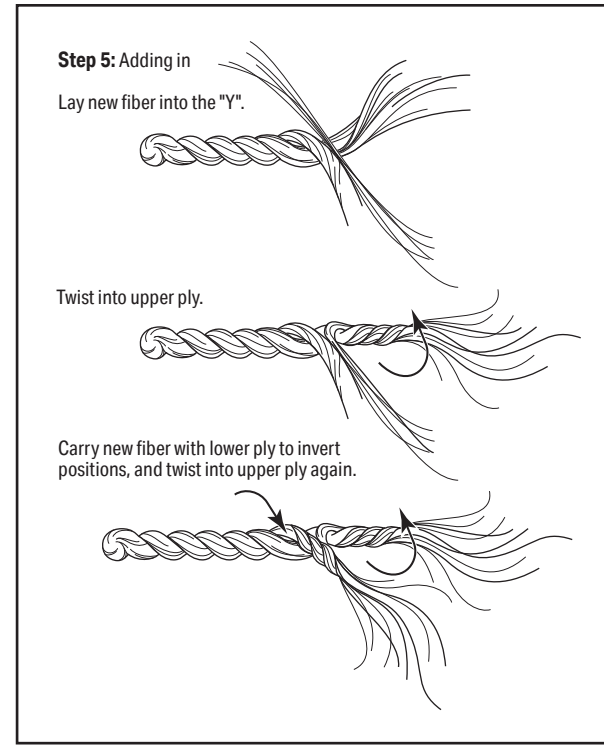


Adding Length

5a As you get toward the ends of your original piece of fiber, you'll want to add more to extend the length of your cordage. To add more plant material with no fiber ends sticking out at the join, take another strand or two of your material and place the approximate middle of the length into the base of the Y between the two plies of your cordage.

5b Twist one leg of the new material in with the top ply. After inverting the plies, twist the other piece of the new material in with the ply that has now been brought to the top.

Keep adding fiber in this way, maintaining a consistent thickness. If the trailing ends of the fiber stick out, snip them off carefully with a pair of sharp scissors held parallel to the surface of the cordage before coiling the cordage up for storage.



USES

Cordage today, as in ancient times, can be made from different fibers to serve different purposes. However, while modern spinning fiber leans into the soft and shiny, cordage remains better suited to the rugged and sturdy.

Sally noted, "One major difference with hand-laid cordage is that it lends itself to 'cord as you go' projects. Rather than setting out to make enough yarn for a project before starting work on it, you can cord up a few arm lengths, then work a section of your net or looped textile. As you run short, you make another length. The end project is seamless, without joins, and it makes the use of materials efficient. Early forms of nålbinding work particularly well this way. You can use similar construction techniques


Hemp cordage

"It's a much slower technique, which forces you to look closely at the way the fibers behave," Sally Pointer says. "Working out where to join in new fibers, how much twist to apply, whether to use fingers or roll the cord on the thigh, all give you a real insight into how yarn forms."

such as looping with different materials to get very different textures, from a stiffer, chunkier basket material from lime bast to a very fine stretchy hairnet from linen or nettles."

Very thin, threadlike cordage from well-processed nettle, flax, milkweed, or dogbane is strong. Run through beeswax to prevent fraying, it works well for handsewing, embroidery on linen, or wrapping in coil baskets. If you have the patience to gather enough, it produces fine linen fabric. Cordage of rough-processed tree or plant bast lends itself to early textile techniques including simple looping (a sort of "proto-nålbinding" involving spiraling rounds of loosely rendered blanket stitch), nålbinding, netting, and twining. Thicker, more brittle cordage from garden leaves or corn husks bridges the gap between textiles and basketry, allowing you to make hats, flexible mats, and containers.

CONCLUSION

As twenty-first-century spinners, we still have much to learn from cordage. The act of hand-turning cordage leads to reenvisioning textile resources. Fiber is everywhere: growing in your garden, tucked along roadsides and in swamps and ditches, and hidden in materials destined for the landfill.

By going back to the ultimate basics of hand-turning, we relearn the principles of balanced twist and participate intimately in the fundamental structure of a yarn. Turning cordage by hand can realign our perspective on the relationship between textiles and our natural environment and help us reimagine our role in the historical development of textile fabrication. By twisting cordage, we turn back the clock to reenact the very origin story of our textile craft.

Golden cordage created from a reclaimed piece of raffia

Resources

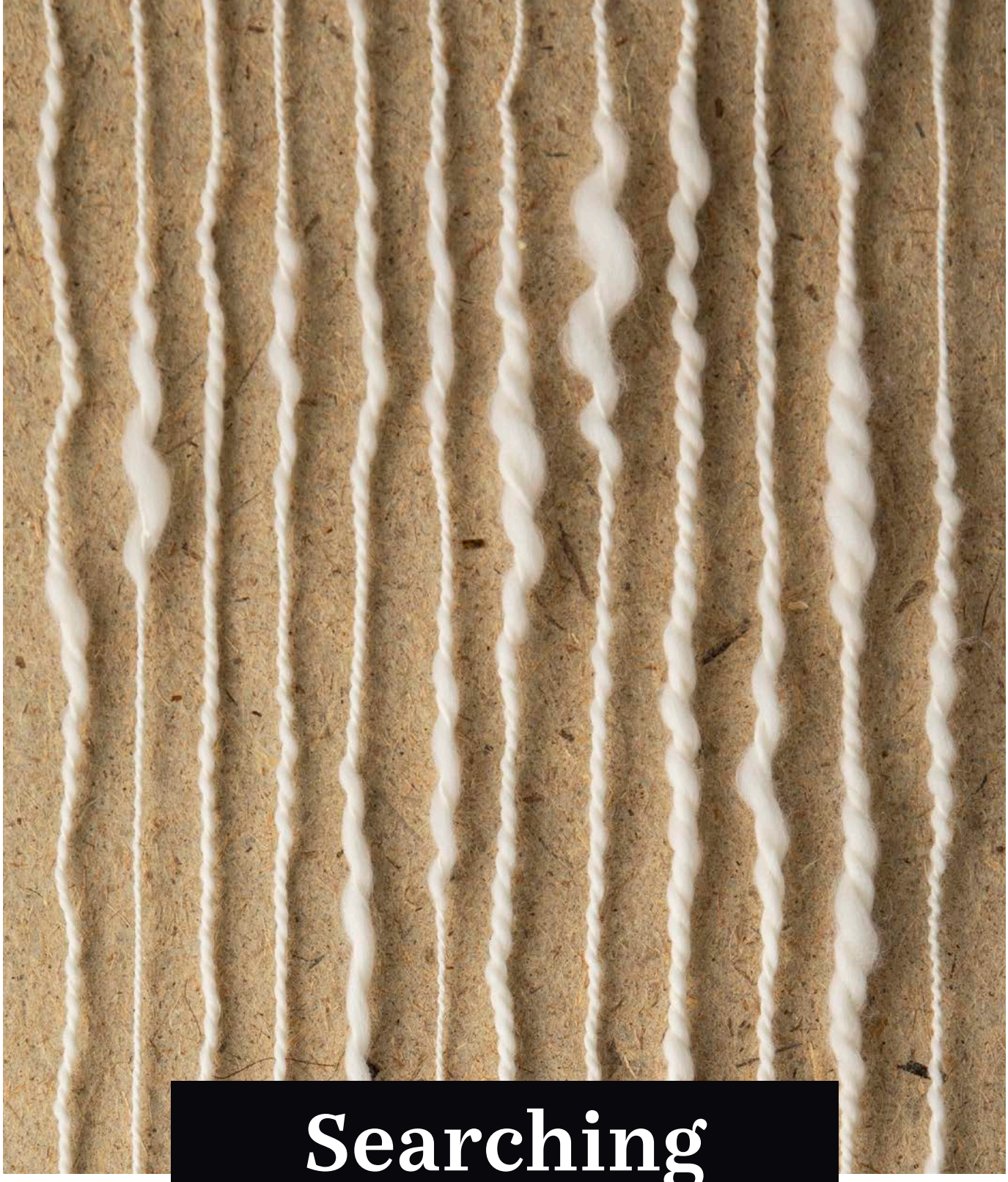
Barber, E. J. W. *Prehistoric Textiles: The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages with Special Reference to the Aegean*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Hardy, B. L., M.-H. Moncel, C. Kerfant, M. Lebon, L. Bellot-Gurlet, and N. Mélard. "Direct Evidence of Neanderthal Fibre Technology and Its Cognitive and Behavioral Implications." *Scientific Report* 10, no. 4889 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-61839-w.

Nettles for Textiles, nettlesfortextiles.org.uk/wp.

Sally Pointer, youtube.com/c/SallyPointer.

Cindy Ellen Hill is an environmental attorney, gardener, and spinner in Middlebury, Vermont. Her poetry book, *Wild Earth*, was just released by Antrim House.



Photos by Matt Graves

Searching for the Perfect Slub Yarn

RILEY KLEVE

Slub yarns, sometimes called thick-and-thin yarns, are named for their characteristic repeating bumps along an otherwise thin yarn. Undulating between thick and thin sections, slub yarns add texture and variation to handspun yarn.

When I teach intermediate spinners, I like to follow Sarah Anderson's lead and use slub yarns as a tool to help students learn to have better control over the thickness, or gauge, of their yarns (see Resources). During a recent class, one student asked about predicting how a slub yarn might look once it is plied and knitted. This led to quite a few other questions: How do slubs look when they overlap with each other? What about when two thin spots overlap in a plied slub yarn? Is it best to make slubs at regular intervals, or should they be spaced randomly? How will these adjustments impact my project?

I realized that these questions warranted an in-depth look. In theory, a two-ply slub yarn will have three different grists—one thick where two slubs are plied, one thin where two sections between slubs are plied, and one in the middle where a slub is plied with a thin section. But to see how this theoretical slub yarn would look once knitted, woven, or crocheted, I would need to create actual samples. I found few answers among my usual spinning resources, so I decided to experiment with slub yarn to find out more.

For a tutorial on making (and removing) slubs, see page 84.

DESIGNING THE EXPERIMENT

Like many spinners, I tend to think best while I am spinning at my wheel. Using some Polwarth top from my stash, I started spinning a slub yarn so I could identify the factors that go into making slub yarns. First, I considered slub size. While taking my "bite" of fiber, I had to choose how large my slub should be compared to the thin sections of my yarn. I determined that the smallest slub I could make (while still noticeably larger than my thin yarn) was about 12 wraps per inch (wpi). The largest slubs I could make (knowing that they would also need

Knitted swatches from the first set of yarns, two-ply yarns created with two slubbed singles. *Top row:* small, spaced slubs; small, randomly spaced slubs; and small, back-to-back slubs. *Bottom row:* large, spaced slubs; large, randomly spaced slubs; and large, back-to-back slubs

to fit through my wheel's orifice when plied) were 5 wpi. The grist of my thin yarn between each slub was 30 wpi.

Next came the question of how frequently I should create a slub in my singles yarn. I tried out a few different approaches. First, I made constant, closely spaced slubs with as little space between each slub as possible (referred to here as "back-to-back slubs"). For these, I fell into a slow rhythm of bite-twist-treadle, bite-twist-treadle, bite-twist-treadle. Next, I tried making slubs with more space in between them ("spaced slubs"). I used my own spinning posture as a measuring tool, making each slub as soon as the one before it disappeared into my wheel's orifice. Later, I measured the distance between the slubs to be 12 inches.

I also tried spinning some slubs with a more random spacing because this is closer to what students might be making in a class. For this sample, I made two slubs back to back, then spun thin yarn until the second slub was through my wheel's orifice. Once it was through, I made three slubs back to back, then thin yarn until the last slub disappeared through the orifice. I repeated this pattern, two-three-two-three, for a while and was satisfied with the semirandom result.

TWO-PLY SLUB SAMPLES

With my variables and research question in hand, it was time to start my experiment. I split the same white Polwarth top into six sections, each weighing 10 grams. I wrote out a list of the samples I was about to spin: spaced small slubs, random small slubs, frequent small slubs, spaced large slubs, random large slubs, and back-to-back large slubs.

I also gathered a little bit of scrap wool in a contrasting color to indicate when I was switching from one sample to the next. I spun my samples with a short-forward draw and a relatively low amount of twist so that my samples with large slubs were not overspun.

Excited to see the results of my first set of samples, I plied the singles together. As I plied, I was delighted to see how the characteristics of the singles affected the resulting two-ply yarn. Overlapping slubs created yarn that was dramatically thick in some spots, and

Woven swatches from the first set of yarns, two-ply yarns created with two slubbed singles. *Top row:* small, spaced slubs; small, randomly spaced slubs; and small, back-to-back slubs. *Bottom row:* large, spaced slubs; large, randomly spaced slubs; and large, back-to-back slubs

areas where two thin spots were plied together created some nice variation to contrast with the slubs. I knitted swatches from my first set of samples, changing the needle size to be appropriate for the average grist of each sample.

I was surprised to find that both swatches with random slubs had the most varied texture. Before making swatches, I would have guessed that the ones with constant slubs would have knitted into swatches with more texture, but because there was less thin yarn to contrast with the thicker slubs, they ended up looking smoother. The swatches knitted from the yarn with spaced slubs both had some nice, subtle texture to them.

The samples I made on a small frame loom were just as surprising. I wove swatches from the small slub yarn at a sett of 4 ends per inch, and for my large slub swatches, I used a slightly lower sett of 3.42 ends per inch (14 and 12 ends over 3½ inches, respectively). Once again, the randomly spaced slub yarns had the most varied texture. The thin sections on the swatches woven from yarn with back-to-back slubs were more prominent than in the knitted swatches; likewise, the slubs in the spaced-out slub swatches were a bit more visible.

PLYING VARIATION: ONE SLUB PLY/ONE THIN PLY

Curious to explore how yarn made with one thin ply and one slub ply works up into knitted and woven samples, I repeated my experiment with this variation. This time, I spun 5 grams of each slub sample and 30 grams of consistent thin yarn at a grist of 30 wpi. I plied the two singles together at the same tension to avoid creating a spiral texture from the slubs wrapping around the thin ply.

After spinning my six new samples, I made knitted and woven swatches using the same methods as for the first set of samples. I was surprised by the impact made by using only one ply of slub yarn in these samples! The resulting swatches had a more subtle texture than the first set of swatches, but the individual slubs stood out much more from the rest of the fabric. This variation eliminated the possibility of one slub being plied with another slub, so the surface was more consistent;

Knitted swatches from the second set of yarns, all made from one slub ply and one thin ply. *Top row:* small, spaced slubs; small, randomly spaced slubs; and small, back-to-back slubs. *Bottom row:* large, spaced slubs; large, randomly spaced slubs; and large, back-to-back slubs

however, the individual slubs were much more prominent in both knitted and woven swatches.

In all of these swatches, I observed that the large-slub yarn swatches had more pronounced texture than their small-slub counterparts. I observed some pooling of slubs in the knitted swatches, especially in the swatches made from spaced and back-to-back slub yarns. The woven samples all had a varied texture from slubs. The swatch made with back-to-back large slubs had the most variation consistently and was my personal favorite among the swatches.

SOME ANSWERS, MORE QUESTIONS

Returning to my students' original questions, I can now answer with much more confidence than before. For a rustic homespun texture, I would point a handspinner in the direction of plying two slubby singles together. I would advise a spinner interested in adding just a hint of texture to an otherwise polished-looking project to add slubs to only one ply of a two-ply yarn. That being said, my exploration of slub yarn here is still just the tip of the iceberg!

I like to end my spinning classes by helping students brainstorm further paths of inquiry because curiosity is what has always driven my practice. Some questions on my mind for the future are: How would yarn made with slubs of different sizes work up in a project? What might change with one slub ply and one consistent thick ply? What happens to a slub yarn when it is chain-plied or cabled? I know I have a lot more slub exploration in my future and hope this inspires more spinners to look for their own questions and answers when creating texture.

Resources

Anderson, Sarah. *Building Blocks of Spinning*. Video. learn.longthreadmedia.com.

———. *The Spinner's Book of Yarn Designs: Techniques for Creating 80 Yarns*. North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing, 2012.

Riley Kleve is a nonbinary handspinner, artist, and educator based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Their work draws from craft traditions to imagine new queer futures for textile art. You can find them on Instagram @lezphair and @betterdaysyarnco, or at rileykleve.com.

Woven swatches from the second set of yarns, all made from one slub ply and one thin ply. *Top row:* small, spaced slubs; small, randomly spaced slubs; and small, back-to-back slubs. *Bottom row:* large, spaced slubs; large, randomly spaced slubs; large, back-to-back slubs

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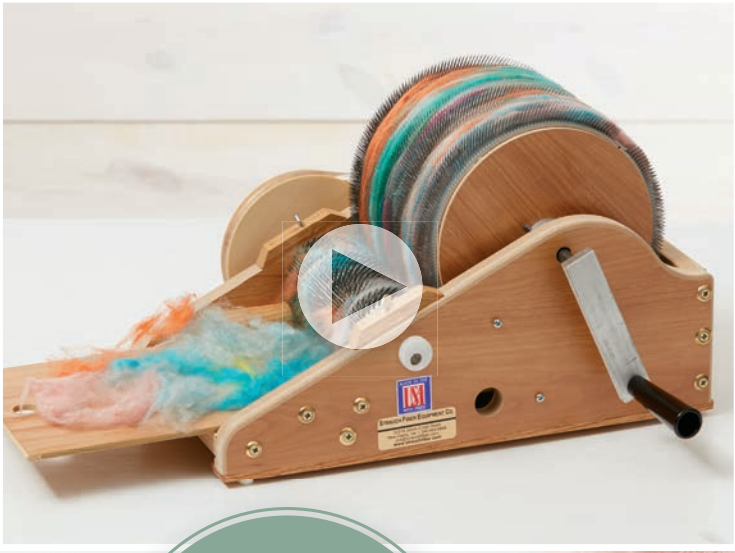

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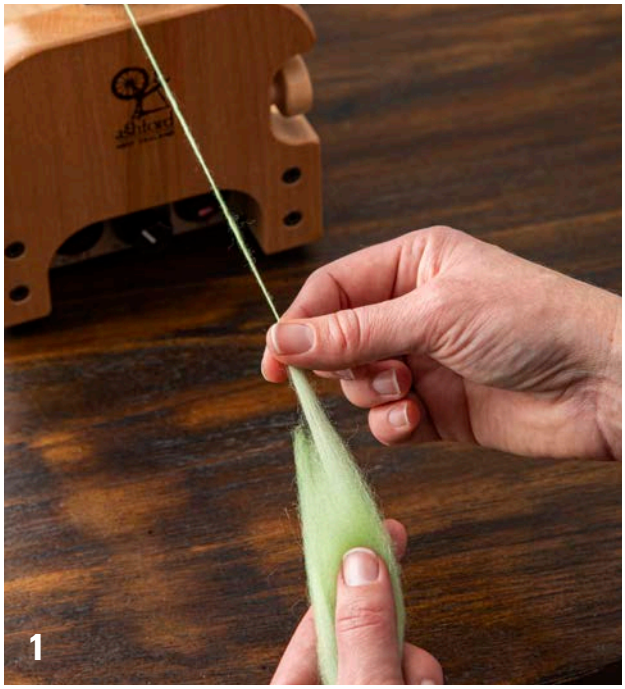
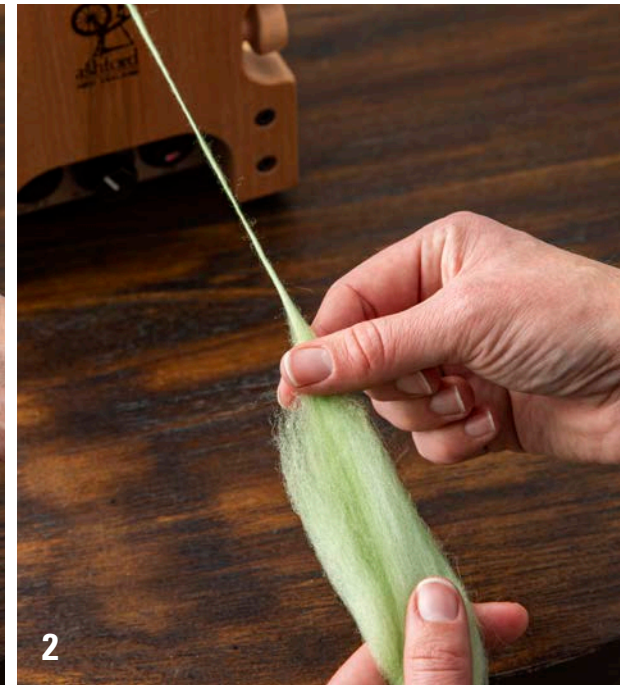
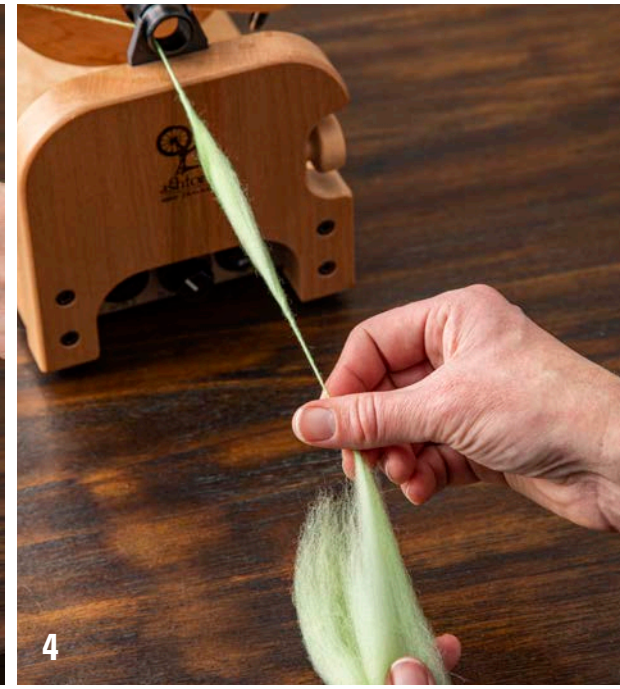
Making Slubs & Removing Them, Too

Beginner Basics

RILEY KLEVE







Photos by Matt Graves

As spinners, we know that twist is what holds our fibers together as yarn. Because twist always wants to travel to areas of less resistance, thick spots tend to untwist and draft apart. Slubs, on the other hand, can stay intact by relying on the twist of the surrounding thin spots to hold them in place. The trick is that a slub needs to be slightly shorter than the staple length of the fiber it is made from.

In *The Spinner's Book of Yarn Designs*, Sarah Anderson likens this concept to a wrapped piece of hard candy: Twist at either end of the wrapper holds the piece intact, whereas a wrapper made from two overlapping pieces would draft apart in the middle.

Knowing that a slub, accidental or intentional, is just a group of fibers held together by twist on either end allows spinners to have better control over their yarn. A quick pinch and twist (and some practice) is all you need to start adding or removing slubs from your singles to create the perfect texture for your yarn.

MAKING SLUBS

These basic steps can be adjusted as you'd like for large or small slubs, frequent or infrequent slubs. Your choice of fiber and preparation can also greatly impact the size, texture, and durability of your slubs. In general, more "worsted" features (longer staple, combed preparation, subdued crimp) will lend themselves to strong and smooth slubs. More "woolen" features (shorter or mixed staple length, carded preparation, active crimp) will create loftier, but weaker, slubs (see Resources). For the best of both worlds, a commercial combed top preparation of breeds such as Polwarth, Merino, or Targhee is an easy place to start for most spinners.

1 Start spinning a thin singles yarn until you reach the spot where you would like to add a slub. The fingers of the forward hand here have stopped where we usually pinch to draft forward or backward for a consistent yarn using a worsted draw.

2 To make a slub, the forward hand moves farther into the fiber supply to take a larger "bite" of fiber. Here, the bite is about a half inch deeper into the fiber supply. Pinch and begin to draft forward toward the orifice or move the hand holding the fiber supply back.

3 Continue attenuating/drafting until the fiber thins behind the slub between your hands. You still have not allowed twist into the drafting zone. How much the fiber thins is up to you. If there is only a small amount of fiber connecting the slub and fiber supply, a dramatic thick/thin yarn will result. Less thinning will produce a more stable but less textured yarn.

4 Reduce the pressure of your pinching forward fingers and begin moving your fingers over the slub. I like to roll the slub in the same direction of the twist. When I reach the end of the slub, I pinch and twist with my fingers in the direction of the twist to secure the end of the new slub.

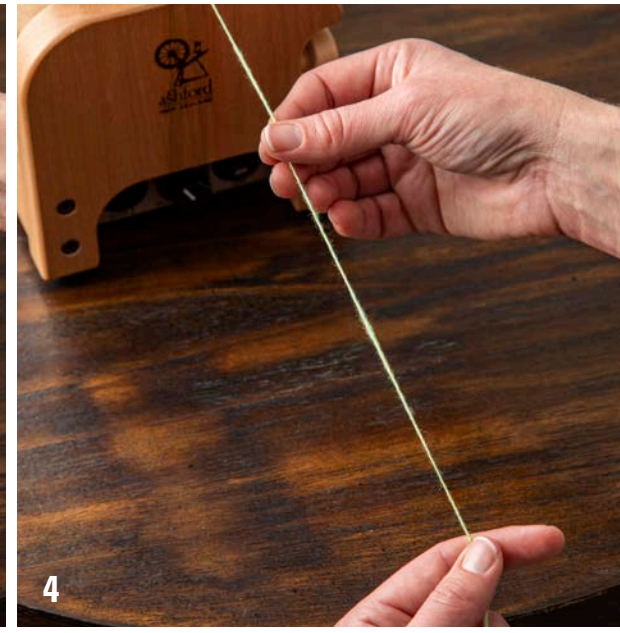
REMOVING SLUBS

Unwanted slubs are associated with "beginner yarns," but even experienced spinners occasionally have slubs. When you understand how they happen, they are easy to remove. Perhaps the spinner's forward hand moved too far into the fiber supply when spinning with a worsted draw, or if spinning with a long draw, it might have been a stubborn spot that didn't draft as smoothly as its neighbor fibers. Either way, try removing the slub by releasing the twist at either end. Going back to Sarah Anderson's analogy of a candy wrapper, you need to loosen the twist at each end of the wrapper.

1 When you have created an unwanted slub, stop treadling and drafting.

I find that predrafting my fiber or vertically splitting combed tops helps when I spin slubs into my singles. This extra bit of preparation means I don't have to draft as much during spinning, which gives me more time to form each slub.

—Beth Showalter (see Beth's slub cables on page 52)



2 Reposition your hands so the forward hand is pinching the yarn between the orifice and slub and the back hand is pinching between the slub and the fiber supply.

3 Begin twisting each end of the slub in opposite directions to remove the twist from the slub section. The forward hand twists in the opposite direction the flyer was moving, and the back hand twists in the same direction the flyer was moving. Begin attenuating/drafting this section.

4 When the fiber is thinned a bit in the slub section, allow the twist to reenter the yarn. If you still have a slub, repeat this maneuver. You can always reduce the size of a slub, but you can't make it bigger again. If you overthin the section, you'll need to break the yarn and rejoin.

Resources

Anderson, Sarah. *Building Blocks of Spinning*. Video. learn.longthreadmedia.com.

———. *The Spinner's Book of Yarn Designs: Techniques for Creating 80 Yarns*. North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing, 2012.

Merrow, Anne. "What Are Woolen and Worsted? Ask a Spinning Teacher." *Spin Off,* Summer 2017, 22–23.

Riley Kleve is a nonbinary handspinner, artist, and educator based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Their work draws from craft traditions to imagine new queer futures for textile art. You can find them on Instagram @lezphair and @betterdaysyarnco, or at rileykleve.com.

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From front: ginned cotton, ginned cotton carded into punis, carded punis spun into a two-ply weaving yarn, combed cotton sliver, handspun cotton singles, and combed cotton spun into a two-ply weaving yarn

Photos by Matt Graves

Ginned Cotton

Embracing the Slubs

MALYNDA ALLEN

A few years ago, a fellow spinner came to our Wasatch Woolpack Handspinners guild meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, with a big box of fiber to give away. No one seemed to want the humble ginned cotton—colorful wools were more appealing—so I brought the cotton home with me. I had never spun ginned cotton before, and I looked forward to trying something new.

A cotton boll harvested from the plant contains multiple seeds, each at the center of a cluster of fiber. A cotton gin mechanically separates the seed from the fiber; during this process, some of the fiber might become tangled, and some plant matter is crushed and mixed throughout the fiber. The resulting preparation is an intermediate step in commercial cotton processing. When we find this fiber preparation, we can expect that the seeds have been removed but not much other processing has happened yet. Most of the unwanted bits of plant fall out in processing and spinning, but tangles and slubs of fiber remain. If you are beginning with cotton that still contains the seeds, they can be removed by hand to produce a nearly perfect preparation (see Resources).

Much of my previous spinning experience with cotton consisted of spinning prepared cotton sliver. I had spun a few sample punis as well, and both the sliver and the punis had spun easily into lovely, smooth cotton yarn. The bag of ginned cotton was old and had been in storage for a while, but I decided to simply try to spin it as it was. The fiber was matted and difficult to work with. It refused to draft smoothly for me and seemed impossible to spin into a decent yarn.

Never one to give up easily, I pulled out my handcards and searched online for cotton-carding tips. After trying several approaches, I figured out what worked for me and this challenging bag of compacted fiber. The ginned cotton wanted to be spun as a slubby cotton yarn, and I needed to embrace that idea before I could successfully spin it. Most of the time, I spin smooth, consistent yarns. They make me happy, but some fiber preparations are just meant to be textured yarn.

Most of the time, I spin smooth, consistent yarns. They make me happy, but some fiber preparations are just meant to be textured yarn.

In the process of working with this natural-colored ginned cotton, I stumbled across some dyed ginned cotton, so I purchased a little bit and played with it, too! The colored cotton responded well to the same process as the natural cotton, and it gave me the wonderful opportunity to experiment with color blending!

I now have a lovely range of slubby cotton yarns that are quite different from the other cotton preparations I have spun. I look forward to using the cotton in my weaving. It will add wonderful texture to a towel, blouse, or skirt. It would also be lovely knitted or crocheted.

MALYNDA'S METHOD: ROUGH-GINNED COTTON

1 Load only the front inch or so of one handcard with cotton by holding a fistful of it in your hand, catching the fiber on the tines of the card while dragging the cotton downward. Next, carefully use the other card to loosen the fibers by pulling across the top of the cotton, barely brushing the top of the fiber. Work your way from the tips hanging off the card on up. Once the fibers open up a bit, continue to card, lifting up the top card so that the fibers transfer nicely onto the

second card. Repeat the process again, working the fiber back to the first handcard. If you continue to card the cotton too long, it will disintegrate into a fluffy, unmanageable mess. Focus on keeping the cotton organized, open, and not overly carded.

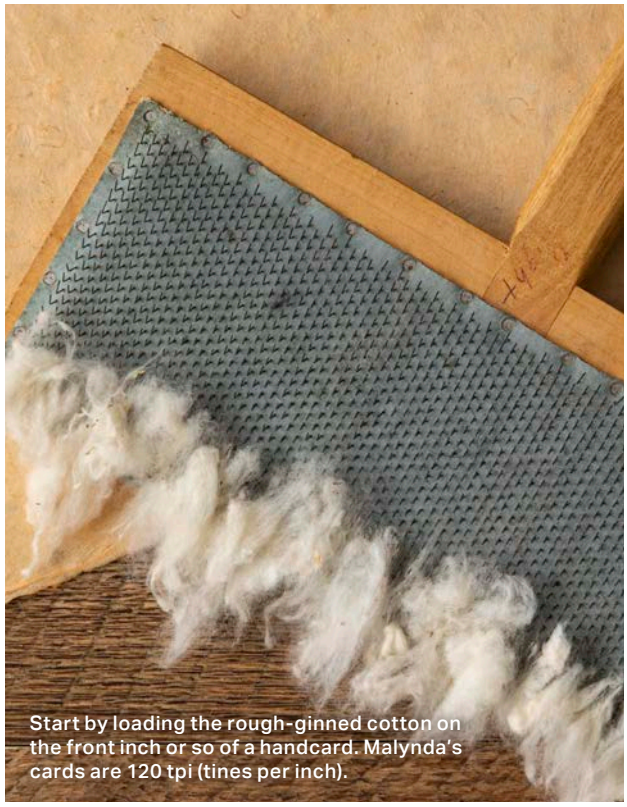
2 Next, take a ¼-inch dowel and lay it over the fluffy tips sticking out in front of the card. Roll them around the dowel and continue rolling over the tines of the card. The dowel will pull the cotton out of the card and make a lovely puni. Finish by rolling the dowel at the base of the handcard between the tines and the handle to secure the last loose ends. Slide the puni off the dowel and repeat to make more punis.

3 Take the punis to your charkha, spindle, or wheel. The carded cotton should draft easily with a long-draw technique. Occasionally, the fibers may snag and leave a slub that will not tug out. Simply add twist to strengthen the yarn and then wind the yarn onto your spindle or bobbin, leaving the slubs in place. When spinning smooth cotton preps such as sliver, I can coax out the slubs as I draft, but that didn't work well for slubby ginned cotton. I found I could either be frustrated by this or just embrace it. These undulations add delightful texture to your yarn and textiles.

4 When you are finished spinning the cotton singles, ply them or use as is. I take the spindles directly to my spinning wheel and ply them on the fastest ratio available. At this point, you can either weave with the yarn as it is or finish it further.

5 If you choose to wet-finish the yarn, wind the plied yarn into a skein, tie it securely, and drop it into a pot of boiling water. Add a couple of tablespoons of washing soda and a tablespoon of dry laundry detergent and let it simmer for about 30 minutes. Rinse the skein well, squeeze out the excess water, and allow the yarn to dry.

6 Enjoy your new slubby yarn!



Start by loading the rough-ginned cotton on the front inch or so of a handcard. Malynda's cards are 120 tpi (tines per inch).

All the cotton has been transferred back to the original card. The key is to be gentle and know when to stop carding—don't overcard this preparation.

Malynda put her slubby cotton yarns to the test. She wove her handspun weft in both plain weave and overshot patterns to create fantastic texture.

WOVEN SAMPLES

I took my plied handspun straight from my wheel's bobbin to the loom. I prefer to wet-finish the yarn in the fabric once it is off the loom. (I will sometimes wash my handspun cotton skeins if I intend to knit or crochet.)

I wove the plain-weave napkin with 8/2 cotton warp at 16 ends per inch (epi) and handspun two-ply cotton weft at 17 picks per inch (ppi).

The overshot sample was woven on a warp of 8/2 cotton in natural at 16 epi. The tabby weft is dyed 10/2 cotton in Cornflower Blue, Carolina Blue, and Purple, and the pattern weft is slubby handspun cotton two-ply. The draft is from Janet Dawson's online course Overshot Departures: "Honeysuckle" (see Resources).

Resources

Cotton Clouds, cottonclouds.com.

Dawson, Janet. "Honeysuckle." Weaving with Janet Dawson: Overshot Departures (online course). weavingwithjanetdawson.com.

Gaustad, Stephenie. *The Practical Spinner's Guide: Cotton, Flax, Hemp.* Loveland, CO: Interweave, 2014.

Georgia Yarn Company, 10/2 cotton in Carolina Blue, Cornflower Blue, and Purple, gayarnco.com.

Hodges, Melvenea. "Hand-Ginning Cotton: A Practical Guide." *Spin Off,* Fall 2021, 30–32.

Ruane, Joan. "Step #1: Cotton Carding and Making Punis for Spinning Cotton Yarn with Joan Ruane." youtube.com/watch?v=bIRs5q4apHQ.

A mother of nine, **Malynda Allen** enjoys experimenting with various fibers. When she is not snuggled up on the couch reading books or watching movies with her husband and children, she likes to spin, weave, sew, knit, and dance.

Malynda couldn't resist purchasing dyed, ginned cotton, which she used to create solids and color blends.

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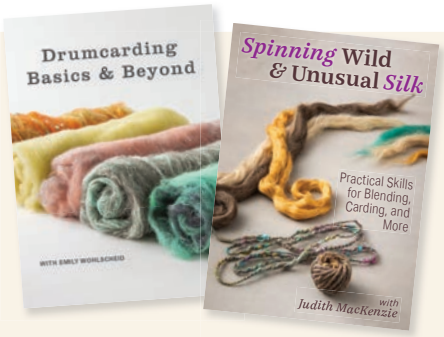

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My Fiber Journey: A Road to Recovery

KELLY CALKINS

On December 31, 2018, I fell on my face on cement and suffered a minor traumatic brain injury (TBI), or concussion. I was now on the road to months of cognitive, physical, vestibular, and visual therapy. I was devastated, terrified, and angry. Fortunately, I knew how to spin and owned a handspindle. It was the only thing I could do while sitting in bed listening to audiobooks. I couldn't watch television or walk to the bathroom or kitchen without an escort, and I struggled to write or speak a coherent sentence for weeks.

My mom's 90th birthday was to be celebrated with a surprise party at my brother's home in Colorado the following May. My therapists said I needed a goal, so I decided to handspin and weave a throw to surprise my mom with. I had a large hank of raw silk yarn and a bunch of undyed washed gray fleece that I had purchased from Sheep Feathers Farm in Colorado, and there were three bags of black walnuts in my freezer. A friend sent me information on using alum for natural dyes. This was February, and the party was scheduled for May 18th. I was able to borrow a Schacht Wolf Pup loom from my local fiber guild and hoped I could manage to thread it and weave plain weave.

Much to my amazement, I did it! I even managed to regain enough equilibrium to spin and ply the yarn on my Ashford Joy wheel. I completed the throw in time for Mom's party, and she loved it! Sadly, she passed away in August 2020, but my husband managed to drive me to Colorado, and I spent five precious hours with her before she passed.

I can now say that the TBI totally changed my life. I did manage to return to work in the fall of 2019, but my lack of executive function and multitasking skills required transfer to a new department, and in January 2021, I realized that I couldn't work anymore. Faced with very early retirement, my husband and I relocated to Florida from Ohio.

Photos by Kelly Calkins

The author with her mother

Kelly's mom with her handspun, handwoven throw

The finished throw

The transition to retirement has presented several difficulties, but one by one my husband has helped me work through them. I can no longer knit or read knitting patterns but am successfully learning to crochet—I think Mom is looking over my shoulder because it's coming quite easily. I can't make sense of weaving drafts any longer, so my husband challenged me to take up tapestry weaving, and it most certainly is a challenge! I'm glad that Rebecca Mezoff was an occupational therapist in the past and that she has carried much of that knowledge into her online courses and book.

I will be forever grateful to all of the fiber people who have been part of my fiber journey and to those I have yet to meet.

Born and raised in Boulder, Colorado, **Kelly Calkins** is a handspinner, weaver, and former shepherd. Retired and now living in Florida with her husband and three dogs, she seeks out wool of all kinds to spin and weave into blankets, rugs, and free-form tapestry. Her latest mission is to wear wool year-round—in Florida—to illustrate how it is the best of all fibers.