Chapter Six



Spinning

Introduction to a Spinning Project

Through spinning you will learn to express your creativity in a constructive way while developing a skill that is relaxing and fun. You will also have the opportunity to learn more about the history of spinning, when and where it originated, how it has passed down through the ages, and other information you may discover through your research of spinning as an art form.

You may want to experiment with different fibers and techniques as you learn the basics of spinning. Visit with spinners in your community to discover how they learned to spin, what projects they have made and what suggestions they would give to a beginner. Check for additional sources in your local Extension office, the Internet, library or yarn shops to get new ideas. Most importantly, have fun!









Project Evaluation

Skeins of yarn should be evaluated on:

Overall Appearance

- Suitability of materials
- Construction appropriate, balanced design
- Fleece is clean
- Skein is tied evenly
- Skein is balanced

Workmanship

- Twist is even and consistent
- Fleece is properly carded
- Fleece is appropriate for yarn type
- Yarn is appropriate for intended use
- Joins are strong and even

History of Spinning

Spinning fiber into yarn is an ancient process. No one really knows when spinning began, but fragments of fabrics from as early as 6300 BC show that early spinners possessed remarkable skill. Ancient cultures used animal and plant fibers to make yarn for weaving cloth and twining sandals. The spinning process consisted of drawing out fibers, which were held on a stick called a distaff, and twisting them with a spindle, which could be spun like a top, to make yarn. The yarn was wound onto the spindle. The spinning wheel, which increased the speed and efficiency of yarn production, was invented in India and was introduced into Europe in the 14th century.

In order for fibers to be spun into yarn, they must be strong, flexible enough to be twisted and long enough to stay together when spun. Fibers used for hand spinning usually come from animals, or protein, or plants called cellulosic fibers. Wool, alpaca, mohair, dog or rabbit are examples of protein fibers. Cotton and flax are common plant fibers used for spinning.

Yarn is made when fibers are twisted together under tension. The function of the hand spindle and spinning wheel is to twist prepared fibers while the spinner holds the fibers under tension. This chapter will give you instructions for spinning fibers only on a hand spindle, not a spinning wheel. Hand spindles are easy to make or can be purchased for a low cost from a yarn or weaving store. Spinning wheels are expensive and are not as available as spindles. If you want to spin with a spinning wheel, it is recommended to learn from an experienced spinner.



Spinning Wool Using a Hand Spindle

The basic parts of the hand spindle are the shaft and the whorl. Spun yarn is stored on the shaft. The whorl weights the spindle and provides tension for spinning. Some hand spindles have a small hook on the unweighted end of the shaft to control the yarn while spinning. There are two main types of hand spindles, suspended (or drop) spindles and supported spindles. With suspended or drop spindles, the spindle is supported by the length of yarn that is being spun. The location of the whorl (weight) is a personal preference. It can be at either the top, middle, or the bottom of the shaft. Popular bottom shaft spindles are Peruvian and Turkish. Supported spindles are a little more difficult to learn and are generally used for spinning shorter or finer fibers using a bowl within which the spindle is held in place as it spins. Common supported spindles are Russian, Tibetan, Navajo and Tahkli.

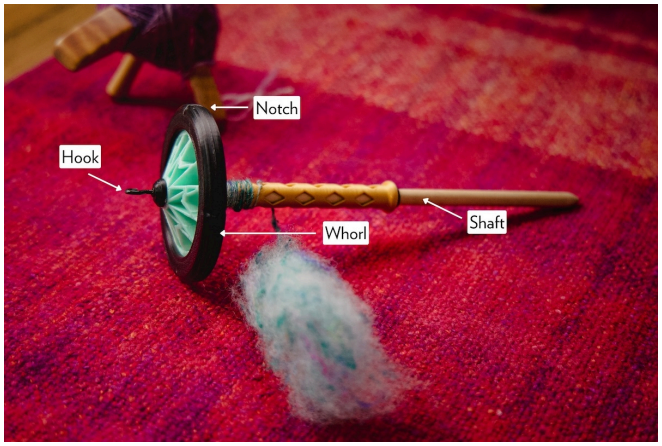


Image Credit: The anatomy of a suspended spindle.
https://sweetgeorgiayarns.com/the-taxonomy-of-spindles-spindle-styles-their-best-uses/



Image Credit: The anatomy of a supported spindle.
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Turkish spindles are a type of drop spindle that have a unique cross-arm design. As you spin, the yarn winds around the arms, forming a ball that's ready for pulling straight off the spindle. This design is practical, and the yarn builds up in neat, geometric layers.



Image Credit: Turkish spindle.
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Takhli spindles are a type of supported spindle that is small, heavier, and usually made of metal. Their fast, smooth spin makes them ideal for short, cotton, or slippery fibers.

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Image Credit: https://www.cottonacres.com/shop/spin/tahkli-spindle/

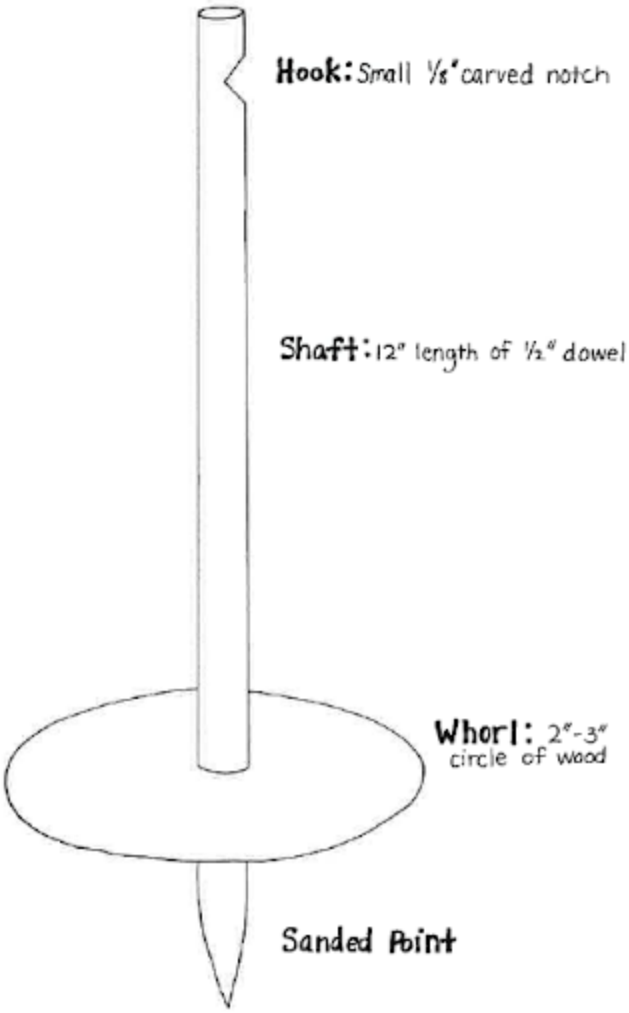


Image Credit: Wand spindle.
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Making Your Own Spindle

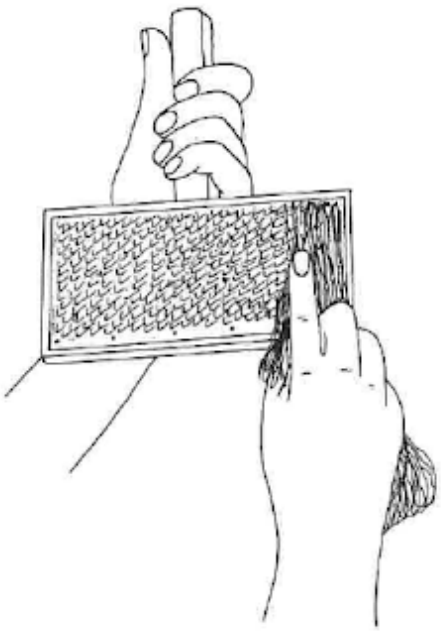
You can make your own spindle using materials available at hardware, hobby or craft shops. Use a 12-inch long, one-half inch diameter dowel for the shaft. Sand one end to a point. Carve a small notch, about one-eighth inch, in the shaft one inch from the blunt end to make a hook.

The whorl can be made from a two- to three-inch circle of solid wood, such as a coaster or wheel from a hobby shop. Drill a hole in the exact center of the wooden circle and insert the shaft so that the whorl is about 1 1/2 inches from the pointed end. The shaft needs to fit tightly, so apply wood glue to secure the whorl. Test the balance and rotation of your spindle by spinning it on the pointed end like a top. If the whorl is not centered the spindle will wobble and making yarn will be more difficult. This picture shows a bottom whorl spindle.

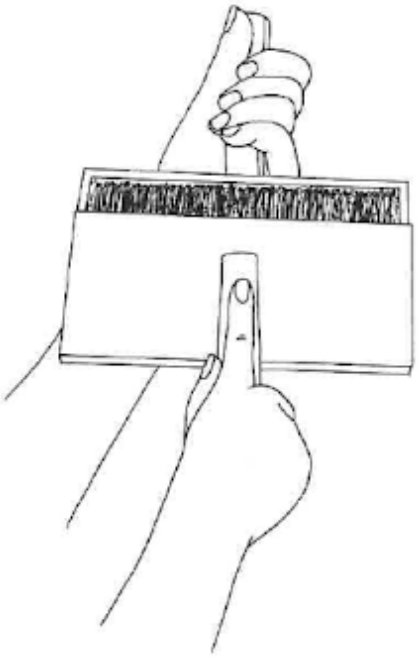


Preparing Fibers for Spinning

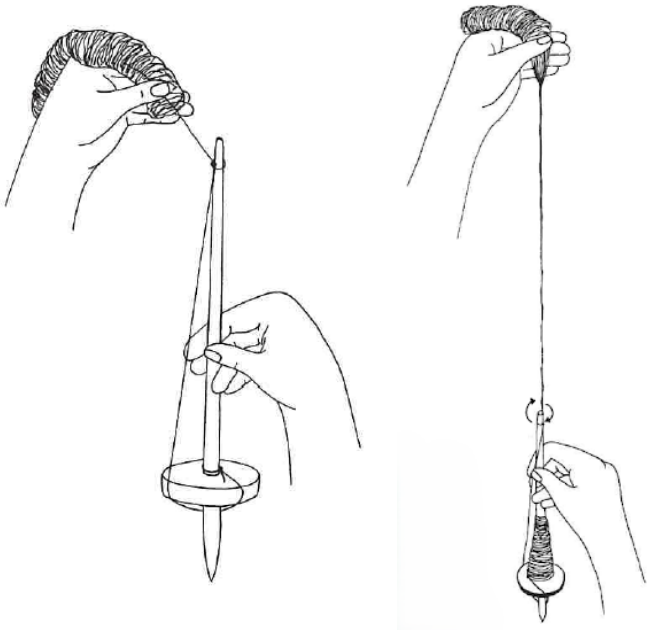
Choose a clean, unmatted fleece. You may spin the fleece in its natural grease or wash it first. To wash fleece, run warm water into a tub and add a small amount of mild dishwashing detergent. Gently place several ounces of wet fleece into the tub and let it soak for about half an hour. Do not agitate the fleece or it will felt. Lift the fleece from the now cooled water and place it in clean water of the same temperature to rinse. Rinse several times if necessary.



To prepare fibers for spinning they must be carded or combed. Carding involves a set of wooden paddles with rows of nails or thin wires through which the wool is combed together. Carding separates and fluffs the fibers using a brush-like tool with metal bristles. It aligns the fibers, removes tangles, and makes the fibers easier to spin. It helps improve the quality of the wool yarn by making it smoother and more even. Carded yarns, called woolen yarns, are usually soft and fuzzy. Combed fibers produce smoother, more tightly twisted worsted yarn. Combing with a metal dog comb can straighten the fibers. If you do not have hand cards to open and separate the fibers, tease them apart with your fingers.



To make spinning easier, tie an 18-inch piece of commercial yarn to the spindle next to the whorl and wind it onto the shaft. Loop the yarn over the top of the spindle in a half-hitch at the hook and take a handful of teased or carded fiber and place it next to the yarn. Twist the spindle away from you with your right hand while holding onto the fiber and yarn with the left hand. You should see and feel the fibers twisting together in your fingers. The small triangular area between the yarn and fiber is the drafting triangle or the drafting zone. It is where the drafted fibers meet the twist, and is the place where yarn is made.



Place the spindle on the floor or your leg so that the twist does not unwind, hold the twist with your left hand and pull slightly on the fleece with your right hand to open and align the fibers. This movement is called drawing out the fibers. Let the twist move into the fleece. Release the half-hitch at the top of the spindle and wind the yarn onto the shaft of the spindle.

If drawing out or drafting seems difficult, you may be adding too much twist to the yarn, or you may not have teased the fibers enough. Loose, open fibers will draft easily. The yarn will fall apart when you try to wind it on the spindle if you have not added enough twist.

When you have spun enough yarn to fill the spindle, make the yarn into a skein. Wind yarn from the spindle around a straight chair back. Be sure to tie the skein in at least four places with a small loop of extra yarn to keep it from becoming tangled.

To set the twist in yarn, soak the skein in warm water for about twenty minutes. Lift the skein out of the water and gently squeeze the yam to remove excess water. Hang the yarn in a warm dry place with a weight on the end to straighten the yarn and allow the twist to be evenly distributed along the yam. When the yarn is dry it will be ready to use.

After the skein is finished, hold it up to see if it drifts to the left or the right. A skein that hangs straight is called a balanced yarn.

Standards for Judging Handspun Yarn

General Appearance

- Yarn should be clean
- Properly skeined and tied
- Skein should hang straight (balanced)

Characteristics of the Yarn

- Uniform diameter (except in the case of fancy yarns).
- Evenly distributed twists
- Adequate strength for intended use
- Appropriate fiber selection and processing method for intended use



Image credit: https://theknittingtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/knitting-with-handspun-yarn-8.jpg?w=750

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References

Interweave Press
(https://www.interweave.com/) is an art and craft media company originally founded in Loveland, Colorado.

Some of helpful spinning resources from Spinning Daily include:
Wool Combing and Carding: How to Use Hand Carders, WoolCombs, and Drum Carders
https://www.interweave.com/wp-content/uploads/1012-_SO_Carding_Combing.pdf

DIY Spinning Equipment
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How to Make Yarn: Spinning for Beginners
https://www.interweave.com/wp-content/uploads/How-to-Make-Yarn-for-Beginners.pdf
An Introduction to Spinning Wheels: How to Use and How to Choose a Spinning Wheel
https://www.interweave.com/wp-content/uploads/1013_An_Intro_Spinning_Wheels_Great_Spinning_Roundup.pdf