

## Sheep !!

### A Needle Felted 'Critter' in 2 Versions

Normally I begin my projects with a material list – giving the amount of material in each kit, the finished size of the project and the location within the following pages of the Pattern Pieces. If this is your first Needle Felting experience then you're going to be surprised and a bit unnerved to read that none of these directions applies to this type of work!

The Felting that has been done in the past is called Wet Felting, to differentiate it from this technique using barbed, industrial needles and known as Dry or Needle Felting. Archeology and Science have proved that wet felting has been around for at least 30,000 years or more, despite it being attributed to more recent patrons. It has been just since the industrial revolution of some 200 years ago that many previously hand-worked processes became mechanized and a machine bed holding thousands of similar barbed needles shortened the felting from days to just minutes. The enclosed sheet gives the specifics on the needles used commercially; for our purposes we'll be using the needles individually, one sized needle at a time.

Any ruler in the kit pictures is in place to show you the approximate amount of wool that I started with as well as the percentage that the wool will compress as you needle it. Not being with you, it's difficult for me to tell you how much wool to pull off for each body part. The ruler serves to show that you should not exceed the measurements shown or you may run out of wool. For example: the polar bear weighs about 1/2 ounce; there is more than 1 ounce of wool in its kit. There are kit makers that pack the wool for every body part in separate bags. I feel that this is 'hand-holding'; that you will not learn to decide for yourself how to apportion the wool unless it's already done for you – and you *will* be branching off into designing for yourself!

#36 is the largest needle in my kits and is used to poke deeply into the wool to mat the center together as well as the surface. Having barbs along the whole working length will felt the inside & outside at the same time. #38 needles can be used to begin a project with, but because they have a slightly smaller barb, they push less wool in with each thrust and it will take longer to achieve the same results that you get with #36. If you're going to make a very firmly felted piece, it's most important that the core is felted firmly with the deeper needles, as it's almost impossible to get a firm product, one that won't change shape when it's squeezed, unless the center is felted firmly too, and almost impossible to achieve unless the piece is begun that way.

Triangle vs Star: How to tell the difference. This was explained in the General Information sheet, but at any time you can hold a needle at an angle to reflect the light and if it shines as if off a flat blade like a knife, it's a Triangular needle. If you rotate it in your fingers and cannot see any reflected surfaces, it's a Star, as those have concave surfaces and don't reflect the light.

The Star shape needle will leave less noticeable holes in the surface than a Triangular, due to its narrower side surfaces. 38 Tri & Star are also useful to begin some of the sculpting for eye sockets and definition and indenting in any area. #40 are fine-gauged needles; with 40 & 42 you'll feel as if all of your poking isn't accomplishing very much. You usually poke rather shallowly with them because the barbs are nearer the tip and penetrating more deeply than the barbs doesn't accomplish much; they work primarily on tightening up the surface.

I've been asked countless times, "How will I know which needle to use"? Easy! Start with the largest size you have and when there's too much resistance to thrusting the barbed end into the wool, move down a size. That will penetrate more easily and when that firms up the wool, again move down a size or use the 'other' style: Triangle instead of the Star or Star instead of the Triangle.

The base wool in this kit is New Zealand Romney, considered to be of Medium grade, between tightly crimped and absolutely straight. The finishing wool in the Polar & Panda kits is Cormo, the finest gauged, most closely crimped wool I've found. Cormo is easy to work and gives a good finish for novices and as well as those more experienced. I want you all to enjoy this and have Fun! There is usually some Vegetable Matter (vm) included in the wool. Sheep get into a lot of plant material during a year, even those coated, and processing removes most but not all of it. I don't bother with removing it until I'm in the finishing stages. Using a pin or the leftover shaft of a broken needle I pick out only the vm that shows in the surface.

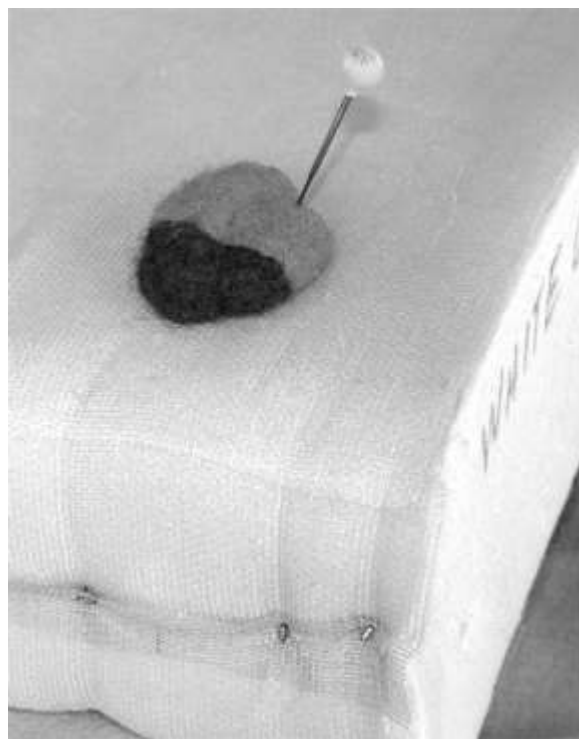
One important lesson is that you want to felt *all of the parts of your project to the same amount of firmness each time you work with the different sized needles*. It's very difficult to keep proper proportions if you felt the body of something to its finished size and firmness and then try to attach legs or a head that has been only half-felted. It's also easier to work the project as a single piece if you do all of the felting with the largest needle (and perhaps with the middle needle - #38 – before joining the pieces). It will then be firm enough to hold in your hand and work until it's done, though you may want the cushion for support at certain times.

You also need a surface to begin the felting process on; a 12" x 15" x 3" to 5" high grade/premium upholstery foam (the type for making cushions) as the base. Most fabric shops carry these and will cut a piece for you. Do NOT use a sponge – like those used for household chores; they dry out and are extremely difficult to penetrate with the needles. Most needles will soon become dull and break while using the sponge. The foam needs to be covered with an over-wrap of Fiberglass window screening to keep the foam from disintegrating after thousands of jabs into it and to keep the wool fibers from becoming entrapped in the foam's surface. It's OK to work without this but know that the caught fibers from one color wool will be transferred to the next project worked (red fibers from a previous project embedded in the foam surface and transferred to a white Polar Bear are VERY obvious!); also that the foam will give off 'crumbs' after it begins to break down and will become entrapped in the surface of the wool being needled. You can keep a separate foam for each color you'll work but nothing will eliminate the crumbs so it's easiest to just start out with this covering.

A towel is also unsuitable for this type of work, due to dulling the point and not allowing the tip to penetrate its surface, as you'll need to do this at all stages of work. It's only in the mid- to final stages of work that the piece is hand-held. It is often said that anything you use is to protect the work surface (your lap, the table, etc...). Actually, while wool is in it's soft, fluffy stages, the needles go right through it and out the other side. This is needed, as you work 3-D pieces from all angles and need to penetrate them completely. Your hand is holding the wool and until the wool compacts enough to hold its shape, the working surface is a substitute for your hand.

This is a Red & Black LadyBug, being worked on a previously 'White Only' surface – no red or black fibers were embedded into or brought up out of the foam: I used to use a separate foam for each color because the wool will 'beard': the fibers are pushed into the surface and held there, to be picked up into the next piece you work. Dye will also stain the surface. There's nothing more

aggravating than picking Christmas Red wool out of a Polar Bear's white wool. Since covering my foam blocks with fiberglass window screening (as explained in the accompanying General Needle Felting Information sheet) I no longer have that problem.



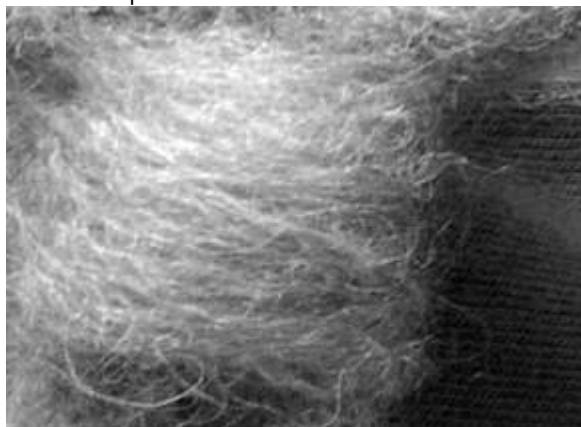
T-Pins inserted through the overlapped edges hold the ends of the screening wrapped snugly over the foam. (This LadyBug has had its 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of felting completed on the right side – compacting and reducing it to 1/2 of the left side.)

I also cannot tell you the exact size of your finished project because it will depend upon how much wool you use and how firmly you compact it with repeated jabs using the various needles. Some people may prefer a more softly worked project, I prefer a VERY firm end result and a lot of felters will choose somewhere in between these two. Anything that you like when you're finished is what you're working toward.

There are also no Pattern piece templates with needle felting: a core is made and layers of wool – Patches™ - are added as you wish. In your mind's eye you'll probably see a picture of the finished product and you'll be working toward that end result. I can only give you suggestions of how to achieve particular results.

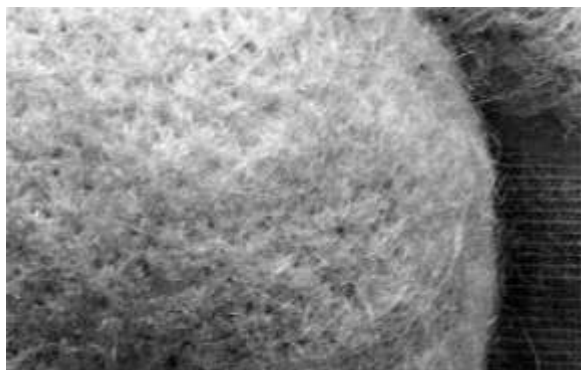
There are at least 2 basic methods of forming 3 dimensional sculptures: I call them The Wrap and The Patch™.

The Wrap looks like this when it's finished:



and is used for very soft sculptured, decorative pieces that won't be handled.

The Patch™ begins with a tightly molded and needled core – like a skeleton, and layers are built up one upon another in separate patches until the final shape is produced.



Both types need more needling but this shows the inherent strength of the Patch over the Wrap method.

I teach the Patch™ method, although it takes MUCH longer to do, because I feel that it gives a more permanent piece of Fiber Art that will hold up to handling over time. A client once asked. "How long will this bear stay like this?" My answer: "Unless your dog gets hold of it or it lands on a campfire; forever!"

For an example of the look of the finished Patch surface, see any cover photo on my kits, web site or one of my Fiber Art handworks.

#### Patches™ for layering:

Pull off a pinch of wool about 1" across and needle the center of it lightly (#36) on the foam. Flip it

over a few times to push the beards back into the wool that's compacting. *Leave all edge fibers loose and un-needed!* In order to have all of the filling patches blend into the surface well, the edges must remain loose and fluffy until after the patch is in place. Lay the patch over the spot and needle around the edges of the compacted section to keep it in place. Now needle in the loose fibers on the edges by going randomly over the area until it all lays smoothly against the core. Not filled in enough? Repeat as much and as many times as needed to achieve the overall shape you want.

On Preparing fibers for Dry/Needle Felting: If you're familiar with the use of hand carders this is the time to use them to separate, realign and fluff up the fibers. I **HIGHLY RECOMMEND** hand carding all fibers before beginning the project. I use a pair of New Zealand Ashcraft hand carders; they're rather expensive (\$40 - 70 a pair U.S.A.) but the justification is the long hours of use preparing fibers for classes and for my own use. All processed wool, even drum carded batts and roving/sliver, has been squashed in shipping. The easiest working wool is that which has been fluffed up just prior to needling. Suitable substitutes are grooming brushes from a pet store. There are several sizes available: use ones at least 2" - 4" to 3" x 5" in the wire bristle areas. The bent needle design works best, a curved or rounded surface plate and wire size for larger dogs, not the fine gauged for 'sensitive skin & coats'. These are about \$5 - \$10 US each.

This website demonstrates how to use them:

<http://www.joyofhandspinning.com/hand-carding.html>



*If at anytime you find you've needled a shape that you don't want, or it's too thick or too thin, it's possible to re-card the wool, reclaim it as a rolag and start over again. It's a bit more difficult if you needled it tighter & firmer with the thinner needles, but it is possible!* This is a good thing to keep in mind if you feel like you're running out of wool and wish to use previously worked wool that you'd abandoned. Or use the discarded or cut off pieces as the core base for another project, covering them with a second skin in the new project's shade. Unlike fabric bears, there is NO waste in needle felting!

One more, inexpensive method to fluff & align the wool: using a wire 'hair pick', the type used to lift permed or very curly hair, hold wool up in one hand and gradually comb through from the end, working upwards while pulling away small fluffed and aligned fiber amounts.

It's still possible to fluff up the wool if you don't have carders try this: Pull off 4" of roving. Holding the wool with your fingertips, pull on the ends to separate this piece into 2 and then lay the 2 sections on top of each other and do it again. Repeat this several more times and you'll notice the fibers beginning to fluff up. Continue doing this for another dozen or 2 times but now lay the fibers in different directions so that they're fluffed but non-aligned. This will create a 'rolag' of sorts that is the base for your work.

I repeat this here because it's VERY Important! "One important lesson is that you want to felt *all of the parts of your project to the same amount of firmness each time you work with the different sized needles.*" It's very difficult to keep proper proportions if you needle the body of something to its finished size and firmness and then try to attach legs or a head that has been only half-felted. It's also easier to work the project as a single piece if you do all of the felting with the largest needle (and perhaps a bit with the middle needle - #38 - before joining the pieces). It will then be firm enough to hold in your hand and work until it's done, though you may want the cushion for support at certain times.

HINT: If you ever feel that you just can't get the wool compressed further, and the part is still larger/bigger/longer than you need or than its matching part, cut with scissors or knife and felt a thin 'patch' over the cut ends to seal them inside.

The following pictures show the hind quarters of a 5" long unjointed polar bear that's been worked to a half-finished state: all of the body parts have been attached and one final outer skin layer applied and tacked into place with the #36. Large holes are visible but everything is in its final position, ready for progressing down through 38, 40 and 42 or the Pinch needle. Look back at this picture and compare it when you feel ready to finish your project's surface layer. In the second picture, the same surface has been worked with #38, except for those 2 vertical rectangles on the bear's side, showing up as raised surfaces at its hip. The surface of the surrounding area is already smoother, more compact and less fuzzy.

This surface of Patches™ has been needled with #36.



Now further needled with #38, except for the 2 vertical rectangles mid-way.



Have a great time working this kit and don't hesitate to contact me should you have questions, comments..... or compliments!

#### Let's begin your Sheep!!

Begin by separating the white wool into 2 even sized pieces, one for each version. Using one of the halves, hold onto both ends and gently pull apart. It's not recommended to ever cut roving with scissors.

Card the black wool and separate it into 2 pieces as you did the white.

Using a white half section, mould the wool with your hands to form a fat log shape. Don't Roll the wool into shape! Place it on the cushion top and use the 36T needle to poke through deeply into the wool from all sides, keeping it as log or barrel-shaped as you started. Penetrate through into the foam top at this stage. Lift and turn it every 5 to 6 pokes. This keeps the 'beards' of wool going back into the ball instead of trying to embed themselves into the foam. Turning it often also maintains your original shaping. Continue to needle until the size of the ball has been reduced by about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of its original size. Keep your fingers of the wool-holding hand well back from the place that you're aiming at. And be sure the angle that the needle enters the wool at is the same that it leaves the wool at. It's not important that this is always at a  $90^{\circ}$  angle to the surface, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the time you'll need to poke from many different angles, but the needle's working shaft is very brittle and can't take much

flexing without snapping off. Never use it as a pry bar for any reason - that's a certain way to break your needles. I'll guarantee that you'll soon collect some broken needles; stick the holding ends into the side of your cushion and use those to lift or pry the wool with.

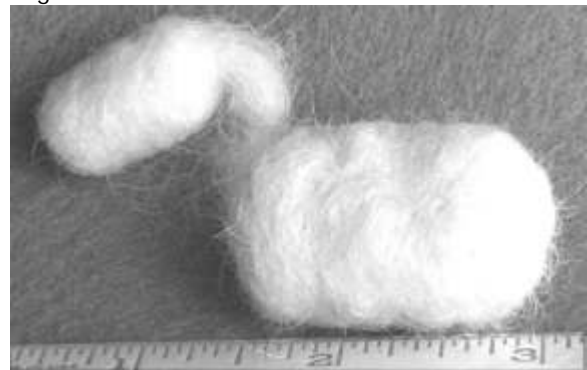
With the other half of the first amount of white, pull it into 3 pieces. One of these is shaped and needled with 36T into a similar log shape as the body, forming the Head. Take a small tuft of loose wool, place it between the end of the log and the head and needle the 2 together. The loose wool acts as a glue to help the already-needled pieces bond together.

A large barrel or log shape - Body, and a smaller shape cylindrical shape - the Head.

This is the angle that they'll be joined together, with a bit of loose wool for the bonding 'glue'



In this picture, the end of the Head shape is left un-needled and becomes the glue to bond Head and Body together:



Poke into both pieces through this 'neck' section until they hold together. Take a short strip of roving, about 2" long, needle the end of it onto the body at the base of the (back) neck, wrap it around the join and needle the other end in. Work around the neck and needle deeply into the head and neck using this strip to make them more solid. Don't push so hard that you move the

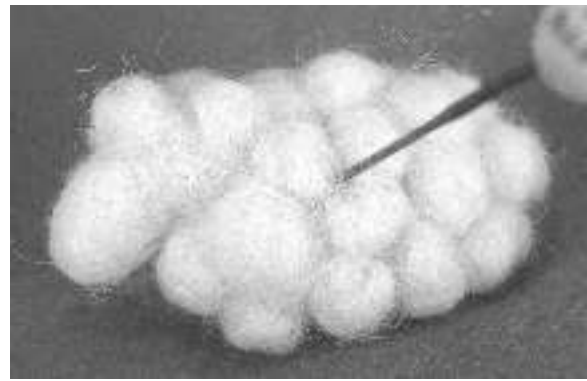
pieces apart however. The head should sit right down against the neck/shoulder area. Lightly go over the whole sheep with 38 S needle to firm up the surface.



Now choose one of the versions to make:  
#1 - is a puffy sheep laying down on its chest, or  
#2 - is a standing, smoother wooly sheep.  
Or, combine the 2 versions into one!



#1 - The larger section you have left will be used to make individual little wool puffs. Pull off small tufts (I can't tell you exactly how big as you'll find that with experimenting) and roll them into large pea-sized balls. Place the fiber ends side against the sheep and needle with 36 around the edges of the ball to bond it to the body. I start at the tail end and work toward the head. Place them irregularly rather than in exact rows; give the puffs a random appearance. You can add them along the lower edge of the sides now or leave a little space and add them at the end.



When you reach the front of the sheep, place one puff on top of its head and use that as a guide to place more down the back of the head, covering the neck join, the shoulders and chest. Now is the time add whatever would be needed to finish off its sides so that it's 'laying down' with no belly showing. You can also needle the belly area a bit with 36 or 38 into the body core to flatten out the belly's surface.

Ears: Using one of the black pieces, needle it into an elongated flat log. Don't make it too thick or the ears won't lay nicely angled half way out from the head. Leave the center section ( $1/2$ "") unfelted. After lifting the ears up and flipping them over many times to contain the loose fibers that 'beard' out of the underside, needling on both sides with 38 and then 40, cut them through the middle unfelted section. Hold them up to the head to check their length. If too short you can tease them out a bit longer towards the unfelted section with a pin. **DON'T USE YOUR FELTING NEEDLE!!** If they're too long trim off a bit at the cut end. (A little bit of their length will be needled into the Head.) Felt them deeply into the head on the sides below the edge of the topknot. Add a few more smaller puffs below them along the sides, like sideburns, to fill in the spaces between the ears and the shoulders.

Version #2 - A little more advanced version - with legs. There are 4 short pieces of dowel included with the kit; with the tip of your scissor widen 4 holes in the belly of the sheep and push the ends into the holes. Check for the balance; you might wish to put a tiny pencil mark on each dowel to mark how deeply they go into the body and where it exits the hole. Put a bit of white glue, like Aleene's Tacky glue or a similar thick-bodied fabric glue on the points and re-insert them into the holes with the pencil marks to the inside. Press the sheep down to imbed them into the body equally. They can be inserted straight up and down or angle them out slightly. Because the Head makes the sheep a little heavier in the front than the back, (to keep the sheep balanced), I pushed the hind legs in just a bit further than the front legs. Check again for balance to make sure it will stand up.

Allow the glue to dry overnight before moving the sheep. If the legs look awkward where they join the body, take small tufts and felt them around the base where the wood meets the wool to soften the line. You want to fill in the 90° angle created between the leg and the belly. My prototype looks fine without these. Continue to work the entire surface of the sheep's body, neck and back of the head to compact it further. It should now be about 1/3 the size of the original piece of wool.

\*\*Wrapping the legs with yarn: glue one end to the foot. Allow to dry. Wind the yarn around the dowel to the body. Add a touch of glue & tuck the end into the yarn or the body at the top of the leg.

Use the rest of the wool to add a layer over the whole body, upper legs, neck and top of head, but do it with small tufts added one at a time rather than laying the wool on in one continuous piece. If one spot seems a bit low or needing a bit more wool, put a tuft over the spot, needle it on with a half dozen pokes with 36 to attach it and then go back to using the 38. Try to keep these additional patches as non-aligned fibers, that is, not having all of the fibers running in the same direction. That would be a very obvious patch that will never blend into the background.

NEEDLE VERY SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY SO YOU DON'T BREAK YOUR NEEDLE BY HITTING THE WOOD.

You can paint the dowels black in advance of gluing in place (or cover them with the enclosed wool by wrapping and gluing the 4 wooly strands around the dowels after inserting the dowels into the under belly. Wrap them only after the legs have been glued in place and dried for 24 hours.)

Your sheep is almost done and your upper arm will be very sore! Take time to stand up and do a few stretches with your arms and back. Concentrate on lowering your shoulders (I KNOW you've had them raised and hunched together while you concentrated on learning this!!!) and swinging side to side at your waist. Shake out the tension in your arms and hands. Do whatever relaxes your muscles best, even if it's walking away from the project for a while. I continue to take Tai Chi classes to gently stretch and flex my whole body just because this is such sedentary work and only a few muscles do a very long hard job for hours at a time.

This should be a wooly sheep so you don't have to have this outer layer completely smooth. It looks better with a bit of fuzziness in the coat. Use 40 needle to go over the face to smooth and tighten the skin surface there however.

When you're satisfied with your Sheep use #36 to poke two small depressions for the eyes on the sides of the head below and in front of the ears. Sew the eyes into place with black upholstery thread. It's not necessary to pull in as tightly as you have to in bearmaking, to 'set' the eyes into the head. Use black floss to sew 2 nostrils (pulled in French knots perhaps??) and a mouth.

If you have a tiny bit of white wool left, you can felt it into a short tube shape and needle it into its 'back' side for a Tail.

There now, aren't you proud of your new friend? It can either be your teddy bear's pet or sew a Mary-Had-A-Little-Lamb Bear or the lazy, laying-down version can doze next to her in school!

It's not necessary to protect your needles from rust unless they're to be stored in a damp area or climate. The oils picked up from your hands are usually enough to protect them. Folding them inside a paper doused with a few drops of oil (like that used in a sewing machine or hair clippers) will be a good barrier against moisture. Or wipe downward on the needle with oil on a cloth or cotton ball and push them more than half way into your foam.

One final word: you are using very sharp needles and raw wools, in various stages of having been cleaned in their processing. While I would not presume to give medical advice. I know that you're going to poke yourself and bleed a bit. This is what I do to head off any chance of infection: I mix a spoonful of Epsom salts (from a 2 quart box of dry crystals from the pharmacy) in a quart of hot water, stir to dissolve the salts and soak my hands for a few minutes. Rinse well, dry well and pamper your hands with a generous application of lotion.

I do this about once a week while felting.

Don't put that foam and the needles too far away; I'll bet your imagination is already planning your next Needle Felted project!