



SOUTHERN OREGON  
SOAY SHEEP FARMS  
www.soayfarms.com

*Happy  
Holidays!*

## December Calendar

- ❑ Cold season is here. Watch for coughing and runny noses. Treat as necessary.
- ❑ Trim hooves if needed while they are soft.
- ❑ Keep an eye on breeding groups. If using older rams, you may need to supplement them with concentrates so they don't lose too much weight chasing the ewes and not concentrating on eating.
- ❑ Also watch to see that rams are not keeping the ewes from feed. Re-arrange hay feeders if necessary.

# Viewpoint

FROM THE PREMIER BREEDER OF BRITISH REGISTERED SOAY SHEEP

## All that wool... part 2 by Kathie Miller and Heather McLaren

Heather's garage, which barely has room for her car, is chock full of wool processing equipment.

A 40-year collection of tools and equipment—drum carders, a wool picker—and bags upon bags of wool from all around the world fill the space. This is definitely the place to get a hands-on demonstration of processing fleece. So the lesson that had begun with washing (see Nov. 2010 Viewpoint) continued.

The next step in preparation, for heavy wools or those that still contain debris after washing, is picking. For spinning, wool must be absolutely free of chaff, and a wool picker can take some of the drudgery out of removing the last bits of VM (vegetable matter). It makes carding, which comes



Wool Picker

next, easier and will help keep the cards cleaner.

"Learning to card," explains Heather, "is an art. And what would appear to be simple is annoyingly complicated."

Hand-carding is the traditional method of preparing wool by separating and straightening the fibers. Hand-carders are generally curved- or flat-backed wooden paddles with a sturdy rubber backing on one side into which closely spaced pins are embedded, similar to a dog

"slicker" brush. Two brushes are used to brush the wool between them until the fibrils are more or less aligned in the same direction. *Care and Feeding of Handcards* has excellent diagrams to get you started.

There are also many types and sizes of mechanical drum carders, both hand-cranked and motorized. Drum carders are a considerable investment



Hand-Carders  
Schacht Spindle Company

and are used for working with large amounts of material.

Whether carded by hand or machine, the wool is transformed into "batts/rolag" or "roving" that are a manageable size for the spinner, who can pull out the amount of

*continued on page 2*



Drum Carder

## Soay wool facts

by Kathie Miller

Soay wool is highly variable in both quantity and quality. The following are what you can reasonably expect.

- ▶ 1 to 1.5 pounds of fleece annually
- ▶ Staple length: 1.5"- 4" (4-10 cm)
- ▶ Quality: 44's - 50's (English (Bradford) Spinning Count System—the higher the number the finer the wool)
- ▶ Rooed wool to yarn ratios (processed commercially):
  - ▶ 5.8 lb. wool raised on dry lot = 2.7 lb. yarn (about 45%)
  - ▶ 4 lb. wool raised on grass = 2.4 lb. yarn (about 60%)

Rams shed earlier in the spring than ewes, and their seasonal scent glands—which impart a pungent smell to the wool—are often still active.

# Resources

YouTube lists 54 videos on carding. Here is a start: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmiM\\_YNm4Nk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmiM_YNm4Nk)

A demonstration of wool picking: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hg6mTIFHcgI>

A simple drop spindle can be made with a stick and a few old CDs. A demonstration of using a drop spindle: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gXTWgMeMgl>

Some inspiring felt artists and their work:

Sharon Parker: <http://dailyartmuse.com/2010/10/18/sharron-parker/>

Karen Head: <http://www.karenhead.co.uk/>

**Antrim Handweaving:** Margaret B. Russell specializes in weaving with Soay

If you are interested in working with wool in any form you will want to subscribe to *Spin-Off* magazine: <http://www.spinoffmagazine.com/> Domestic subscriptions are \$26 (£16.56) a year (4 issues); Foreign subscriptions \$33 (£21).

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All advice in this newsletter has been used successfully on our farm. It is important to remember that every animal and situation is different. Before you try any of our suggestions, we urge you to consult your veterinarian.

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## All that wool, part 2 continued from page one

fleece needed without having to stop for knots, burrs or tangles. Now, the fiber is ready to spin or felt.

In technical terms, hand-spinning is the art of twisting fibers into a long, continuous length of interlocked filaments to create yarn.



Wool batt

Spinning can be done with a drop spindle—as the early St. Kildans did—or on a spinning wheel, which they used after it was introduced to the island in 1830. By the time of the evacuation 100 years later, every St. Kildan home had a spinning wheel, and part of the tenants' annual rent was paid with the tweed that they had spun and woven.

Spinning Soay wool can be very frustrating for the beginner because of its short staple length, 1.5"- 4" (4-10 cm). (Staple is the length of the wool when shorn from the sheep.) In contrast, Lincoln Longwool can have a 14" staple (35cm). But Soay is considered a novelty by more advanced spinners, who also blend it with other fibers.

Spinning is growing in popularity and is a world unto itself. There are many good resources online to help beginners.

Soay wool can also be prepared commercially, and while it is a bit expensive,

fleece that a spinner would not touch (because of VM) can be processed into lovely wool yarn for weaving.

Still River Fiber Mill in Connecticut is a small, family-owned mill that has a lot of experience with Soay.

Felting is possibly the easiest way to make a piece of fabric. Soay wool is ideal for felt because it is downy and short. To create felt in its simplest form, you can take a pile of fleece in your palm, add some soapy water and rub it. In a few minutes, you'll have created felt. But to do it more seriously you will need bubble wrap, hand soap (not detergent), hot water, wool batt or roving, and elbow grease.

First, lay out a few ounces of carded wool in alternating layers on a sheet of bubble wrap. Make certain the fibers in each layer are all going the same direction, e.g. north to south. Put a second layer on top with the fibers in the opposite direction, e.g. east to west. Make all

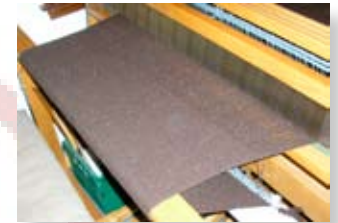
the layers as even as possible. The more layers you put down the thicker your felt will be. When you have the desired size and thickness,



Spinning

lay a sheet of synthetic net or fabric on top of the pile and pour hot, soapy water over it. Roll it all into a cylinder and work it back and forth

as you would a rolling pin. Because the layers are at right



Soay on the loom

Photo courtesy of Margaret B. Russell

angles to each other they will interlock, mat, and shrink with the pressure of rolling. Unroll, change direction, re-roll, and continue to work it as before. Repeat as needed. Hot, soapy water and agitation are the keys to success. When you are satisfied with the result, rinse in cold water to shock it, squeeze or spin dry, stretch to final fit, and lay it out flat to finish drying.



Soay woven tapestry

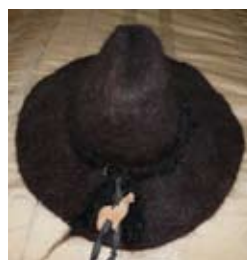
There are amazing things you can do with felt. Heather's remark at the end of my lesson was, "Get over

thinking processing fleece is a big deal. You can improve, but it's very, very simple to just get started and has been done many thousand years from cave women onwards."

Next spring, when your ewes begin to molt, save some fleece and give it a try.



Balwen felted ram's head



Llama felted hat