



Advice on washing raw/greasy fleeces

We normally wash wool clean of grease and dirt at the mill. The textile industry calls this “scouring” and uses the same term for washing the spinning oil from spun yarns. At the mill scouring will remove most grease/lanolin at a temperature of 65 degrees Centigrade.

If you have to wash fleece in advance, either to preserve it or to remove yolk stains or pesticide, then we hope you will find the following instructions useful. This is NOT scouring, as it will not remove much lanolin, but is also sufficient for hand spinning.

1. Choose open fleece with no staple break. One fleece or even half a fleece is enough to wash at a time.
2. Remove second cuts, vegetation, obvious dirt and tangles – do this by pulling NOT CUTTING.
3. Check tips for soundness – our equipment will break weak fibres. Fibre quality is very important: shearing too late means the carding will test the weak point. Second cuts will not all fall out so some will be distributed all through the web and yarn.
4. Soak in warm suds, with no movement (too hot and too much movement causes felting). This will remove dirt, sweat and some grease. You can fill a bath or large bowl with hand hot water, add liquid soap or detergent (e.g. wool washing fluid or washing-up liquid), then dunk the fleece into the bath/bowl and ensure it is submerged. Leave till cold.
5. Drain by squeezing gently and lifting onto a rack, then rinse until water runs clean. For very fine fibre, do not use a hand shower, only dunk in new water and squeeze gently, draining on a rack. Coarser fibres and those less inclined to felt, like alpaca, can be rinsed gently with the hand shower.
6. When all excess water is drained, and the rinsing water is pretty clean, put in sacks or pillowcases, tying it closed, and spin on wool spin, around 1,000-1,200 revolutions, in the washing machine. Using 3-4 pillow cases will balance the load in the machine. DO NOT use the rinse/spin cycle, as water dropping onto the wool can cause felting at this stage.

DO NOT TUMBLE DRY unless you want a felt ball. If you are brave, you can try experiments with small amounts at low temperatures for short periods to establish whether tumbling will felt your particular fleece and you will probably find that alpaca and mohair will not felt if tumbled dry unless very fine.





7. **If this is for your own use, tease whilst damp:** seeds do not stick so easily when wet and hay and straw are removed more easily. This step can be omitted if you are sending fleece to us as we will re-scour and tease the fibre at the mill.
8. Leave the washed or teased fleece to dry in warm airy space or in sunlight if not too windy. When dry, bag and repeat until all is complete.

Washed fleece will keep much longer in sealed storage bags – plastic to avoid moth – than a raw fleece, which cannot be kept in air-tight bags and must breathe or it will rot. However, because not all the lanolin is removed the clean wool is better stored in a breathable bag.

Storing raw/greasy fleeces is best in cool, dry, draughty conditions, for example tied in an old duvet cover or in **closed** paper, hessian or polypropylene sacks, hanging up or on pallets off the ground. Well stored, raw fleeces may be kept for up to three years before use, if you need to collect a particular colour or type. You need to store so as to prevent moths, vermin, dust and damp damage!

You may wish to try **cold water fermentation** of small quantities and can find information about this online: it smells but produces soft, clean results, removes the lanolin and makes a liquid fertiliser as well!

If you have any doubts, send a small sample of raw and prepared fibre and ask for further advice.

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