



## Glossary: Sheep and Wool

If you've not worked with us before, are new to sheep and wool, or just want to learn more, this should help. You can find out more about yarns, knitting and crochet terms and advice, on the Blacker Yarns website: <http://www.blackeryarns.co.uk/about/advice-information/>

Terms shown in *italic* are separately listed here.

- **Bale:** a pack of wool containing a specific weight of pressed wool. Prepared by a *bale press*;
- **Batts:** thick sheets of carded fibre;
- **Bellwether:** originally an experienced *wether* with a bell round its neck enabling it to lead a flock;
- **Break:** a thinning of the fleece, meaning that part of the *staple* will be weak;
- **Bummer Lamb:** a lamb that steals milk from ewes other than its mother, usually from the back where it cannot be checked by smell. Bumpers may be spotted by fecal matter on their foreheads, hence the phrase 'it's a bummer';
- **Cast:** a sheep stuck on its back and unable to regain its footing, possibly because it's on a hill with its legs in the wrong direction, or its fleece may be heavy;
- **Clip:** the wool gathered from a flock after *shearing*;
- **Clipping:** removing the fleece from sheep, the same as *shearing* or *rooing*;
- **Comb:** machine or implement used to process long stapled wool for worsted spinning;
- **Crimp:** the natural wave formation of wool. Fine wool is usually crimpier. In most cases, the closer the crimp, the finer the wool;
- **Crutching:** when only parts of an animal are sheared, frequently the belly and back end in woolly breeds like Merino to prevent or inhibit fly strike;
- **Dags:** clumps of dried dung stuck to the wool; removed during hand sorting or *crutching*.
- **Dagging:** clipping off *dags*;
- **Downs:** Downland breeds of sheep belonging to the short wool group. For example Southdown, Hampshire Down or Dorset Down;
- **Drench:** an oral veterinary medicine administered by a drenching gun. Most commonly an anthelmintic used for the treatment of parasitic worms;
- **Eaning:** the act of a sheep giving birth;
- **Earmark:** a mark clipped from the ear for identification purposes. The word can also refer to a tattoo inside the ear relating to ownership and/or age. See *Lug Mark*;
- **Ear Tag:** a plastic or metal identification tag clipped to a sheep's ear. It may incorporate a microchip;



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- **Ewe:** a female sheep;
- **Fibre:** unspun wool, hair or vegetable material;
- **Fleece:** the wool covering of sheep or the entire coat after *shearing*;
- **Flock:** the collective noun for a group of sheep. **Herd** is used for alpacas and goats;
- **Fly Strike:** commonly used phrase to describe *myiasis*, an infestation of the wool, skin and flesh with blowfly or botfly maggots. Often occurs when the fleece is contaminated by dung or urine;
- **Fold (or Sheepfold):** a pen in which a flock is kept overnight in bad weather or when predators are about;
- **Folding:** confining sheep and other livestock to restricted areas for feeding or before shearing; used to be used for husbandry on the South Downs;
- **Foot Rot:** commonly used phrase to describe the infectious pododermatitis, a hoof disease common in sheep, goats and cattle grazing on wet or flooded pasture;
- **Gimmer:** a young ewe yet to give birth. Commonly used in the more northerly parts of England and Scotland;
- **Greasy wool:** wool that hasn't been scoured;
- **Hank:** a *skein* of wool of measured length/weight. Hanks are the preferred way of displaying wool for sale in some countries, notably Mainland Europe and the United States;
- **Hefting:** some breeds of sheep instinctively restrict their roaming to a small area or heft. This allows some sheep to graze areas without fences;
- **Hogget:** a sheep aged between 9-18 months, technically until the animal cuts two teeth. Many lamb eaters, particularly in New Zealand, believe hogget has the best flavour;
- **In Lamb:** a pregnant ewe;
- **Kemp:** the short, coarse, white, hollow or more hairy fibre found round the head and legs of sheep, alpaca and other animals. Sometimes called *medullated fibre*;
- **Lamb:** a sheep under one year old. In some countries, particularly in the east, the term is loosely used to describe meat that is not mutton;
- **Lambing:** the word used when ewes give birth;
- **Lambing Percentage:** a measure of lambing success relating to the number of ewes mated and the number of multiple births. May vary from 100% in a hardy mountain flock, to 150% or more in well-fed lowland flocks. Depends on breed; some ewes can only successfully mother one lamb, others are happy with twins and others even triplets;
- **Lanolin:** grease secreted by the sheep's skin. It is thick, yellow and greasy and removed by scouring. Manufacturers recover it from raw wool for commercial purposes, notably shampoo. Sometimes called *wool fat*, *wool wax*, *wool grease*, *adepts lanae* or *yolk*;
- **Lug Mark:** used in Cumbria for the mark created by clipping a small section of the sheep's ear with a particular pattern that identifies the farmer;
- **Medullated Fibre:** see *Kemp* above;



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- **Myiasis:** see *Fly Strike* above;
- **Micron:** one millionth of a metre. Used as a measure for the diameter of fibre. Some people use micrometre;
- **Mule:** a crossbred sheep usually combining suitability for meat with the qualities necessary to thrive in colder climates, notably the north of England. Usually, but not always bred from a Blue-faced Leicester ram on a mountain ewe like a Swaledale. Often qualified to indicate the ewe. A Welsh Mule, for example, comes from a Blue-faced Leicester ram and a Welsh Mountain ewe;
- **Mulesing:** a practice to inhibit fly strike widely used in Australia that involves cutting off wrinkled flesh from the crutch area. Controversial, and illegal in some parts of the world. Named after Mr Mules;
- **Mutton:** meat from older *ewes* or *wethers*;
- **Noils:** short fibres removed when combing the fleece. These can be recycled to a limited degree by mixing with other wool, to be carded and spun;
- **Old-season Lamb:** a lamb a year or more old. See *Hogget*, *Shearling* and *Teg*
- **Pencil Roving:** thin strips of roving roughly the diameter of a pencil;
- **Plying:** winding two or more yarns together;
- **Poddy Lamb, Bottle Lamb or Pet Lamb:** an orphan or a lamb rejected by its mother that has been reared on a bottle. Also called *cade lamb* or *placer*;
- **Polled/Poll:** a sheep without horns, for example Poll Dorset. In the case of North Ronaldsay sheep, the rams have horns, but the ewes may be polled, horned or scurred (scurrs are small residual horn protuberances where horns would be. They sometimes get rubbed off and regrow).
- **Pour-on:** external medication applied along the line of a sheep's backbone, usually after shearing to control parasites and lice. Australians say *backliner*;
- **Raddle:** also *ruddy*, a coloured pigment used to mark sheep. Where now used to indicate ownership or show which lambs belong to which ewe is largely replaced by spray paint. The *raddle* can be strapped to the chest of a ram so that it marks the backs of ewes he mates. Hence the phrase 'that ewe's been raddled';
- **Ram:** an uncastrated adult male sheep. Also *tup*.
- **Rooping:** removing fleece by hand-plucking, usually late in the spring when moulting begins, particularly with Shetlands;
- **Roving:** carded wool as produced by carding machines;
- **Ruddy:** see *Raddle* above, used particularly in Cumbria;
- **Scab or Sheep Scab:** a skin disease caused by the sheep scab mite or *Psoroptes ovis*, a psoroptid mite;
- **Scour:** to wash or clean raw fleece or fibre;





- **Scrapie:** a fatal, degenerative disease that destroys the nervous systems of sheep and goats. It is a form of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy, or TSE. Similar to BSE in cattle;
- **Shearing:** clipping off the fleece. Some shepherds do it themselves, but most use professional shearers. Afterwards a sheep is said to be either *sheared* or *shorn*;
- **Shearling:** a yearling sheep before shearing. See also *Hogget*, *Old-season lamb* and *Teg*;
- **Sheep:** four-legged ruminants, the species, or members of it. Sheep are ovines, technically *ovis aries*. Like fish, the plural is the same as the singular;
- **Shepherd:** the person who looks after sheep while they are in pasture;
- **Shepherding:** looking after sheep, or sheep husbandry;
- **Shepherd's Crook:** a staff with a hook at one end used to catch sheep by the neck or leg;
- **Skein:** a *hank* of wool of measured length and weight – these words are used interchangeably in the UK
- **Skirted Fleece:** greasy wool that has had the dirty edges removed;
- **Slubbing:** condensed, rubbed strips of carded fibre wound off the carder on to bobbins ready for woollen spinning;
- **Staple:** either a group of wool fibres that form a cluster or lock, or the length of a lock of fleece, or a single fibre;
- **S-twist:** yarn that has been spun with a counter clockwise twist;
- **Teg:** a sheep in its second year. See also *Hogget*, *Old-season lamb*, *Shearling*;
- **Theave** or **Theaf:** a young ewe yet to lamb. Plural is **Theaves**. See *Gimmer*.
- **Top Knot:** wool from the forehead or poll of a sheep;
- **Tup:** synonym for *ram*;
- **Tupping:** mating or the mating season;
- **Weaner:** a young animal weaned in its first year, more usually used for pigs;
- **Wether:** a castrated male sheep (or goat);
- **Wool-grease:** see *Lanolin*
- **Woollen:** generally yarns made from carded, short-stapled wool;
- **Worsted:** yarns made from long-stapled wool where the fibre is combed lengthwise and spun from cut end to tip;
- **Yolk:** see *Lanolin*;
- **Yow:** a synonym for *ewe* in some areas;
- **Z twist:** yarn spun with a clockwise twist.

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