

A Lightweight Scarf

Cotton Voile with Pre-felt Inlays

Pat Spark, Oregon © 2001

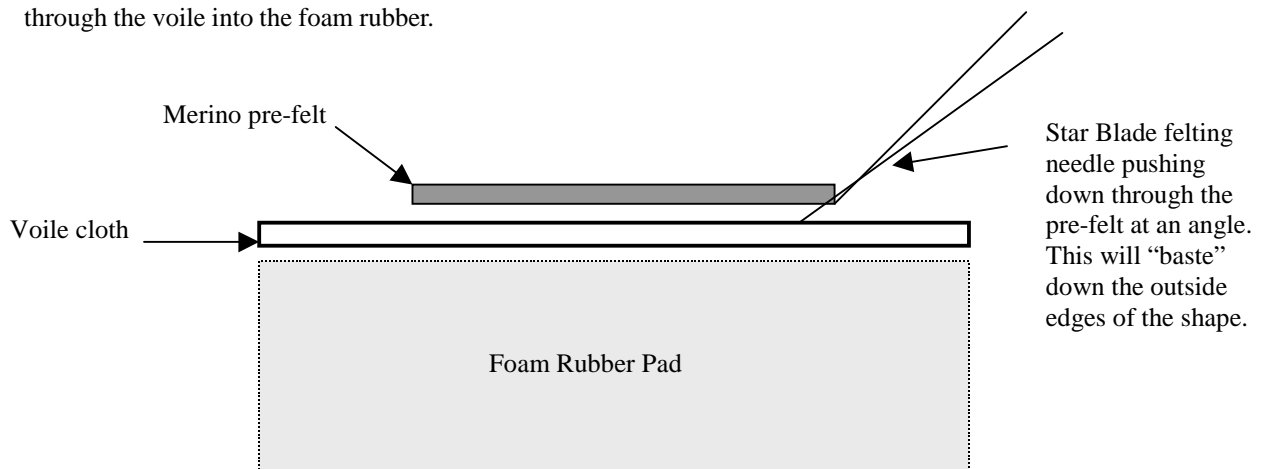
I started to do my first experiments in June, with the Star Blade felting needle. This needle is not shaped like the Triangular Blade used by most of us for our needle felting. According to the manufacturer, the Foster Needle Company, the Star Blade has barbs on four apexes rather than the three of a triangular blade. When you look at the Star Blade, there seems to be a long indent down the side of the needle. As with some of the Triangular Blades, the notches that push the fiber, begin about 3.2 mm up from the point of the shaft (See sidebar on previous page.) I have been working with Gauge 38 Star Blades, but I am looking forward to trying out the Gauge 40 and 42 Star Blades.

Here are some of the things I discovered with this needle:

- A. The Star Blade works well to attach pre-felts or fleece onto a cloth background. I think this is because the side surfaces of the needle are smaller than the Triangular Blade. So the Star Blade doesn't seem to catch or snag if you are needling wool fleece onto a thin, delicate background fabric. In the past, I have been able to needle fleece onto an open background, such as cotton crinkle gauze, using a Gauge 38 Triangular Blade needle. But I couldn't needle onto a finer cloth because the needle would catch and snag it. However, I used a fine cotton voile in my experiments with the Star Blade and it worked well, no snagging. When I tried to needle onto silk habotai however, the Gauge 38 Star Blade did snag the silk. I am hoping that the smaller Gauge 40 or 42 Star Blade needles will not do this.
- B. The Gauge 38 Star Blade worked well for the fine detail work. I used it to add small pieces of fiber to a wall hanging I made. I was pleased that the holes were less noticeable than when I used the Gauge 38 Triangular Blade. But when I tried to use the Star Blade to attach big shapes of fleece to the wall hanging, they didn't want to attach well. I concluded that the Star Blade is better for detail work while the Triangular Blade is good for the less fine work.
- C. I used the Star Blade (38) to "baste" down some coarse karakul fleece I was working with in a carpet and they didn't seem to be able to tangle any fiber at all. But the larger Triangular Blade (Gauge 36) worked really well with this. Once again, this showed that the Star Blade didn't work well for large-scale work.

The following is the procedure for making a scarf using these needles.

1. Cut a piece of cotton voile, approximately 10 inches by 72 inches. Hem the edges.
2. Make some thin pre-felts with fine merino.
3. Cut out the pre-felts in the design that you want. I got my ideas for the roses from a stencil book. I think the bold, simple designs of stencils or stained glass work well for this technique.
4. Use a dog brush to roughen up the back side of the pre-felt.
5. Lay the pre-felt down onto the voile and pin the shapes in place. Place the cloth on top of a foam rubber pad.
6. Using the Star Blade (38 or finer), slowly push down on the outside of the merino shape to "baste" the edges to the voile. I like to come in at a slight angle, catch the raw fibers that were roughed up with the dog brush, and push them down through the voile into the foam rubber.



7. Begin punching down with the needle in the inside area of the shape. After awhile, lift up the voile and pull the fiber away from the foam rubber pad. This is the fiber from the merino pre-felt which has gone through the voile and is now fuzzing up on the back side of the cloth. If there are areas where the voile cloth looks non-fuzzy, you will need to place the cloth back down onto the foam rubber and needle in that area as well. Do this until the whole shape looks fuzzy on the back side.
8. Carefully needle down all of the shapes like you did the one above. Remember to check the back side to make sure that the shapes are totally fuzzy.

9. At this point, the shapes are just barely attached. The felting needle only bastes them down. If you were to pull up on one of the shapes, you could rip it away from the cloth ground. So the shapes need more felting to make them actually attach well to the cloth. This time I use wet felting. I start by working from the backside. I put a felting net over the fuzzy wool shapes and sponge them with cool soapy water. I blot away the excess water and use the sander to make the fuzzy bits felt together and catch the cloth in a sandwich between the pre-felt side and the fuzzy side. If you don't want to use a sander, you can carefully massage the fuzzy fibers until they tangle with each other.
10. Turn the scarf over, cover the pre-felt shapes with the felting net and then work this side as above; wetting and sanding (or massaging).
11. The shapes are holding on pretty well at this point, but it is possible that the felt should be hardened a bit more. This depends on how hard the felt skin is. If it is too soft, it will pill badly and possibly pull off. To get the skin harder, I sponge on hot, soapy water, and roll up the felt area tightly without a rolling bar. I rotate the roll back and forth a few times and then unroll the felt. Then I re-roll it from a different direction and rotate it some more. I work from all directions, on both sides until I am sure that the felt skin is hard. If the roll slips on my work surface, I put it on a piece of rubber grip cloth or a damp towel so that I can rotate it easily.
12. Rinse the soap out of the felt, soak it in a vinegar/water solution for 15 minutes and rinse again. Lay the scarf flat to dry.



Cotton Voile Scarf, with Pre-felt inlays, needled on with Star Blade (38).