

PREPARING MERINO TOP FOR NEEDLE FELTING

Pat Spark © 2006

Top is wool that has been carded and then combed. With combed fiber, the shorter fibers in a fleece are pulled out and the longer fibers that remain are “combed” into line. The length of the fiber is uniform throughout the top.

Sometimes top is very slick and difficult to work with for needle felting. When the fiber is prepared commercially, it goes through a series of rollers that “iron” out the crimp and stretches it. For needle felting, we need this crimp so that the needle has something to grab on to. Otherwise the fiber is too slick and the needle either doesn’t grab it at all or grabs too much, causing a deeper hole than we want. Don’t despair though, we can alter this fiber to make it easier for us to use.

STEAMING METHOD

Lay the fiber in a vegetable steamer and place the steamer in a pan of water. (Make sure the fiber itself does not touch the water.) Cover with a lid and place the container on the stove. To keep the steam from condensing on the lid and dropping down onto the fiber, place some newspaper between the lid and the container. Bring to a boil so that the water begins to steam. Let the fiber steam for 15 minutes and then remove it from the steamer with tongs. (It will be hot.) Allow to dry. This will happen pretty quickly.

MISTING METHOD

For small amounts of fiber, mist and put into a plastic bag. Put the bag someplace warm such as outside in the sun or near a heat vent for several hours. Or put the bag of moistened fiber into the microwave on medium for a couple of minutes. (Make sure it’s all misted because the dry fiber might burn!) In all these cases, the fiber should get very warm. Remove the fiber from the bag and allow it to dry before using. This method takes much more time than the steaming method.

HOT WATER METHOD

If you’re doing a large amount of fiber, put very hot water into a large container. Carefully submerge your **dry** fiber down into the container. Push down, but don’t agitate or the roving will felt! Leave the fiber in the water until it cools down and spin out the water with the spin cycle of your washer. (Don’t let it go through the agitation cycle though!) Fluff out the fiber if it needs it and let it dry.