

**Preparing Wool for Spinning or Felting**  
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**Picking the Fleece.**

When the fleece is shorn from the sheep, it comes off in a mass which holds together. It helps to loosen this mass before the wool is washed so that much of the dirt which is caught between the locks of wool will fall out. The process of loosening and opening the mass is called picking the fleece.

To pick the fleece, hold a handful of wool in one hand. Stretch a small amount of fleece between the fingers and thumb of that hand so that it is taut. Use the fingers of the other hand to pull out individual fibers of wool. After the handful is totally separated, put the picked fibers into a container to wait for washing or carding.

**Scouring the Fleece.**

Scouring is a washing process which removes the dirt and the natural grease called lanolin. Unscoured wool is called "wool in the grease". Some felters do not wash their fleece before felting. They just pick it, and then card it. This is personal preference. Scoured fleece is more accurate to weigh and is easier to dye. People who felt unscoured wool, do so because they say the wool felts easier if the lanolin is holding it together. You should try it for yourself to see if you prefer felting clean wool or unscoured wool.

Pick the fleece well before scouring. Use canning kettles or other large containers and prepare four scouring baths. The first bath is hot water. The second has hot water, washing soda, and soap. The third has hot water, less washing soda and soap. The fourth bath is clean, hot water for rinsing.

**CHART OF SCOURING BATHS**

	Water Temp.	Soaking Time	Soda Ash*	Soap†
Bath 1	120°F	3 min.	none	none
Bath 2	120°F	3 min.	4 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub> tbls to 3 gal water	1 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub> tbls to 3 gal water
Bath 3	120°F	3 min.	1 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub> tbls to 3 gal water	1 <sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub> tbls to 3 gal water
Bath 4	120°F	3 min.	none	none
*For scouring purposes, Arm & Hammer washing soda can be substituted for soda ash.				
†For soap you can use grated Olive Oil, Glycerin or homemade soap.				

Fill the first container with picked fleece. Do not agitate the wool or it will felt. Do not stir it even gently while it is soaking. Following the scouring chart, leave the fleece soaking the appropriate amount of time. Remove the fleece carefully, and squeeze out the water before putting it into the second bath. If you have more fleece to wash, refill the first container. Continue moving the fleece gently from one container to the next.

To dry the fleece, lay it on a clean surface, out of direct sunlight. Keep turning it over so that it won't mildew. It helps to use the spin cycle of a washing machine to remove most of the water so that the fleece will dry easier.

Another method of drying is to tack window screening to a frame, put the frame on saw horses, and put the fleece on the screen. It can then dry from above and below.