

SPINNING WOOL WITH A POTATO DROP SPINDLE

For thousands of years people have used "drop spindles" to twist wool into yarn. In many parts of the world drop spindles are still used today. Using a stick, a potato and a piece of yarn you can make a drop spindle and try this primitive form of spinning.

- To make a drop spindle, poke the pointed end of the stick through the middle of a small potato and let it come out about an inch on the bottom. Tie the piece of yarn to the stick just above the potato. Loop the yarn around the stick underneath the potato, then bring it back up and tie it with a single loop near the top of the stick (see diagram 1). Or just tie it below the potato and loop it up.



Diagram 1

Your wool has been carded and combed so now you are ready to spin. Take a long strand of wool and place the end next to the yarn and twist the two together. To do this hold the wool and yarn in your left hand and TWIRL the stick clockwise with your right hand (diagram 2). When the two are firmly twisted together quickly bring your right hand up below the left to PINCH the yarn and MOVE your left hand up a few inches. LET GO with your right hand and TWIRL the potato again (diagram 3). PINCH, MOVE, LET GO, TWIRL. Keep the spindle twirling all the time and always in the same direction. Twisting the fibers creates the yarn. The tighter you twist the stronger the yarn. Keep going until all of the wool is twisted. DON'T LET GO. Hold the yarn at both ends- at the top and just above the stick. (If you were going to make a long piece of yarn you would stop now and unloop the yarn at the top of the stick, twist the spun yarn onto the spindle just above the potato and then reloop the yarn at the top of the spindle. You would then take a new piece of wool - overlap the extending piece and repeat the spinning process. You would do all of this without letting go of the yarn or letting it untwist).



Diagram 2

PLYING YOUR YARN

If you remove the spun yarn from the spindle it will untwist and fray. If you ply your yarn it will become softer, but stay together. Plying is the twisting together of two single strands of spun wool. The easiest way to ply your yarn is to have someone hold on to the center of your yarn while you hold both ends. Bring your hands together and put both ends in one hand so there are two strands side by side. Have your helper let go and let the wool twist together. The double strand that you now have is plied yarn. It is stronger and won't unspin.

SPECIAL NOTES:

I have found that combed wool is the best for teaching children how to spin on a drop spindle. I have purchased it from CLEMES & CLEMES, 650 San Pablo Avenue, Pinole, CA 94564. Phone (510) 724-2036 One pound would be enough for several classes. It is about \$8.50 a pound.

Children do best if they have to concentrate on one thing at a time. I have them work in groups of three. One to spin the drop spindle, one to hold the yarn and wool together and move it down slowly, the third to hold the extra loose wool out of the way.



Diagram 3