spinning daily presents

Spinning for Beginners:

An Intro to Spinning Fiber

Welcome to the world of handspinning! So, you've decided to take the plunge and explore the wonders of making your own yarn. Not only are you in for a treat, but you've also started at the right place. Learning how to spin your own yarn is pretty easy and straight forward, especially if you have access to great teachers. To make this free eBook, we pulled from some of our best content from the pages of *Spin·Off* magazine.

One of the oldest of Interweave's publications, *Spin·Off* is a quarterly magazine that has been around since 1977 inspiring spinners new and old to make beautiful yarn and find enchanting ways to use it. We also host the spinning community, spinningdaily.com complete with blogs, forums, and free patterns, and our series of workshop videos where the living treasures of the spinning world share their knowledge with you. We're devoted to bringing you the best spinning teachers, the newest spinning ideas, and most inspirational creativity right to your mailbox, computer, and ultimately fingertips.

We hope you enjoy your spinning journey—come tell us about it at spinningdaily.com.

Happy spinning,

Amy

Amy Clarke Moore

What are Roving, Top, *and* Sliver?

BY ABBY FRANQUEMONT

It's common nowadays for a lot of folks in the fiber world to use the word "roving" to refer to any unspun fiber. This isn't really accurate and doesn't give a clear sense of what the preparation really is—and the preparation is relevant!

In most European-derived spinning traditions, yarns are categorized as worsted or woolen; worsted yarns are tightly spun without air trapped between the fibers; they are spun from combed prep with all the fibers parallel, producing a smooth, long-wearing yarn. Woolen yarns are produced from carded prep using more hands-off techniques and resulting in a more heterogeneous fiber alignment with air trapped in the yarn. Woolen yarns are lofty; worsted yarns are dense.

Traditionally, it is not possible to spin a true worsted yarn unless you use both worsted prep and worsted technique. Likewise, for a traditional woolen, you need woolen prep and woolen technique. However, I think of these categories as defining the ends of a spectrum of possibility and urge mixing and matching for results that traverse that spectrum.

There are also Andean, African, and other non-European textile traditions whose yarns don't exactly fit in that spectrum. Nonetheless, English speakers tend to discuss those techniques with terms from Western European traditions.

Another important thing to note about the types of fiber preparations available for handspinners today is that many of them are not prepared specifically for handspinners—they are intermediate stages in industrial processing, adapted (or adaptable) for handspinning.

The bottom line is that there are more preparations of fiber, done by hand or done by machine, available to the handspinner now than at any time before.

A true **handcombed top** is the only thing from which you can spin a traditional worsted yarn. For a worsted yarn, all the fibers are parallel, smoothed down into the yarn with the air squeezed out, and there is no twist in the drafting zone. This prep is really best suited to true worsted spinning, but can be spun semiworsted (using woolen technique).

A **commercial top** is a machine-produced variant of the above. The fibers are mostly all parallel, but whereas a true combed top will present them tip first every time, a commercial top does not. This causes commercial top to draft a little less smoothly than true handcombed top, a tendency that is heightened by the fact that commercial top will often become a little compacted in shipping and storage, while handcombed tops are usually very fresh. Once you're used to this prep, you can spin a pretty fair worsted yarn, a pretty fair woolen-ish yarn, or a range of yarns in between.

A **rolag** is made with handcards—it's a puffy roll of fiber. Traditionally, for woolen spinning, you spin a rolag from one end, and your fibers end up circling around a hollow core as you use a fast long-draw technique. You could spin this with worsted technique, but it would be slow. You'd still get fuzzy, not smooth yarn, but it would be stronger than a traditional woolen.

A **batt** is made on a drumcarder and is like a blanket of fibers, carded, but more aligned than you get in a rolag. You can strip these, predraft them, tear off chunks, or roll them up, and then spin them with what's considered either woolen or worsted technique; and you can pull them or tear them into rovings.

A **roving** is a carded preparation whether produced by hand or industrial equipment. It is commonly wrist-thick, though thickness can vary; one way or another, a roving is usually made from a batt, either pulled off the carding equipment in roving form, or in some cases, pulled later from a batt.

A **sliver** is a thinner variant of a roving. Sliver doesn't have any twist to it at all, while roving has a tiny bit of twist (not spinning twist, but a slight twist to the entire rope). Sliver is what mills generally call their intermediate stage. (*Note:* it's pronounced sly-ver).

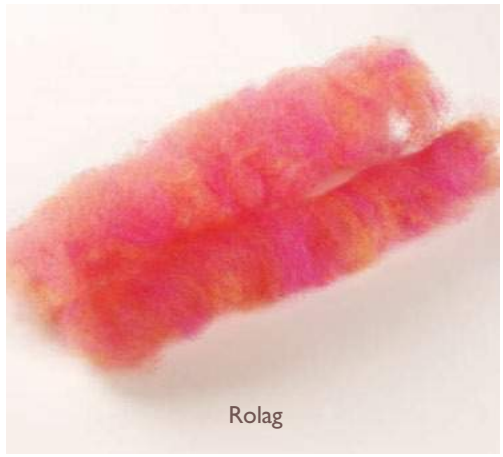
Pin-drafted roving has been carefully drafted through a series of pins, producing an open, lofty roving with a more aligned prep than is typical of other rovings.

A **puni** is similar to a rolag, prepared on handcards, after which the fibers are rolled on a stick and compressed by rolling this stick on a flat surface. Punis are a common prep for cotton and other very fine fibers.

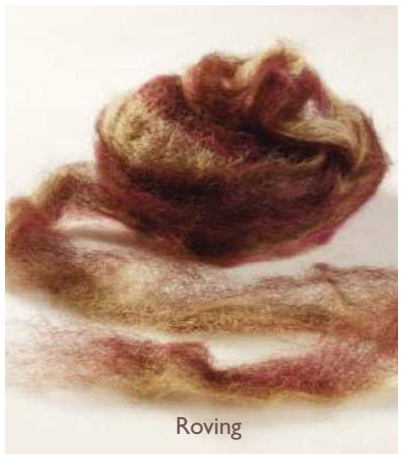
Hankies, caps, bells, and mawatas are common terms for silk preparations in which silk


Handcombed top


Commercial top


Rolag


Batt


Roving


Sliver

Pin-drafted roving


Puni


Hankies

cocoons are stretched out wide and layered together. These do look rather like a handkerchief, cap, or bell, depending on how large they are and what they have been stretched over. These are typically spun by loosening the fibers from the middle and drafting (or predrafting) from the inside out to the edges. These preparations don't lend themselves to spinning yarns that are as smooth as those from silk top or sliver would. ⌘

Abby Franquemont, raised in the fiber arts, lives in Ohio where she runs abbysyarns.com and serves on the board of directors of Andean Textile Arts. She spins, weaves, knits, crochets, braids, sews, mends, and designs, and talks about it all nonstop.

Handcombed top, made from dyed Corriedale top from Louet North America, www.louet.com/dealer/find_retailer.shtml. **Commercial top,** Mohair/wool blend from Bonkers Handmade Originals, www.bonkersfiber.com. **Rolag,** made from Polwarth fiber from Rovings, www.rovings.com. **Batt,** wool/silk blend from Loop, www.loop.etsy.com. **Roving,** dyed wool roving from Lone Tree Wools, (319) 629-5451. **Sliver,** Northern Lights wool from Louet North America, www.louet.com/fibers/dyed_northern.shtml. **Pin-drafted roving,** Shari McKelvey at Morro Fleece Works, www.morrofleeceworks.com. **Puni,** made from cotton/silk top from Louet North America, www.louet.com/fibers/silk.shtml. **Hankies,** Chasing Rainbows Dyeworks, 1700 Hilltop Dr., Willits, CA 95490, (707) 459-8558, nancyscrd@saber.net.

A Handspindle Primer

COMPILED BY PATTIE GRAVER

For thousands of years, handspinners have been using handspindles to twist fiber into yarn. There are many finely crafted spindles available to the contemporary handspinner, and although the technology is basically the same as the ancient tools, it can be confusing to know where to begin. The following guide will familiarize you with some of your options so you can make the right choice for your spindle projects.

Rule of thumb: Use lighter spindles for thin yarns, heavier spindles for thick yarns.

Images originally published in *Respect the Spindle* by Abby Franquemont (Interweave, 2009).

SUSPENDED SPINDLES

High-whorl (top-whorl) spindles:

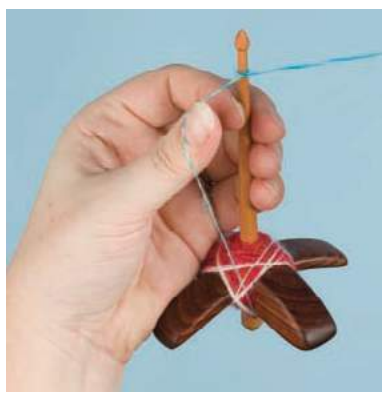
- Whorl at the top of the shaft; meticulous craftsmanship required
- Usually have a hook or groove at the top for securing yarn
- Operate in midair
- Yarn bears the weight of the spindle; spinner's hand bears the weight of spindle and yarn
- Yarn winds on below the whorl
- Suited for fibers with long or variable staple length (although used for spinning cotton in Africa)
- Historically used for yarns requiring less twist
- Less yarn capacity than low-whorl spindles

Low-whorl spindles:

- Whorl at the bottom of the shaft; easier than high-whorl spindles to keep balanced; easy to make
- May have a hook or groove at the end farthest from the whorl for securing yarn
- Operate in midair
- Yarn bears the weight of the spindle; spinner's hand bears the weight of spindle and yarn
- Yarn winds on above the whorl
- Good for fibers with a short staple length but have been used for all types of fiber
- Historically used for yarns requiring high twist
- Capacity for lots of yarn

Turkish spindles:

- Type of low-whorl spindle that consists of a shaft and two removable crossarms
- Often have a knob at the top of the shaft for securing the yarn
- Operate in midair
- Yarn bears the weight of the spindle; spinner's hand bears the weight of spindle and yarn
- A center-pull ball of yarn is created when the crossarms are removed



SUPPORTED SPINDLES

Small supported spindles (such as tahkli):

- Sharp point at one end used to spin the spindle
- Supported by a bowl or other surface
- Yarn does not bear all of the weight of the spindle
- Can spin fast or slow
- Appropriate for fibers with short staple lengths such as cotton or cashmere
- Suited for laceweight yarn; not for thick yarn

Supported spindles without separate whorl (Russian, French):

- Supported by a bowl or other surface
- Yarn does not bear all of the weight of the spindle
- Usually constructed without a whorl; if the spindle does have a whorl, it is intended for collecting yarn
- Spin slower than tahkli spindles
- Good for spinning fine singles yarn from down fibers

Navajo spindles:

- Constructed from wood
- Long shaft and large whorl
- Supported by the spinner's body
- Capacity for lots of yarn
- Good for spinning thick, low-twist yarn

RESOURCES

Franquemont, Abby. "High Whorl, Low Whorl." *Spin·Off* 33, 1 (Spring 2009), 44–49.

———. *Respect the Spindle.* Loveland, Colorado: Interweave, 2009.

Spin·Off 19, 1 (Spring 1995). Commonly referred to as the "Spindle Issue"; several articles in this issue focus on spindles and spindle spinning.

Spindle Spinning

By Maggie Casey

Several years ago at *Spin·Off* Autumn Retreat (SOAR), a friend and I took Rita Buchanan's drop spindle retreat session. During the class we challenged each other to make something out of our spindle-spun yarn. My favorite mittens are the result of that challenge. Rita's retreat and those mittens renewed my love affair with handspindles, and here are some tips to make you fall in love, too.

Your first spindle should weigh 2 to 3 ounces. Many beautiful lighter-weight spindles are available, but wait before you try one because a medium-weight or heavier spindle will keep turning while you learn to draft out the fibers. Don't choose one that is too heavy, however, or you will learn why they are called drop spindles. A well-balanced spindle is a delight, so check to see how well yours spins—tie on some yarn and give it a twist. The spindle should turn smoothly without a lot of wobble and continue to spin for some time.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(1) Once you have chosen a spindle, take a piece of plied wool yarn about 18" long and tie it onto the spindle shaft (leader). **(2)** If you have a top-whorl spindle, tie the leader underneath the whorl, bring the leader up and over the whorl, and catch it with the hook. You can wrap the yarn around the hook once for security, if you like.


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(3) With a bottom-whorl spindle, tie the leader above the whorl and then spiral the yarn up the spindle shaft. **(4)** If your spindle has a hook (rather than a groove), catch the yarn with it and you are ready to go. If you have a groove, you will have to make a half-hitch knot to hold the yarn to the spindle.


7

(5) On bottom-whorl spindles, some spinners tie the leader above the whorl and bring the yarn down under the whorl, around the bottom of the shaft, and then back up to the top. Both ways work; see which one you like best. **(6)** Once the leader is on, start practicing with the spindle. Remember that most singles yarns are spun clockwise (to the right). Most spinners hold the fiber in the left hand and the spindle in the right hand, but try both ways and see which feels comfortable to you. Hold the leader in one hand and with the other hand, give the spindle a twist. Practice until you can get the spindle to turn smoothly. Periodically you will have to let the leader unwind so you don't accumulate too much twist. **(7)** Wool is the easiest fiber to spin; carded wool is much easier to spin than combed. A nice, clean, medium wool is lovely to work with. Before you use the spindle, practice drafting out the fibers. Take a handful of wool in one hand and with the other hand, gently pull some of the fibers away from the mass and then add some twist by twisting the fibers in one direction between your fingers.

(8) That is what spinning is all about—drawing out the fibers and adding twist until you have created a stable yarn. Continue to pull out the fibers (drafting) and add more twist. If you don't have enough twist, the yarn will fall apart. If you have too much twist, you won't be able to draw out the fibers. Spend a few minutes drafting out the fibers and adding twist—you will need to be able to maintain a comfortable rhythm when you start spinning. Once you are comfortable drafting out the fibers and twisting the spindle, put these actions together. Start by sitting down, if you're not already, because your lap will be a valuable tool. **(9)** Before you start to spin, fluff out the end of the leader.


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(10) With one hand, hold a handful of fiber and the leader together.


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(11) With the other hand, twist the spindle clockwise. Watch the twist run up the leader and grab the fibers in your hand. You've just made a join.


12

(12) After you have made the join, twist the spindle and then stop it in your lap so it can't go backward. Slide your twisting hand above the spindle, pinch the leader, and draft out some fibers.

Maggie Casey author of *Start Spinning* (Interweave, 2008) and *Start Spinning* DVD (Interweave, 2009), spends her day working and teaching at Shuttles, Spindles, and Skeins. in Boulder, Colorado. She loves teaching spinning because she learns so much from her students.

(13) Once the yarn is the right size, open up the pinching hand and let the twist run up and stabilize the fibers you have just drafted. Continue to twist the spindle, stop it in your lap by holding the shaft between your knees, pinch and draft. You determine the size of the yarn by how much you pull the fibers out. A few fibers make a fine yarn; many fibers add bulk. If too much twist gets into the fiber, slide your fiber hand back a little and then draft out those fibers. **(14)** When the yarn is longer than your arms, it's time to wind it onto the spindle. Keeping the yarn taut, wind it on the spindle clockwise and make a cone *under* the whorl on a top whorl and an upside-down cone *on top* of the bottom whorl. The neater you wind the yarn on, the easier it will be to remove from the spindle.

(15) Pinching the yarn keeps the twist from running up into the fiber source. The twisting/pinching hand keeps the twist under control while the fiber hand drafts out the fibers to the correct size. **(16)** After you feel comfortable spinning the spindle and stopping it on your lap, it is time to spin with the spindle suspended in the air. Continue to draft the fibers out the same way, but instead of stopping the spindle in your lap, let it keep spinning. When it stops of its own accord and starts to twist counterclockwise, add more clockwise twist. If the spindle keeps going backward, the twist will come out of the yarn, turn it back into fluff, and the spindle will drop. **(17)** Soon you will have a spindle full of yarn. Now you can wind the yarn off the spindle and into a skein. Use a shoe box with holes punched in either side to hold the spindle. Niddy-noddies (pictured here) work for making skeins, but so does a chair with a straight back: Gently loop the yarn around and around the chair back until the spindle is empty. Tie the two ends of yarn together and before you take the yarn off the chair or niddy-noddy, put a couple of figure-eight ties through the skein.

How to Choose Your First Wheel

BY RUDY AMANN

ANN SABIN SWANSON

Upright wheel.

When I am teaching spinning workshops, I'm often asked, "Which spinning wheel should I buy?" My usual answer is "It depends." There are many different wheels available, and all of them will add twist to fiber and spin yarn. But some wheels will be a better match for each spinner. In addition to price, there are some important things to consider that can usually narrow the choice to just a few wheels.

If it is possible, visit a shop that has several different spinning wheels that you can try. Some shops and spinning guilds rent wheels, giving you an opportunity to try one in your home. Also ask your spinning friends to let you try their wheels. It is not unusual for spinners to have more than one wheel, even though they may just bring a portable wheel to spinning gatherings.

One of the first things to consider is which hand is your spinning or orifice hand (closest to the orifice) and which hand is the fiber hand (holding the fiber). If you are a beginning spinner or a novice, I suggest that you try letting your dominant hand be your spinning or orifice hand. Your dominant hand has the fine motor skills that are needed for controlling the twist.

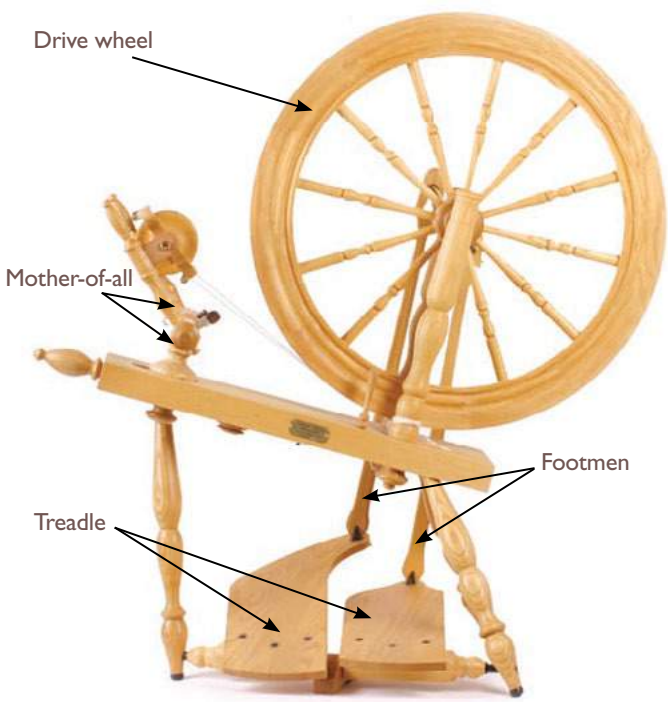
If your left hand is the orifice hand, you will most likely want the flyer on the left, and if your right hand is the orifice hand you will probably be most comfortable with the flyer on the right. This allows you to draft across your lap and let the twist enter the fibers in front of you without having to turn sideways—which can get very tiring or painful.

Unfortunately, even though most people are right-handed and their right hand is their dominant hand, very few wheels have the flyer on the right. This is because of the historical development and evolution of spinning wheels. There are a few wheels that allow you to place the flyer on either side. A wheel with the orifice in the center is a compromise to accommodate either right- or left-handed spinners.

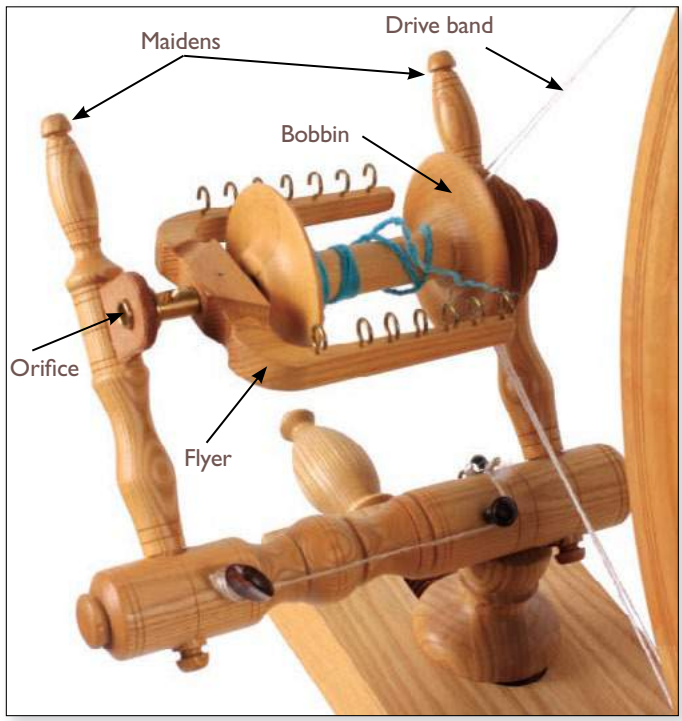
You need to think about where you will be using your spinning wheel. How much space do you have and how portable a wheel do you need? If you are planning to take your wheel to guild meetings, spin-ins, or demonstrations, then size, portability, appearance, and style may be very important. Nonelectric spinning wheels with flyers and bobbins can be put into three groups: traditional or Saxony, upright, and portable.

Traditional-style wheels take more space and usually are not very easy to transport. Upright wheels take less space and are easier to move around. Some upright wheels are designed to fold or to separate into several parts to make them more portable. The smallest wheels are the lightweight, compact wheels that are designed for easy portability. Generally, portable wheels are not as stable as full-size wheels and often do not have as many features or options available.

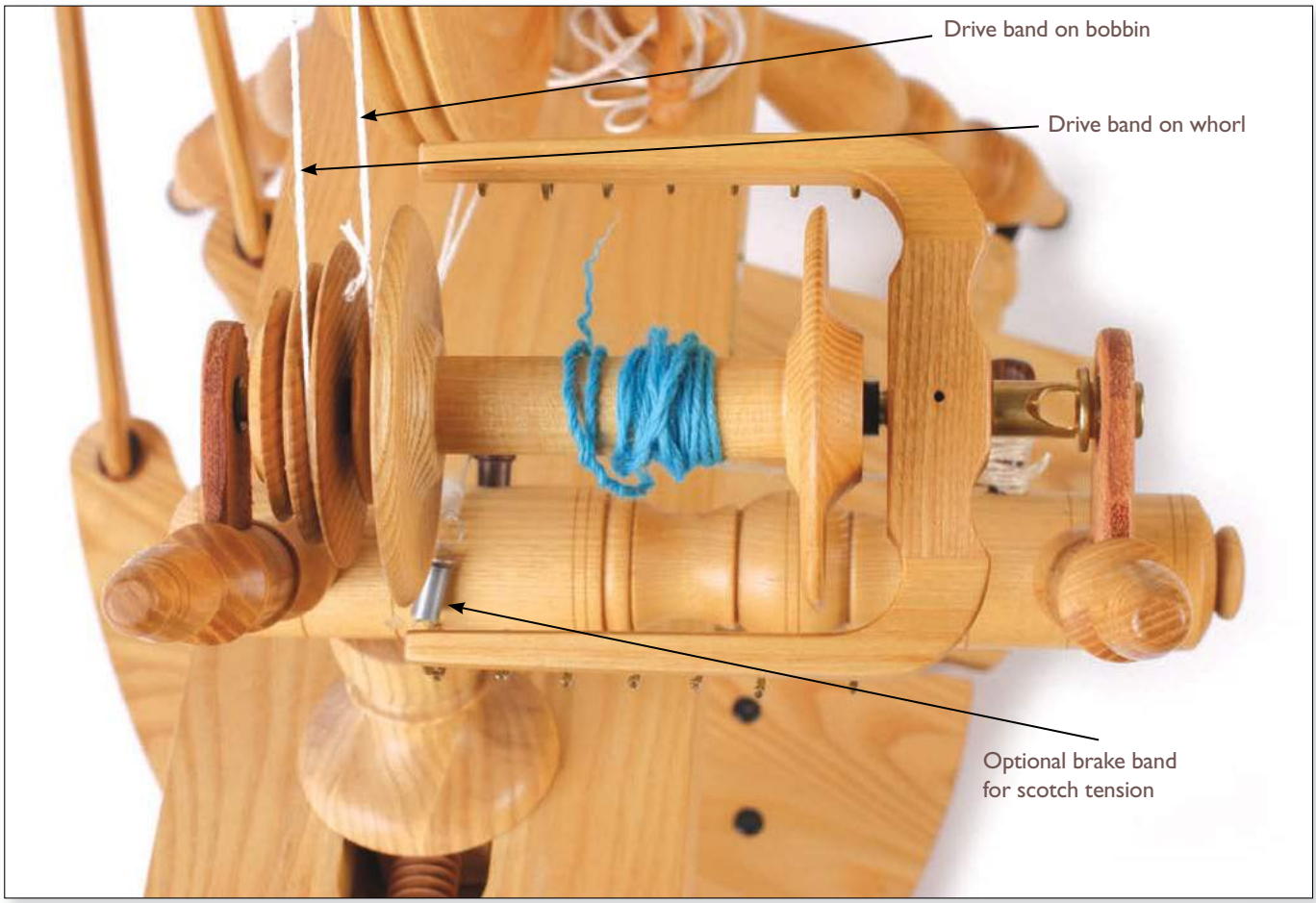
Until a few years ago, most spinning wheels had only one treadle. Today, many wheels are available in single- or double-treadle models. Most traditional-style wheels have a single, narrow treadle just wide enough for one foot. The treadle on some contemporary single-treadle wheels is wide enough that you can use either one foot or both feet. A single



Traditional or Saxony wheel.



Parts of a wheel.



Double-drive system.

treadle placed at the center of the wheel allows the spinner to use either foot and also gives the spinner more flexibility in finding a comfortable position for spinning.

Some spinners find that they have better control of their wheels using a double-treadle model. They are able to spin more smoothly even at slow speeds and find it easier to start and stop the wheel. However, other spinners find it uncomfortable to keep their feet and legs together while spinning. Even if you like to treadle with just one foot, there may be some advantage in getting a double-treadle wheel. If your right hand is your orifice or spinning hand, you can position the wheel to your right side and use your right foot on the left treadle. Similarly, you could have the wheel to your left and treadle with your left foot on the right treadle. Spinners with short arms may find it more comfortable to move a wheel with a center orifice to one side so that they have more space in front of them for drafting across the lap. If you think you might want to treadle a double-treadle wheel with just one foot, experiment and be sure the wheel spins easily and smoothly using one foot.

When you are trying a spinning wheel, be sure your foot is positioned correctly on the treadle or treadles. This is especially important with a single-treadle wheel so that you are able to use both your toes and heel to power the wheel. Often beginning spinners have their foot/feet too far forward on the treadle. The back of your heel should be even with the bottom edge of the treadle. This allows you to press down with the ball of your foot for the downstroke and then press down with your heel for the upstroke.

For plying yarn, you should have a separate lazy kate. The pegs that are provided on some spinning wheels are handy for storing extra bobbins, but they are not really satisfactory for plying. For good controlled plying, you need to be able to place the kate behind you. The kate should have a tensioning device and be able to hold at least three bobbins. If a separate lazy kate does not come with the wheel you select, buy a lazy kate with tensioning that will

accommodate the bobbins of your wheel.

If you have an idea about what fibers and what type of yarn you will be spinning, the drive system may make a difference. There are three types of drive systems: single drive with bobbin lead, single drive with flyer lead, and double drive.

On bobbin-lead wheels, also known as Irish-tension wheels, the bobbin is turned by the drive wheel and there is an adjustable brake on the flyer. It is easy to change bobbins on these wheels, and once the brake band is set, it usually does not need to be adjusted. These wheels usually have bigger bobbins and are best-suited for spinning DK and heavier weights of yarn, novelty yarns, and for plying. Spinners with several wheels often keep a bobbin-lead wheel to use for plying.

Although bobbin-lead wheels can be used to spin finer yarns, a flyer-lead wheel would be a better wheel if you are planning on spinning cotton, silk, or other finer yarns. On flyer-lead wheels, also known as scotch-tension wheels, the flyer is turned by the drive wheel and there is an adjustable brake on the bobbin. This system offers the most control in spinning a large variety of different-size yarns and in the amount of twist that you insert in the different yarns. However, as the bobbin fills with yarn, the tension on the bobbin brake needs to be readjusted. A flyer-lead wheel is a good choice for spinning fine fibers and yarns.

On double-drive wheels, both the bobbin and the flyer are turned by the drive wheel, usually with the bobbin turning faster than the flyer to wind on the spun yarn. Double-drive wheels are good for spinning large amounts of consistent yarn in the fine to medium range of yarns. They are also good for spinning soft-spun yarns. Many double-drive wheels have the option of being set up as single-drive flyer-lead wheels.

There are a few wheels that allow you to set them up with any of the three drive systems. That enables you to use either single drive with flyer lead (scotch tension) or double drive for spinning singles. When you are spinning the singles for a two-ply yarn, fill the bobbins to about half capacity. Then switch to single drive with bobbin lead (Irish tension), and ply the singles together on a third bobbin. This takes advantage of the benefits of the different drive systems.

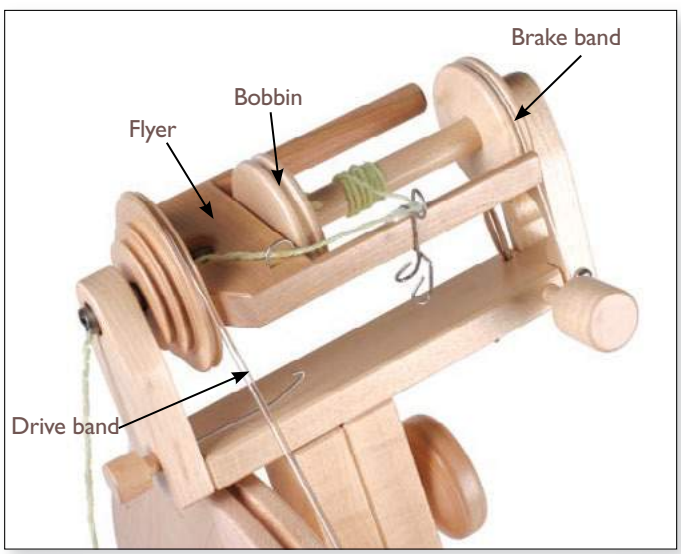
If you are planning to do a lot of spinning with fine fibers, you may want to consider a wheel that offers an optional high-speed flyer and bobbins. Also, some wheels have larger flyer and bobbins available for plying or spinning heavier yarns.

The appearance of the wheel can be an important factor when selecting a wheel. Do you like the style, design, wood, and finish of the wheel? I hope you will be able to spend many happy hours sitting in front of it spinning. You should enjoy looking at the wheel, and you should like the way it looks in your spinning space.

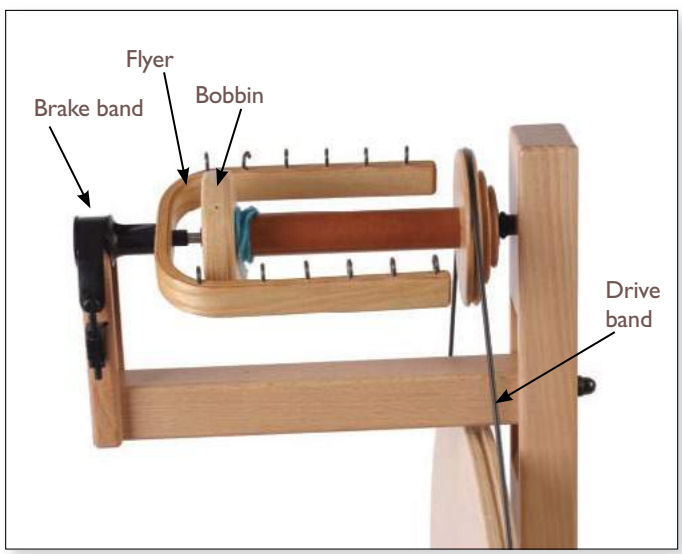
Good luck in finding the perfect spinning wheel for you! ⌘

Rudy Amann of Brunswick, Maine, is a retired high school mathematics teacher and assistant principal. When he was learning to spin, Priscilla Gibson-Roberts was his mentor. He teaches and demonstrates spinning and nålbinding.

Photos from *Start Spinning* by Maggie Casey (Interweave, 2008).



Flyer-lead or scotch tension system.



Bobbin-lead system.

PHOTOS BY JOE COCA

Spinning on a Wheel

By Maggie Casey

Learning to spin on a spinning wheel is tricky! How can your body do so many different things at the same time? One hand pinches, one hand pulls, and your feet pump the treadle. What a lot to think about at once. However, if you learn each step in the spinning process before you put them together, spinning will be easier. And with a little practice, it becomes second nature.

Spinning is the act of drawing out fibers **(drafting)** and adding twist to make yarn. Your spinning wheel will add plenty of twist, so before you sit down to spin, give your hands a head start and practice drafting. Choose wool as your first spinning fiber because it is the easiest fiber to learn on and it is widely available. If you are buying prepared fiber, choose **carded** not combed wool and a fiber length about 3 to 4 inches. Carded fibers are much easier to spin than combed fibers, and rolags (rolags are carded fibers organized on handcards) are best because the fibers are organized in a way that makes them draft more easily.

Practice drafting

Take a handful of wool in one hand, and with the other hand, gently pull some of the fibers away from the mass and twist them in one direction with your fingers. Continue to pull out the fibers **(drafting)** and add twist. If you don't put enough twist in, the yarn will fall apart. If you put in too much twist, you won't be able to draft out the fibers. Concentrate on feeling the fibers slip between your hands as you draft. This is the most important step in spinning because as you draft the fibers, you form the yarn. Pull out a few fibers and you create a fine yarn; pull out a lot of fibers and your yarn will be thick.

Practice treadling

Most singles yarn is spun clockwise (to the right), so start your wheel in that direction and just **trea-**

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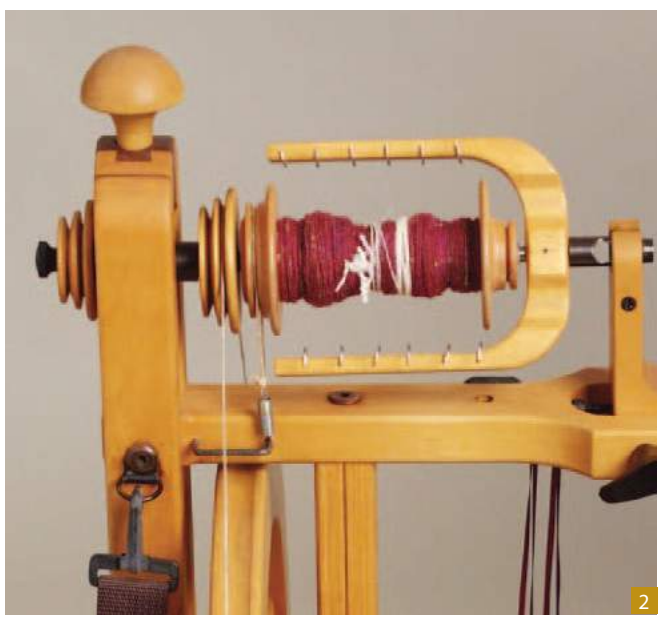

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dle. It isn't a race, so treadle slowly but with enough momentum that the wheel continues to turn clockwise and doesn't stop and back up. Think of the drive wheel as a clock. If you position the footman (the part of the wheel that connects the treadle to the drive wheel) at one o'clock and make the first treadle strong, momentum will help keep the wheel going in the correct direction **(fig. 1)**. While you practice, sit on different chairs to find the most comfortable one. Both chair height and seat depth can make a big difference in treadling comfort. Treadle while you talk on the phone or read until treadling becomes a natural movement.

Getting comfortable with your wheel

The **wheel ratios** of spinning wheels vary; you will want to be on the slowest speed when you're learning to spin. **Remember slow is big**. Use your largest whorl to give you the most control **(fig. 2)**.

Tie a piece of plied wool yarn about 24 inches long **(leader)** onto the bobbin. You want the leader to wind onto the bobbin without slipping, so tie the yarn on firmly to the bobbin and leave a tail long enough to wrap around the bobbin again and tie another knot. Once the leader is on the bobbin, take the yarn over the hooks of the flyer and through the orifice.

Learn how to adjust the **tension** on your brake band on your wheel. This device controls the rate the yarn is drawn onto the bobbin and acts essentially as a brake. On double-drive wheels, the drive band is also the tensioning device. On single-drive wheels, the tension is separate from the drive band. Some single-drive wheels have a brake band with a spring or rubber band over the bobbin, and some wheels have a strap or brake band over the flyer. In all cases, the tighter the brake band, the faster the yarn will be pulled onto the bobbin.

Spend some time playing with the tension on your wheel. Start with very light or no tension on the brake band. Hold onto the leader and start treadling. The leader should pull onto the bobbin very slowly or not at all. Now tighten the tension a lot and see what a difference that makes. If the brake is very tight, the leader will feel like it is being sucked out of your hand. Pull the leader back out of the orifice and keep adjusting the tension. Tighten and loosen the tension in small increments and see how it changes the rate that the leader is pulled onto the bobbin. Learning how to adjust the tension on your wheel can make all the difference for enjoyable spinning. Start with the tension very loose with no draw-in, then tighten the brake until the yarn is pulled on firmly when you release it.

Getting ready to spin

The yarn will be wound onto your bobbin with the help of the **leader**. Once the leader is on your bobbin, take the yarn over the hooks of the flyer. It doesn't matter which hook you start on, but it is important that the yarn is engaged by all the other hooks between that one and the orifice. Some wheels don't have hooks but have a thread guide that moves up and down the flyer arm; be sure to thread your leader through that guide and then the one near the orifice.

To get the leader through the orifice, you will probably need a small tool called an **orifice hook**, which you insert into the orifice to catch the yarn and pull it through. Some wheels have built-in orifice hooks and holders; if yours doesn't, tie a string around the hook handle and hang it nearby. Keep the orifice hook close at hand because you will need it frequently. The orifice of some wheels will be large enough that you can just pull the leader through with your finger, while Majacraft wheels have been designed without an orifice at all.

Time to spin

Fluff out the end of the leader with your fingers **(fig. 3)**. With one hand **(the back hand or fiber hand)**, take a rolag or small handful of carded fiber, place the leader on the fiber, and hold the leader and fiber together with your thumb and index finger **(fig. 4)**. Slowly treadle clockwise and watch the twist come up the leader and grab the


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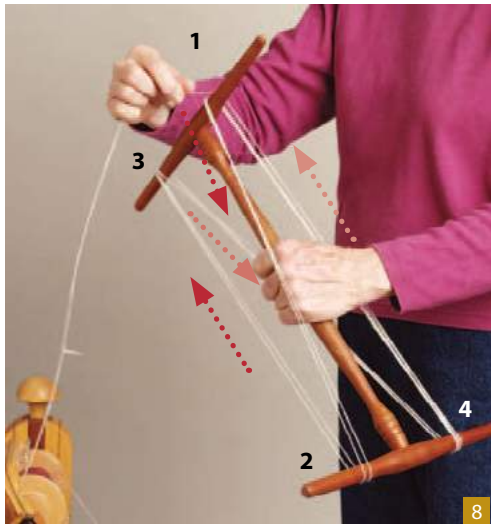

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fibers in your hand. After the twist has built up a little, use your other hand **(the front hand or twist control hand)** to pinch the leader to control the twist. Now draft the fibers out, keeping your front hand closed. Next, open the front hand and let the twist run up, grab the loose fibers, and turn them into yarn **(fig. 5)**. Relax your back hand and let the wheel pull the yarn onto the bobbin **(fig. 6)**. Although you are stronger than the wheel, you have to give the yarn to the wheel to continue making yarn. Now start the spinning process over again. The front hand controls the twist by pinching, and the back hand drafts the fiber out. You determine the size of the yarn by how much you draft the fibers out. A few fibers make a fine yarn; many fibers make bulky yarn. Once you have made a length of yarn, release the twist with your front hand and let it run up the yarn and stabilize it. Remember to let the yarn wind onto the wheel. If you don't, so much twist will accumulate that the yarn won't go onto the bobbin. Adjust the tension if your yarn isn't winding onto the bobbin or if it is winding on too quickly. Keep repeating the sequence: Pinch with the front hand to control the twist, draft the fibers out with the back hand, release the pinch and let the yarn wind on.

Soon you will have to make a join because you will have run out of fiber. Make a join just as you did with the leader and your first bit of fiber. Fluff out the end of the fiber you are spinning, place it on your new fiber, hold it gently with the thumb and index finger of your back hand, wait until the twist runs up, and then gently draft the old and new fiber together. Each time you start a new rolag or handful of fiber, move the yarn to a different hook on the flyer to load the bobbin evenly **(fig. 7)**. The size of your handfuls will determine how often you need to move the yarn. You want the yarn to fill the bobbin evenly without any great hills and valleys.

Congratulations, you are a spinner!

Now you can take your singles yarn off the bobbin and put it in a skein. A **niddy-noddy** comes in handy here. A niddy-noddy looks like the capital letter I with the top and bottom arms at right angles to one another. Hold the center part of the niddy-noddy with one hand and wrap the yarn around the arms. To facilitate the process, you can number the ends of the arms; 1 and 3 on one arm, 2 and 4 on the other. The yarn starts over 1, goes down to 2, back up to 3, down to 4, and back up again, over and over **(fig. 8)**. Be sure to take the yarn to the outside of the arms as you make a skein. When the skein is wound and while it's still on the niddy-noddy, tie the two ends of yarn together and put some ties through the skein. Gently pull the skein off the niddy-noddy.

The yarn you have made will probably be very curly, so you will need to set the twist to relax the yarn. Fill the sink with warm water, add a little mild detergent, and soak the skein for several minutes. Rinse with warm water. Remove excess moisture by wrapping the skein in a towel and squeezing. Hang the skein on a hook in the shower and put a weight on the bottom to straighten out the kinks. I use a spray bottle as a weight **(fig. 9)**. The handle hangs on the skein, and I fill the bottle with as much water as necessary to straighten out the yarn. Once the yarn is hanging straight, let it dry, and while it's drying, think of all the wonderful ways you can use it.

Maggie Casey, author of *Start Spinning* (Interweave, 2008) and *Start Spinning* DVD (Interweave, 2009), spends her day working and teaching at Shuttles, Spindles, and Skeins in Boulder, Colorado. She loves teaching spinning because she learns so much from her students.

Resources

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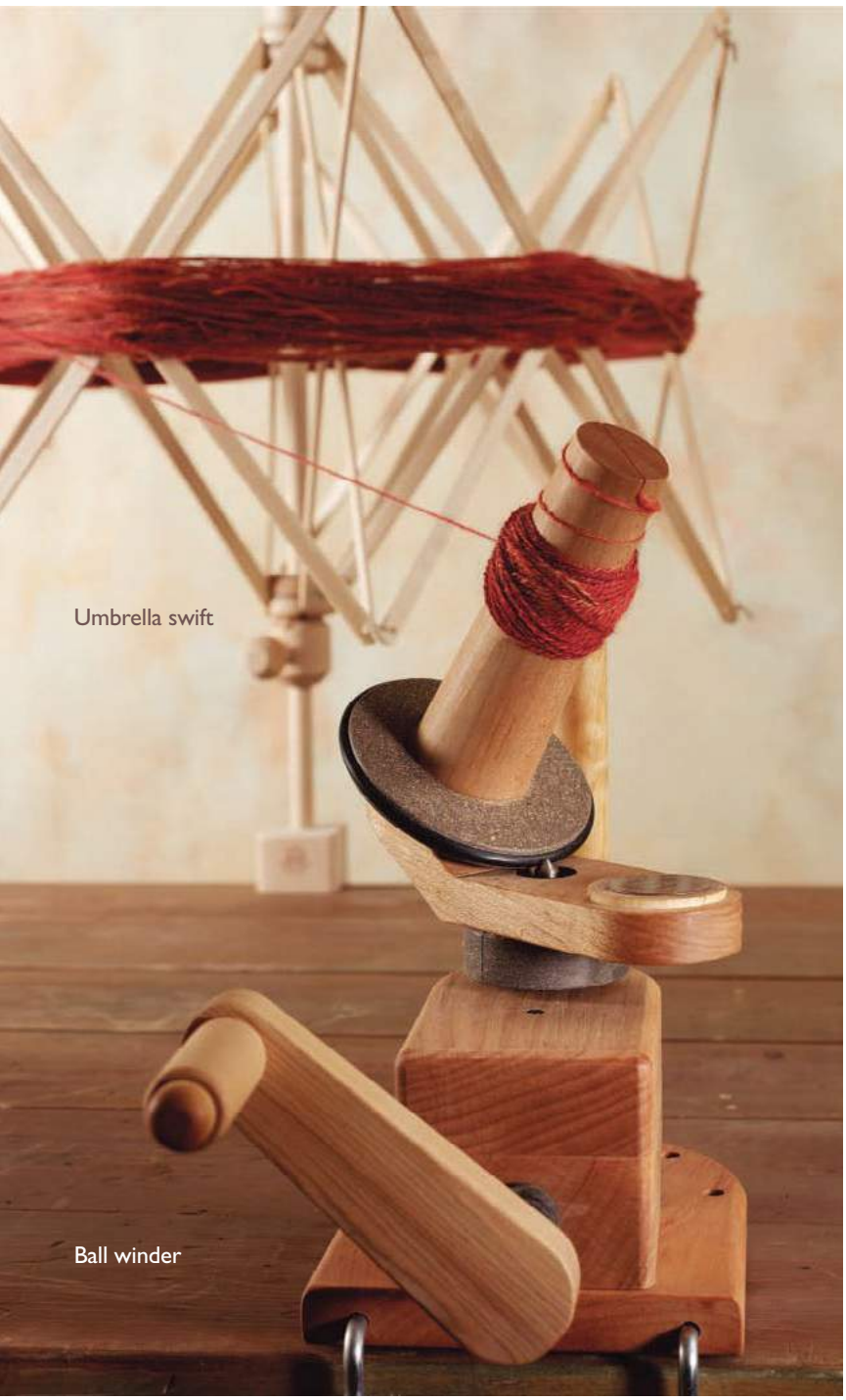
Managing Your Yarn

BY CAROL HUEBSCHER RHOADES



Umbrella swift

Ball winder

After you've spun a singles yarn onto a bobbin or spindle, you have to decide how to manage it so that you can ply and wash it. What you do depends partially on the fiber and the amount of twist in it and partially on what equipment you have on hand. In this column, we'll look at how to get your yarn off the bobbin for plying and skeining.

If you have enough bobbins, you can spin all your singles yarn onto the bobbins and then ply directly from them. It is best if your **lazy kate** (the rack that holds bobbins) has a tensioning device, so you can ply rhythmically and smoothly, and the yarn won't suddenly fly out and tangle. Of course, you also have to hold each strand with an even and relatively firm tension as you ply. If your singles yarn has a high amount of twist, tension very carefully so that snarls don't get trapped in the yarn. I usually wind cotton singles yarn onto a PVC pipe with holes in it, boil it for 30 minutes, and then wind the yarn onto a niddy-noddy to dry. After that, I wind it back onto a bobbin to ply from. Work from bobbins and not balls when plying high-twist yarns to avoid tangling and frustration.

If you don't have enough bobbins or a holder for plying directly from spindles, you can ply low- to medium-twist singles from balls made on a ball winder or a nøstepinne. Each of these tools has advantages and disadvantages.

A ball winder has a cone for holding the yarn, a yarn guide, a crank mechanism, and a clamp for attaching to a table or board. You can hold a ball winder in your hand rather than clamping it to something, but it gets a bit tricky if you have to hold the clamp at the bottom away from the crank as you wind *and* hold the yarn as it goes through the eyehook guide.

I use my ball winder to wind singles yarn from the bobbin while it is still on the wheel or to wind plied yarn from an **umbrella swift** (a cage-like apparatus for holding skeins of yarn). For winding singles, leave the bobbin on the spinning wheel and hold the ball winder parallel to the bobbin about a foot or so away from it. Run the yarn tail across the hooks and under the flyer arm to tension it, thread it through the eyehook, and then double the tail

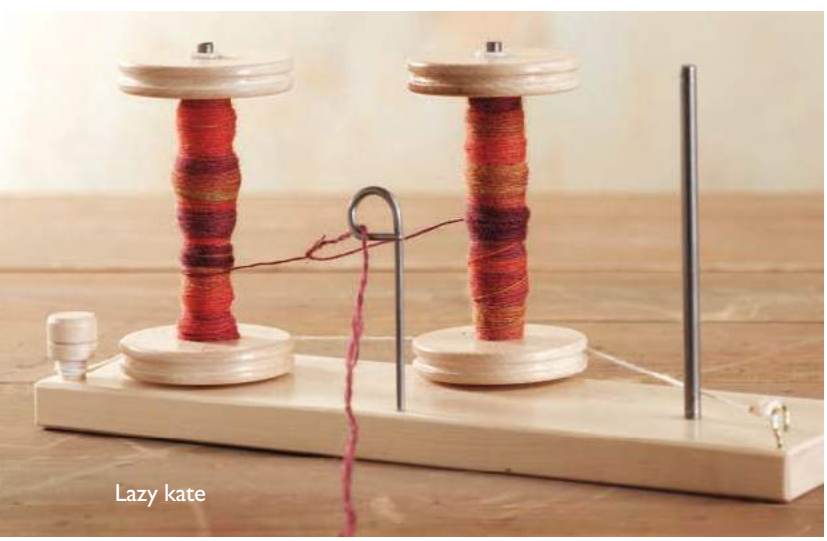
about 2 inches and put it firmly into the slot at the top of the cone on the ball winder. Turn the crank smoothly at a medium speed and check the tension of the yarn as it winds. Too little and the ball will be very sloppy; too much and the yarn is stretched, and the ball can collapse inward. If you can't tension the yarn on the hooks and flyer arm, use your fingers to hold and tension the yarn. You can also position the bobbin on a tensioned lazy kate. After the ball is wound, if it isn't on a removable cone that the yarn will stay on, insert a piece of heavy paper or a folded index card into the center of the ball as you remove it from the top of the cone to keep the ball from collapsing inward.

A **nøstepinne** or winding stick is a handheld tool for winding yarn into balls. In the United States, we use the Norwegian term; the Swedes call it a *nystpinne* and the Danes a *vindepind*. If you are going to buy or make a nøstepinne, make sure there is a notch around the top and that the top half is smooth and tapers from the center to the top. My favorite nøstepinne is 3½ inches in diameter at the center and 2⅝ inches just under the top notch. A notch at the bottom is handy, and the tool should fit comfortably in your hand.

You can hold the nøstepinne in whichever hand is comfortable. Start by wrapping the yarn around the bottom notch two or three times to hold it. Bring the yarn up to the top and wrap it once or twice around the top notch. If your nøstepinne doesn't have a notch at the bottom, simply wrap the yarn around the top notch and hold the tail with your thumb below the spot where you start winding. Now bring the yarn from the top notch down about 1½ to 2 inches (the bigger the ball will be, the lower you want to start winding it). I hold the nøstepinne in my right hand and guide the yarn with my left hand, winding it diagonally from the lower left up to the right. The key to making a ball successfully is winding with the yarn at an angle, just the way yarn is wound in a commercial ball of yarn. You want an egg shape, not a round ball. At first you may have to hold the yarn in place with your fingers as you wind. Wind a few turns, and then roll the nøstepinne slightly in the direction from which you start the wrap. Since I wrap from left to right, I roll the nøstepinne to the left. Continue winding and rolling the nøstepinne until you have a nice, egg-shaped ball of yarn. Remove the ball from the top of the nøstepinne, keeping hold of the original tail if you need it to ply or knit from. The ball should have an open center that won't collapse.

Ball winders are good for winding large amounts of yarn and for making a flat-bottomed ball that can sit on the floor or in a box without rolling around. If I have a large project, I wind each bobbin of singles yarn onto a ball winder and stack the balls in order so I can ply the first and last balls together, the second and second-last together, and so forth. That way, any differences in the yarn grist will be more or less evened out. While you can ply from the two ends of the ball produced on a ball winder, the center can collapse and it can be tricky controlling the tension of the two yarn ends.

Nøstepinnes are convenient for winding small amounts of singles yarn that can be plied from the ball. Plied yarn is also wound onto a nøstepinne for two-end knitting (which uses two strands alternately throughout) so that you can easily pull the


Lazy kate


Nøstepinne

Niddy-noddy

strands from the center and outside of the ball. The disadvantage of a nøstepinne is that winding on is slow and you have to be careful to wind evenly and smoothly so that the yarn doesn't slide or tangle. Yarn wound onto either a ball winder or nøstepinne can also acquire or lose twist. For more on this, see Rita Buchanan's excellent article on center-pull balls listed in Resources.

After you've plied your yarn, you can skein it onto a **niddy-noddy.** This is a tool for skeining and measuring yarn. It has a center "stick" that is usually carved so you can hold it easily. Each end of the stick has a crossbar with one end curving upward and the other tapering down (sometimes one crossbar has curves at both ends). There is often one flat end so that you can slide the yarn off the niddy-noddy. The crossbars are offset 90° from each other.

Start winding the yarn by holding the tail at the center of the handhold and keep hold of it as you wind. Then take the yarn up over the left end of the top crossbar, down and under the right-side end of the lower crossbar, up and over the other end of the top crossbar and then down and under the other end of the lower crossbar. When you get back to the starting point, begin counting complete wraps as you continue to wind. Measure the yardage for one wrap, and then you can multiply by the number of wraps for the skein total (for more details, see Rita Buchanan's article on measuring yarn listed in Resources). Wrap evenly and with medium tension. Wrap too tightly and you can't get the yarn off and your yardage count will be overly optimistic; wrap too loosely and the yarn falls off or slides to the wrong part of the crossbar. After you've wound the yarn, secure each end with a short piece of waste yarn tied around the skein in a figure eight, and then tie the skein in at least two more places before removing the yarn from the niddy-noddy. Your yarn is now ready to be washed and used. ⌘

Carol Rhoades is settling into her new home in Madison, Wisconsin. She has hidden all the unsightly bins of wool in the basement and spins upstairs in a pleasant and tidy room.

RESOURCES

Buchanan, Rita. "A Closer Look: The Ins and Outs of Centerpull Balls: How to Avoid Tangles and Frustration." *Spin·Off* 24, 4 (Winter 2000), 26–29.

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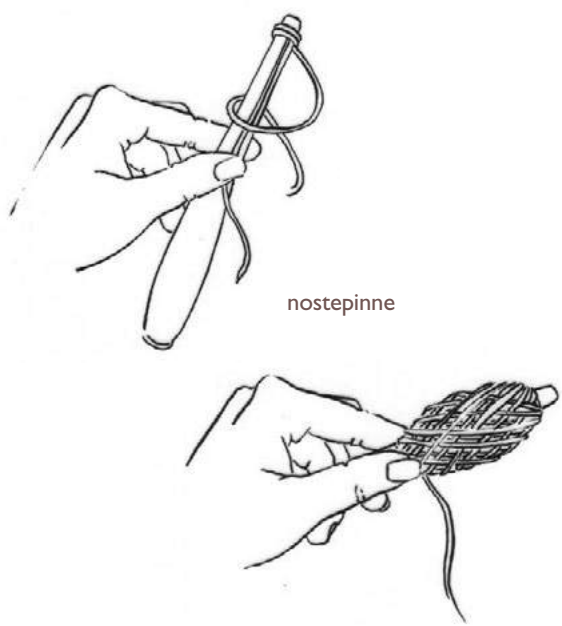
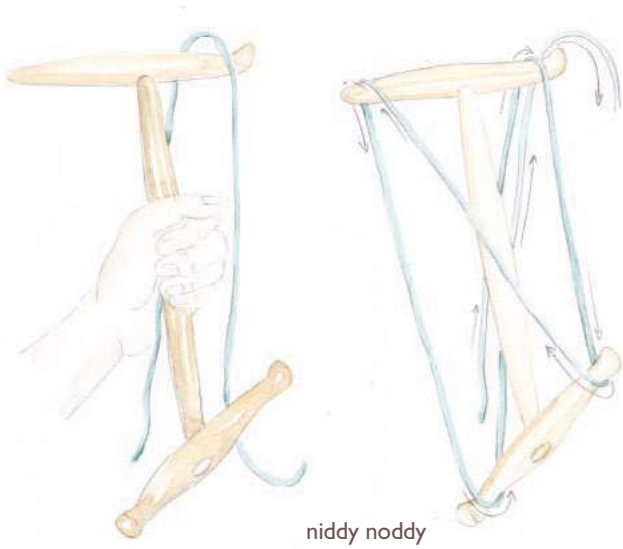


nostepinne



niddy noddy