

# NEEDLE FELTING

with Jennifer Tan

## Felting Basics

Felting with wool fiber has been done for many years by many cultures around the world. Felting is accomplished with the following methods:

1. Rolling between hands and/or on the leg
2. Agitating fibers with water and soap by hand
3. Washing wool in a wash machine
4. Repeatedly poking a needlefelting needle into wool

Each technique essentially creates felt by forcing the fiber strands to loop and knot into each other, thus shrinking and becoming denser the longer felting occurs.

Rougher, fresher wool tends to felt easier than wool that has been overly processed, is smooth, or very soft, such as merino or cashmere. Corriedale is one of the easiest wools to felt and card. Other animal fibers, such as alpaca, will also felt, but tend to felt better when combined with wool. Plant (bamboo, corn, cotton, soy) and synthetic (Angelina sparkle, nylon) fibers will not felt, but may also be blended with wool during felting.

Consider combining wet and needlefelting when you want to create large pieces of felt for clothing, slippers or other larger projects. Be sure to only needlefelt a wetfelted pieces once it is completely dry.

Needlefelting needles may break, so have extras on hand. Two-inch thick foam works well as a base when needlefelting. Be careful not to jab yourself with the needle and have lavender or tea tree oil on hand in case you pierce your finger.

If wool is not felting easily, card the fiber first with hand carders or a drum carder. Looser fibers will grab onto each other easier than fibers that are already partially felted, which can happen after hand-dyeing.

Experiment with how wispy or how dense you want your felting to be for your project! Repeated felting will make a project stronger and the wool more dense, and the size will also shrink.

Needlefelting may be a 2-dimensional landscape or a 3-dimensional creature. For 3-D creatures, rotate the wool regularly to keep the shape from felting flat. For 2-D landscapes or “wool paintings”, felting may be done directly onto a piece of wool felt, a previously wet-felted piece (once it’s dry), or into a compressed industrial felt piece ½ inch thick.

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## Pedagogy

Felting is generally recommended for ages 9 and up, and is introduced in Waldorf schools usually by grade 7 (school handwork programs vary). It is a wonderful form of handwork that can be introduced by classroom teachers and integrated into curriculum blocks.

Lower grades: Steiner emphasized Grace, Morality and Virtue in the curriculum. “Hands” is the focus of Hands-Heart-Head. These are met during felting with the following: The active choosing of color, following instructions (establishing authority), fine motor development, imitation of a pattern, sensory integration, going from outside-in, and cross-over heaven-to-earth (lateral). Stories, songs, verses, and projects (housebuilding, holiday gifts, etc.) may be integrated with felting.

Upper grades: Steiner emphasized Belonging, Harmony and Order in the curriculum. “Heart” is the focus of Hands-Heart-Head. These are met during felting with the following: Moving from capacity to refinement, developing control over the craft (self-esteem), blending of colors, definition of subject matter, choice. Purposeful content, such as scenes related to geography, science, social studies (layers of earth, maps of land and sea, etc.) may be integrated with felting.

## Songs and Verses

### My Hands (clapping)

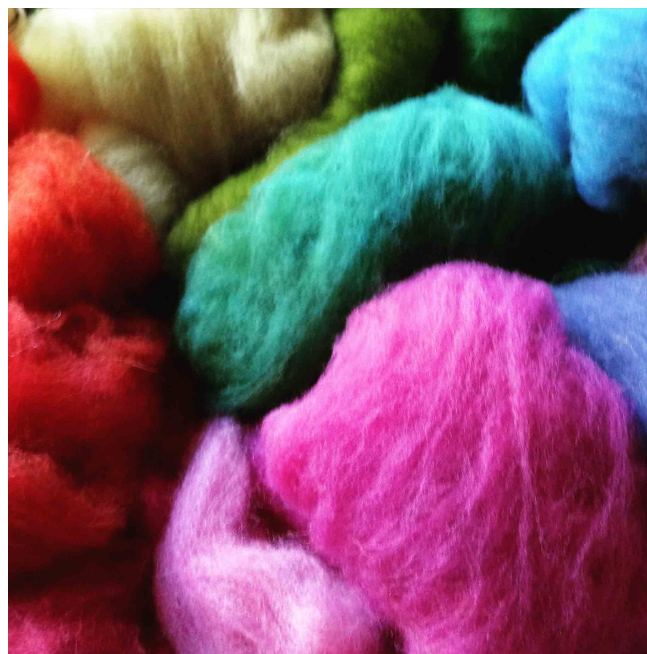
My hands are good, and yes I would  
Felt some wool for you.  
If you would, and if you could  
Please felt with me, too!

### Wet Felting

Up and down, up and down  
Water, soap and wool!  
Up and down, up and down  
We are making felt.

### Needle Felting

Draft the wool and lay it down  
Angle needle so  
In and out, in and out



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## Fiber Arts Resources

[www.mamajudes.etsy.com](http://www.mamajudes.etsy.com) | Judy Forster's plant-dyed wool, felt and yarn

[www.colorsofnature.etsy.com](http://www.colorsofnature.etsy.com) | Trisha Lambert's plant-dyed wool, felt and yarn

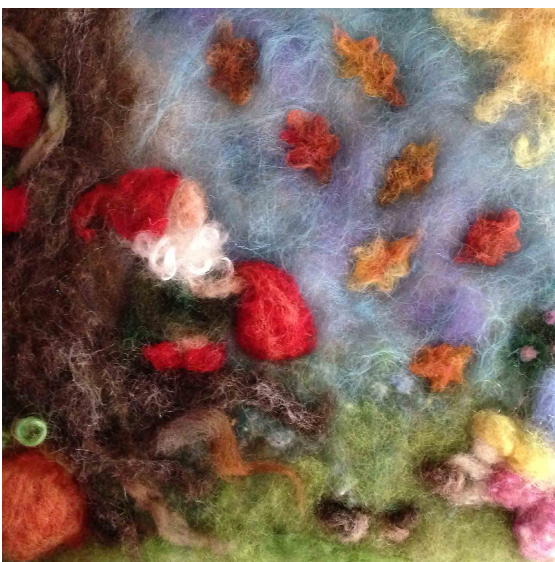
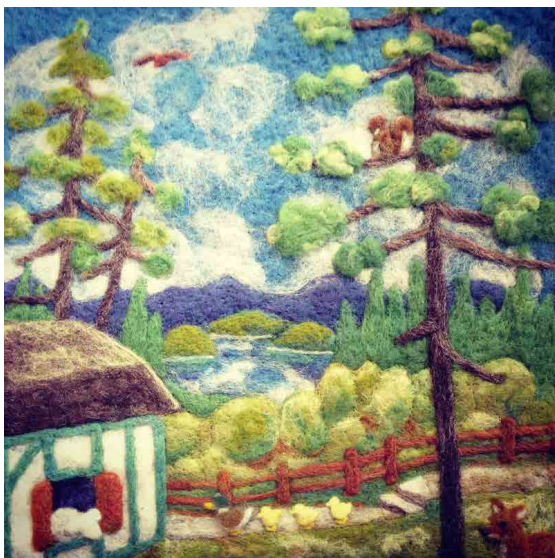
[www.griffindyeworks.com](http://www.griffindyeworks.com) | Natural dyes, annual retreat and fiber frolics

[www.babettafineyarnandgifts.com](http://www.babettafineyarnandgifts.com) | Babetta's Yarn Café in Fair Oaks

[www.thorshof.org/spinyarn.htm](http://www.thorshof.org/spinyarn.htm) Fiber Arts songs, verses, rhymes

[www.interweavepress.com](http://www.interweavepress.com) | Magazines and resources for fiber arts

[www.sutherlandfelt.com](http://www.sutherlandfelt.com) | Pressed felt



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