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Skirting Fleece 101

Begin here

Start with a dry freshly shorn fleece. Before you invest any time on your project, select a pencil size thickness of fiber and tug on it. If the lock staple breaks, the fleece is not sound. (You can use the broken fleece to felt with).

Sometimes the tip of the fleece will break off. This is caused from weathering and is most likely to occur along the spine of the animal. You could trim the unwanted ends off using scissors before washing, making sure you still have proper length. The reason to avoid broken tips in a fleece is they create neps in the carding preparation.

Separating the undesirable parts of the fleece out, insures a greater quality of finished fiber product. Undesirable parts include junk wool, grain, loose vegetation matter, stains, dung tags and second cuts. This is done by using a skirting table with a chicken wire top which permits the undesirables to fall through.

How-to

The fleece is laid on the table cut side down, tip side up. Make sure the table is big enough for the entire fleece to lie flat. Start at one side and work around the fleece removing 2 to 4 inches from the edge. Remove stains and dung tags at the tail end. The Kemp fiber found on the britch wool is located on the upper leg. These fibers do not take dye evenly and will stick out in the final product. Finally, skirt away belly wool and the top from the head. Look also for stain or wool with color markings and remove it from your fleece.

Once the dirtier parts of the fleece are removed, you can gently shake or bounce the table top. This technique helps the undesirables fall through. This will help dislodge seconds which are from the shearing process and result when the shearer makes a second pass over an already shorn area to neaten up his/her work on the animal. This unfortunate maneuver creates more neps in the carding process

In summary

Quality in = Quality out. The cleaner the fleece, the happier you will be in the long run with your processed fiber. Battenkill Fibers can assist by offering a hands-on, skirting workshop free of charge, whenever you would like.