

Getting Started With Wool

Collecting for FOM:

Here's a preview of themes/colors we'll be working with this year so you can keep an eye out for wool. Since each design is 7" x 9" you don't need any wool piece larger than that (you'll need a slightly larger background if you're not using wool).

This list is in chronological order – we'll be working ahead so your project is ready to hang at the appropriate time. For example, at the April meeting you'll get a summery pattern & if you finish it by the May meeting it's ready to hang for June:

- Summer (Lemonade) – dark background, pale yellow, light gray, fun pops of color
- Americana – dark background, red white & blue
- Sunflowers – light background, textured black/white for center, bright petals, brown/green stem, black for bird
- Lilies – choose your flower color first and find a vase & background color to compliment, you'll also need greens and a light color for the doily
- Pumpkin – dark or very light background (set off those oranges), bright oranges, brown stem
- Oak Leaves & Acorns – light background, dark/dusky greens, medium & dark browns (plaids)
- Snowman – look for a scarf for the background (perfect to share since you'll get two ends), white wool, pop of color that contrasts with background AND either a cheap necklace with tiny bells/lights OR beads.
- Coffee – colors of your choice for mug, mug rug, table cloth & background (some should have texture), dark brown coffee or lighter for hot chocolate.
- Valentine – fun background, white/cream, red, pink, green
- St. Patrick's Day – background of your choice, emerald green
- Spring (Daffodils & Ducklings) – dark background, bright green, bright yellow (daffodils), light yellow (duckling)
- Spring (Dragonfly) – light background, jewel tone dragonfly

Saving & Splurging:

If you buy everything new, wool will bankrupt you! To keep the costs down:

- Use something other than wool as the background and backing (especially for larger projects). Home-spuns and flannels make great bases for wool applique at a much lower cost.
- Upcycle/recycle wool that you find in thrift stores and garage/estate sales (directions below). Level up by trading with friends who also upcycle.
- Try dying your own wool to get more colors (directions below).
- "Find" patterns:
 - Check your stash or the free table for any applique or embroidery pattern – just trace the shapes from the design to make wool patterns (no seam allowance needed).
 - Find free "coloring book" pages on the internet & do the same.
 - Draw your own using clip-art, greeting cards, etc. as inspiration.

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But sometimes it's worth it...

- When you need the right color to make your project perfect – splurge
- When you're working on a special project with embroidery and want high end floss – splurge
- When you find that something special (be it a vintage silk kimono, a fabulous color, or a pattern you absolutely love) – splurge

Thistle Dew has an extensive selection of wool applique/embroidery supplies (10127 Fair Oaks Blvd)

Quilters' Corner has wool-like flannels and wool yardage (9792 Business Park Dr. # B, Sacramento)

Dorr Mill (www.dorrmillstore.com) is an excellent site for reasonably priced wool yardage. You can buy pre-washed yardage, fat-quarters & bundles of small pieces. There's an even wider selection of yardage that isn't pre-shrunk, and their wool over-dyes beautifully. Combine your order with friends to save on shipping!

Dying Wool:

Easy! Wool is protein-based and you can use any food-grade dye – that means Kool-aid & Wilton's. No dangerous chemicals and the mess can be kept to a minimum. Here's my basic microwave approach which is suitable for small amounts. There's lots of free advice on the internet for variations.

- Choose pieces no bigger the size of a piece of paper.
- Pre-soak your wool in vinegar and water
 - Since wool naturally sheds water, make sure you squeeze it & dunk it a few times until the entire thing is soaked through. Dry parts won't take the dye & you'll get a mottled result (sometimes desired).
 - The acid from vinegar will help the wool take the dye, but if you're using Kool-Aid with citric acid you can theoretically skip the vinegar.
- While the wool is soaking, prepare the "dye bath"
 - Use a micro-wave safe bowl that can hold several cups of water
 - Fill the container 2/3 full
 - Add the dye of your choice and mix until completely dissolved (gloves recommended). Unsweetened Kool-Aid and Wilton's for cake decorating are readily available. Avoid grape Kool-Aid it's a really ugly purple.
 - I've used ½ tsp. of Kool-Aid & 1 quart of water to dye 2 pieces of wool. You'll have to play with amounts & flavors until you find what you like.
- Squeeze out the wool, add it to the dye bath & squeeze a couple of times so it soaks up the colored water.
- Microwave on high for 3-5 minutes
 - Check the result – caution Boiling water!!!!
 - Carefully remove from microwave & use tongs to lift out the wool.
 - Is the color dark enough? Is the water clear? If you want it darker but there's still a lot of color in the water, you can just pop it back in the microwave. Add more dye if it's clear.
- Rinse the wool in cold water until no color comes out, wring out & hang to dry.

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Upcycling/Recycling

Look for the following:

- At least 80% wool (including cashmere/angora). Anything less than 80% may not shrink/felt.
- NOT “Washable”. Washable wool has been chemically treated & will not shrink/felt.
- Tight weave or knit (loose/lacy won’t felt well and will still fray after shrinking).
- Clothes that will give you large pieces of fabric:
 - Skirts of any size often have large panels with few seams!
 - Larger women’s jackets like 2X and 3X often have no seam in the back at all.
 - Coats & men’s jackets have less seams than small women’s jackets.
- Colors! You’ll find that neutrals are easy to come by, but snatch up fabulous brights and unusual colors. A truly fabulous color should outweigh the rule on large pieces!
- Patterns! Regardless of color, an interesting weave will add texture to your projects. Lighter shades can be over-dyed to add color.
- White – hardest thing to find, so grab it if you see it.
- Ignore moth-holes and stains since you can work around them after you shrink the fabric.

Felt It:

Wool fibers will open up in hot water and hook onto surrounding fibers creating a tight mat of wool. This is called felting. When you do it with woven or knitted wool, you get an easy-to-work-with fabric that won’t ravel, but the fabric retains its weave/knit allowing little spaces for your needle. FELT is wool fibers that were felted without ever being woven or knit so the fibers completely overlap and don’t have any openings – this makes it a little harder to sew through.

- Keep it out of your house until you have time to felt it! Fabric from thrift stores and garage sales may have moths or silverfish – so the garage or shed is a great temporary parking spot.
- Prep the clothing:
 - Remove buttons (start a button jar!)
 - Cut up the clothing along seam lines (sweaters should be left whole so the knit doesn’t unravel before felting).
 - Remove extra stuff like zippers, collars, pockets, waistbands, hem tape, shoulder pads & sewn-in interfacing (don’t worry about fused interfacing).
- Wash/Dry:
 - Separate those colors! There will be a lot of dye released & it will cross-contaminate other pieces. Nothing worse than having it all come out muddy!
 - Throw in an old towel or some old socks with knots tied in them – this will help agitate the fabric so it felts better.
 - Use HOT water and a small amount of detergent to wash.
 - Some fabric will shrink/felt enough just in the wash & you can hang it dry.
 - If it needs to shrink a little more, throw it in the dryer on high (along with the towel/socks). Check after 15 minutes or so to see if it’s shrunk enough – stop when it has & hang dry if the fabric is still damp.