

July 2008 Newsletter

Textiles 101 - Wool

As you know, wool is a natural fiber. Wool can come from a variety of different animal sources, but is still considered wool. Most commonly we are accustomed to thinking of wool in terms of sheep's wool. Virgin wool in particular is made from fibers that have never before been processed into fabric.

Discovering content of the wool – There are two ways to determine the quality and makeup of a fabric that is considered to be wool. The first is the burn test, which you may be familiar with, as it has been discussed in our newsletter before. The burn test for wool will produce a smell like that of burning human hair. Any “melting” of the fabric while burning will indicate that the fabric is a blend with a synthetic fiber. 100% wool fabric will burn similar to cotton with the smell of burning hair.

Another test for 100% wool content is a bleach test. Place a scrap in one cup of chlorine bleach overnight. One hundred percent wool fabric will leave no residue in the cup. If any fibers remain, this indicates that the fabric is a blend. Some fiber finishes and other natural content may affect the final result

Felt vs. felted wool – In my opinion; I believe these are two completely different things. Because felted wool is very popular felt has also become very popular. Quite simply felt is matted fiber. Wool become felts when moisture, heat and pressure are added. Felt is a compacted sheet of entangled, not woven wool, fur, or cotton fibers (or synthetic fibers produced to act like wool). As a child, I used felt for everything, the inexpensive squares from the craft store that I could attach with glue to fabric, paper, or cardboard to invent a variety of things. Most likely this type of felt is 100% polyester and is more likely to bleed and deteriorate over time (as I am sure you discovered). The amount of wear and tear it will endure is minimal because it is a matted fabric.

I visited a large chain fabric store recently and looked at their stock of felt. It was 100% polyester in 72 in wide yardage, useful for Halloween costumes and other limited use projects.

Wool felt on the other hand is a high quality fabric or fiber that has been washed, shrunk, or felted by a needle or similar tool for the purpose of crafting a different look from the original product. If you have ever washed a wool sweater, that came out smaller and denser, you have felted an item of wool. The original purpose and use for crafted item such as a penny rug, hooked rug, or braided rug, was to recycle old clothing for another purpose. But it was initially washed or “felted” to create a more durable product.

As I have mentioned before, I used to produce crafts in my home. I have felted all type of scrap wool by using boiling water and my clothes dryer. I learned from experience which fabrics were 100% wool fibers. They became more dense during the felting process and the colors tended to mix together creating all kind of new colors. After a piece of wool has been felted its raw edges will not ravel and this makes it more conducive to cut and use for wool appliqué. Wool blend fabrics will not produce the same quality product for appliqué. It does not “felt” and the synthetic fiber can melt creating a rough fabric unsuitable for use.

Heirloom Patch stocks only 100% wool fibers. If you would like to purchase a fat quarter, specify that information in the comment section and order ¼ yard of fabric. These fabrics are ready to felt on your own for a high quality and durable item. I enjoy the process of learning involved in the process of felting. I have used left over scraps from a multitude of sources, and mixed them with new fabrics to create new life from old items. Reduce, reuse, recycle...is a good adage for times when finances are tight and the Holidays are still coming.

Check our patterns section for “Buttermilk Basin” wool appliqué pattern. Also many of the “Crabapple Hill Studios” patterns include small bits of wool appliqué.

We will be adding cream and a neutral hound’s tooth print if you are interested in dying some of your own fabrics. We will also be adding new colors to our stock in the near future.

Enjoy!