

Needle Felting Basics



Written by Kathryn Sheehan ©2002, The Silver Penny at www.thesilverpenny.com

Although needle felting in industry has been around for a while, home crafters are embracing this technique more and more. They are finding all kinds of uses and projects in which to incorporate it into their creative work. It's easy to understand because it is such a satisfying technique that gives beautiful results. Working with soft, luxurious carded wool is a pleasurable, sensory experience! Give it a try soon.

A Note of Caution: This activity is for adults or older children (age 10 and up) only with strict adult guidance and supervision due to the long and very sharp needles. Do not allow your child to attempt this project alone!

Materials Needed:

Barbed felting needle
cleaned and carded wool, can be dyed
a piece of 2" thick dense, spongy foam 12" x 8" or larger, depending on your project

Directions: Please read completely before you begin.

- 1.) Begin by deciding what shape you'd like your finished felt piece to take, for example: a heart. Draw this on a piece of paper and cut it out. (If this is your first time to needle felt, I suggest that your shape be at least 3" in diameter. If it's too small your fingers might get in the way later.)
- 2.) Next, tear a sheet of wool that is about 1/2" thick and at least 1/2" bigger on all sides than the shape template you've created.
- 3.) Lay the wool on your foam and poke the needle (up and down) into it in a random pattern. You don't need to be forceful, not at all! Instead, allow the needle to penetrate the foam only about 1/4" with each poke. Also, this is important, only move your needle straight up and down, not at an angle. If you move your needle sideways, while it is in the foam, the tip will break off. **And watch your fingers!!! Always know where they are in relation to your felting needle so you don't stick yourself. As they say in Maine: That needle is "wicked sharp!"** Poke the wool a few times to secure it to the foam work surface.
- 4.) Now, with straight pins, pin your shape template in the middle of your wool. Going around the outline of the shape, poke the felting needle up and down until the fibers have compressed and you can see the outline of your shape. Remove the template.
- 5.) Use the felting needle to poke up and down in the middle of your shape until the inside has been compressed and your shape is well defined.
- 6.) Fold the excess wool that extends beyond your shape into the inside and use the felting needle to incorporate it into the shape. This will give your finished piece a nice, rounded edge. (If you want a straight edge, just flatten your wool sheet completely and you can cut it into any shape later.)
- 7.) By this time, your shape is probably securely felted into the foam. Lift it off and turn it over. Use your felting needle to push the "fuzzies" into the back side of your shape. You might want to use straight pins to hold it to your work surface, especially if the shape is small and there's a chance your fingers will get in the way. But make sure the needle doesn't hit the pin, or the tip

might break off! You'll have to lift, turn and work your piece several times until it's finally smooth and finished. That's it! No water -- no mess!



Tips for 3-D Needle Felted Figures:

The technique for making 3-D felted objects is much the same as above, except you will be working "in the round," so to speak. **You need to take extra precaution to watch your fingers because, as you hold and turn your project, there is a greater chance of poking through the wool right into your finger! Ouch!**

You can produce the different parts of your project separately, such as a head, legs, body, etc. Then, when they are well formed, attach them to the main base of your figure. For example, in the mouse pictured above, the body, head and ears were formed separately, and then needle felted together (much like working with clay). When I attached the head, I laid it where I wanted it, then poked my needle through the head entirely into the wool of the body. By doing this many times and from different angles, eventually the two pieces joined (no glue required). **(Remember to always poke your needle in a straight line, up and down, no matter the angle, so as not to break your needle.)** To seal and smooth out the joint, I wrapped a thin layer of wool around the neck and needle felted it into place. This strengthened the joint, as well.

Details can be added by using different colors of wool or, as in the case of the eyes and tail for the mouse above, I used cuttings of embroidery floss and needle felted them in place. For my mouse, this worked fine, because it isn't going to be handled roughly or by very young children (or pets) that might pull them out and swallow them. **It is important to keep safety a top priority when designing toys!** For greater strength and durability, only felt wool to wool. The unique property of wool that allows it to "stick" to itself creates a stronger bond than wool to other materials, such as the cotton floss. *Please keep this in mind when you design your figures.*

For project ideas: I have used the books *Magic Wool*, *More Magic Wool*, *Making Magical Fairy-Tale Puppets* and *Making Fairy-Tale Wool Animals*. Although it is not suggested in any of these books to needle felt your figures, the combination of their techniques and needle felting I have found creates a stronger more durable result.



Also, there are many other craft books published specifically about needle felting, such as *Designer Needle Felting*, *Fast & Fun Needle Felting*, *Fleece Dog* and many more.

Please check our website for a complete listing of needle felting books & craft supplies. Our web address is www.thesilverpenny.com. Thank you!