A Guide to Spinning Wool:
Learn How to Spin Wool from Rare Sheep Breeds and Other Wool Fibers
There’s a sheep for every spinner.

I don’t mean that you need to bring at least one sheep into your home, though if you do I won’t blame you. (Get three or four—they like company.)

I mean that there is a tremendous diversity of sheep breeds, some with startlingly different properties, and somewhere in that bounty of woolly goodness you’re sure to find a type of fleece you like best.

In this eBook, we examine four breeds of sheep—Border Leicester, Wensleydale, Jacob, and Bond—and offer just a glimpse of the huge diversity of wool types that you may come across.

None of these is the most common breed; in fact, several of these sheep are considered rare breeds. Still, by visiting a wool market or keeping an eye on shepherds you admire you can probably get your hands on one of these fleeces and try it out for yourself. When you’re done spinning, try one of the four projects, each designed to make the best use of a particular type of wool.

Since 1977, Spin-Off has been inspiring spinners new and old to make beautiful yarn and find enchanting ways to use it. We also host the spinning community spinningdaily.com, complete with blogs, forums, and free patterns. In our series of workshop videos, the living treasures of the spinning world share their knowledge with you. We’re devoted to bringing you the best spinning teachers, the newest spinning ideas, and most inspirational creativity right to your mailbox, computer, and ultimately fingertips.

We hope you enjoy your spinning journey—come tell us about it at spinningdaily.com.

Happy spinning,

Anne Merrow
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Fiber Basics:

Border Leicester

By Robin Russo

History

Leicester sheep derive their name from Leicestershire, England, where they have been bred for centuries. Robert Bakewell (1726–1795) is given credit for the improvement of the Leicester sheep, although many breeders have taken part in the process. Today there are three distinct breeds of Leicester: the English, the Border, and the Blueface. In this article, I’m taking a closer look at Border Leicester.

It is believed that George and Matthew Culley bred a Bakewell Leicester ram with either a Teeswater or Cheviot ewe as the foundation of the Border Leicester breed. The breed was founded in 1767 but was not firmly established as a breed until 1850, at which point it became more popular than the English Leicester. The Society of Border Leicester Sheep Breeders was established in 1898 in Edinburgh, Scotland. Although it is unclear exactly when this breed was brought to America, the U.S. census of 1920 lists 767 Border Leicester sheep. The American Border Leicester Association was established in 1973. Today, Border Leicesters are found in England, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and North and South America.

The Sheep

Border Leicesters are a dual-purpose breed that produce both meat and wool. They are very distinctive looking and easily recognizable, with a regal stature and pronounced Roman nose. Their faces are white and their ears are long and erect. They have no wool on their legs or face and neither sex has horns. Their wool hangs in long, shimmering locks. Rams weigh from 200 to 225 pounds and ewes weigh from 150 to 175 pounds.

The Breed

Border Leicester sheep are calm, easy to handle, and have pleasant personalities. They are also very hardy and can forage better than many other breeds. The ewes are prolific, often producing twins and triplets. They lamb easily and make excellent mothers. The lambs are active at birth and grow rapidly. Border Leicesters are often used to improve fertility in other breeds. They are easy to shear and produce eight or more pounds of useable wool a year.

The Wool

Border Leicester wool has a 6- to 12-inch staple.
It is lustrous, wavy, and has well-penciled (defined) locks. The individual staples separate easily and end in a small curl. The fleece is uniform and has little kemp hair. A young fleece frequently has corkscrew tips. Although traditionally white, Border Leicesters have been bred for many wonderful natural colors ranging from silvery gray to a rich brown. A mature fleece weighs between 7 and 13 pounds. Its low grease content makes it easy to wash; the yield is approximately 70 percent.

The wool is used commercially to make high-quality worsted yarns for use in dress fabrics, braids, coats, draperies, hosiery, hand knitting, carpets, and upholstery fabric. It is also used to make looped yarns such as bouclé. It is very durable so it's a preferred choice for garments that need to withstand abrasion.

**Handspinning**

My first experience with Border Leicester fleece was at a local county fair. I was drawn to the fleece from some distance by its incredible luster. I loved the distinct locks and the soft feel of the wool. It was also very clean and free of vegetation. I later learned from the breeder, Sue Johnson at Meadowland Farm in Hinesburg, Vermont, that her ewes are sheared in February prior to being brought into the barn for lambing. This timing keeps the fleece free of hay and chaff.

It was easy to see that the fleece would be a dream to prepare and spin. I used mesh bags to wash it. They preserved the well-penciled locks and helped prevent felting during the washing process. I put half a pound of wool in a bag and placed the bag in a washtub of very hot water and detergent. I let the bag soak in the washtub for fifteen minutes, swished the bag around, and then set it aside to drain. I poured the remaining very dirty water down the drain and filled the tub again with hot water. Once again I placed the bag in the tub and let it soak for fifteen minutes. If this water had looked dirty, I would have rinsed again.

Eight samples of Border Leicester wool showing natural colors and differences in length and lock formation. Some fleeces have a corkscrew appearance and others are more open and wavy. These samples were provided by Betty Levin of Lincoln, Massachusetts, and Sue Johnson of Hinesburg, Vermont.

**Preparing the Fiber for Spinning**

Handcarding can be difficult with long wool because the fibers have a tendency to tangle. Drumcarders are excellent for long wool. It is helpful to pick the fleece prior to feeding it into the drumcarder. The locks are easily pulled apart by hand if you do not have a picker. Making this step part of the process will save time in the carding process; it will also save the wires on your card cloth from the strain of having to open and organize the fiber, and it will quickly provide a beautiful spinning batt.

It doesn’t take very much time to pick open the locks by hand before drumcarding because the locks are open and long. Five minutes of picking by hand
gives me the two to three ounces batt my carder
will hold. I use a Patrick Green drumcarder—a very
heavy-duty carder; the wire teeth are .038 inches,
set ¼ inch apart, with 28 wires per inch. I find that
it is perfect for carding the long-luster wools.

If your goal is a smooth yarn that shows off the
luster of the wool, consider combing your fleece
rather than carding. Handheld Viking-style combs
work very well with the long luster wools, although
using table mounted English combs can
produce the top more quickly and efficiently. It is
easier to draw the fibers through a diz when you
use table mounted combs. This method gives you
a top that is ready to spin into a fine yarn.

Border Leicester wool also makes beautiful,
durable felt. After using the softest parts of a
fleece for my handspinning projects, I have the
remaining wool commercially carded into batts for
felting. These batts are large and are perfect for
big felting projects.

The price of a Border Leicester fleece can vary
from $3 to $15 per pound. A freshly shorn, well-
cared for fleece that has been well-skirted is worth
the extra money. A colored fleece is generally more
expensive than a white one. A lamb’s fleece will
give you the softest fiber, but an adult fleece will
give you more luster and greater durability.

Resources
British Sheep and Wool. Bradford, England:
Fournier, Nola and Jane Fournier. In Sheep’s

Robin Russo lives in Bradford, Vermont, where she teaches
spinning, felting, and dyeing. A fiber enthusiast for over
twenty-five years, she takes every opportunity to explore
its potential.
A Border Leicester Christmas Stocking

by Robin Russo

I drumcarded a beautiful Border Leicester fleece and spun two-ply yarn at 10 wraps per inch on my Ashford Joy wheel. I spun a sturdy yarn because I wanted to be sure that it would be able to withstand the kind of weight it might be subjected to on Christmas Eve. The stocking knits up quickly and you could easily graph out a name or a few of your own designs to personalize the stocking.

**Corrugated rib**

K1 gray, p1 red, repeat. Move the red yarn to the back when you knit the gray stitch and move the red yarn to the front when you purl the red stitch.

Cast on 56 stitches. Divide the stitches onto 3 needles: 14, 14, and 28. Work corrugated rib for 2 inches (see instructions above). Work in stockinette stitch to the heel following the chart.

**Heel flap**

Working on the needle with 28 stitches:

*Row 1*: Sl1, knit remaining stitches.
*Row 2*: Purl.

Work these 2 rows 17 times (a total of 34 rows). Repeat row 1.

**Project Notes**

- **Finished size**: 6½ by 24 inches.
- **Fiber**: Border Leicester, 5 ounces gray, 2 ounces red, 2 ounces green.
- **Yarn**: Two-ply yarn spun at 10 wraps per inch.
- **Gauge**: 4 stitches per inch.
- **Needles**: U.S. size 9 double-pointed needles (or size to obtain gauge).

Robin spun a 2-ply yarn using Border Leicester fleece that she prepared on Viking combs to knit this Christmas stocking.
Turning the heel

Row 1: S11, p15, p2tog, p1, turn.
Row 2: S11, k6, s11, k1, psso, k1, turn.
Row 3: S11, p7, p2tog, p1, turn.
Row 4: S11, k8, s11, k1, psso, k1, turn.
Row 5: S11, p9, p2tog, p1, turn.
Row 6: S11, k10, s11, k1, psso, k1, turn.
Row 7: S11, p11, p2tog, p1, turn.
Row 8: S11, k12, s11, k1, psso, k1, turn.
Row 9: S11, p13, p2tog, p1, turn.
Row 10: S11, k14, s11, k1, psso, k1.

When the heel flap is complete, 18 stitches remain on the heel flap needle.

Gussets

Pick up 12 stitches along heel flap edge. Knit across the next 28 stitches on one needle. Pick up 12 stitches along the other heel flap edge and knit 9 stitches from the first needle. Place the remaining 9 stitches on the needle with the first 12 heel flap stitches. Your needles should look like this: First needle from center of heel has 21 stitches, second needle (instep) 28 stitches, third needle has 21 stitches.

Knit around, following the chart, decreasing the gusset stitches as follows until 56 stitches remain.

Round 1: Needle 1: Knit to within last three stitches, k2tog, k1. Needle 2: Knit all stitches. Needle 3: k1, s1, k1, psso, knit remaining stitches.
Round 2: Knit.

You should now have 14 stitches on your first and third needles and 28 stitches on your second needle. Continue following the chart 5 to 6 inches or until 3 inches from desired total length.

Toe

Round 1: Needle 1: Knit to within last three stitches, k2tog, k1. Needle 2: k1, s1, k1, psso, knit to within last three stitches, k2tog, k1. Needle 3: k1, s1, k1, psso, knit remaining stitches.
Round 2: Knit.

Continue with these 2 rounds until 20 stitches remain.

Finish by using the Kitchener stitch to sew together the remaining stitches.

Robin Russo stays warm in Bradford, Vermont by spinning and knitting and felting many garments; she is a frequent contributor to Spin-Off.
Many years ago, I worked in an office and kept a poster of British sheep breeds on my door. Visitors often perused the poster, and Wensleydale was the hands-down favorite. No wonder, considering the long ringlets of wool hanging almost to the ground like a magnificent Hungarian Suba coat and the “come-hither” look of eyes partially covered by tendrils of curly forelocks.

Wensleydales are a dual-purpose British long-wool breed originating in 1839 as a cross between a longwool ewe and a Dishley Leicester. Their progeny, Blue Cap, renowned for his large size, dark skin, and white, lustrous wool, determined the characteristics of the new breed, which was named Wensleydale in 1876. Two breed associations formed in 1890, but they merged in 1920. Recently, Wensleydales were introduced to North America, not as imported sheep but as “upgraded” from registered Cotswold, Leicester Longwool, or Lincoln ewes artificially inseminated by pure Wensleydale ram semen. By the fifth generation of the specified breeding program, the sheep are considered 96 percent blood. European flocks are found primarily in northern England, with smaller flocks in Holland and Denmark.

The lustrous wool is the most obvious quality of the Wensleydale, which is also notable for its size: mature British ewes average 248 pounds and rams, 300 pounds, according to the British breed association. Both rams and ewes are polled, or hornless, have a dark blue head and ears, and are described as having a “considerable presence” (www.wensleydale-sheep.com). Wensleydale rams are primarily used to cross with British hill breeds such as Swaledale, Rough Fell, and Blackface, producing, for example, the Masham, crossbred from a Wensleydale ram and a Swaledale or Dalesbred ewe. These crosses provide larger market lambs and more lustrous wool.

Spinners, of course, focus on the long, lustrous ringlets of wool. Staples average 8 to 12 inches and are rather fine for a long luster wool (50s to 44s or 30 to 36 microns). Fleeces are heavy, weighing from 7½ to 15 pounds. A key feature is the lack of kemp, a desirable quality passed on to crossbreeds from the Wensleydale. Most of the Wensleydales are white-wooled but the breed registers also have a section for colored-wool sheep. The British association does not allow breeding between sheep of the two sections. Commercially, the wool is used for upholstery and fabrics with a lustrous finish and is sometimes blended with mohair or shorter wools for added strength and luster.

Choosing and preparing Wensleydale

Wensleydale wool can be found as fleece, roving, and top and occasionally as millispun yarn. If you haven’t worked with very curly wools before, you should get a small sample before committing to a fleece. Since United States Wensleydales have developed from various backgrounds, get samples from several breeders to see if they have the quality you want. The wool characteristics can vary somewhat depending on the stage of the breeding program and the selection goals of the individual breeder.
The locks are lovely, but the curl makes them tricky to prepare. If you whack away at them with the flick carder, you will damage the wool and the card teeth. As with any wool of this type or mohair, it is best to wash the fiber gently (warm water, wool wash, and no agitation for about 5 minutes; rinse in warm water with a tablespoon or two of white vinegar, rinse again, and spread out to dry). Once the wool is dry, divide it into locks and gently open each lock by hand. Now you can safely handcard (with locks shorter than 5 inches), drumcard, or comb. You can also spin directly from the locks or even draw the locks into a fine roving and knit or crochet directly from them. Combing is especially recommended if you want to emphasize the luster. If you handcard, store the rolags in a long shallow box and spin the rolags very soon after carding. Although Wensleydale has some resilience, it is also slick, and rolags, especially those in the bottom layers, will “deflate” and not be easy to spin.

**Spinning Wensleydale**

Spinning Wensleydale presented a little dilemma for me. I love handcarding and light woolen yarns, but most Wensleydale is too long for that method. Woolen preparation and spinning also diminish the luster of Wensleydale, one of its best qualities. Combing and worsted spinning really make Wensleydale shine, but the yarn can be rather dense, particularly if you are working from top. Of course, how you spin depends on what type of yarn you want. For tapestry weaving, a worsted-spun yarn from top will be lovely and functional; for knitting and crochet, try a lighter yarn.

No matter what spinning method I used, I had to make adjustments for the Wensleydale because the fibers tended to slip past each other. That’s great if you need to thin out the fiber mass but not so good when there isn’t enough twist to hold the yarn together. To compensate, I opened the thumb and index finger closest to the orifice more frequently than usual to almost continually add twist as I drafted back. When drafting forward, I made sure there was enough twist before I fed the yarn onto the bobbin. If you want a bit more air in the worsted-style yarn, try opening up the drafting triangle more (see “Light and Smooth Yarns from Worsted Preparations,” *Spin-Off*, Summer 2010, pages 34–36).

**Resources**

Weldon and LeeAnne Richert, Red Oak Farm, PO Box 523, Cable WI 54821; redoakfarm26@cheqnet.net.

*Carol Huebscher Rhoades* of Madison, Wisconsin, has actually been to Wensleydale (Thank you, Carol and Peter Leonard!), has seen all the Wallace and Gromit films, and enjoys Wensleydale and cranberry cheese. She’d also like to thank Chris Roosien of Briar Rose Fibers for the generous donation of fiber.
Wensleydale Scarf
Plain or fancy to suit your mood
By Carol Huebscher Rhoades

As I was designing this scarf, I looked through my stash of Wensleydale fibers and had a difficult time choosing one beautiful fiber over the other. I finally chose the lovely blue top donated by Briar Rose Fibers because it would go with lots of things I wear. Spinning worsted from top would have made a heavy and scratchy yarn, so I handcarded the top into rolags for a softer, lighter, and fuzzier yarn. The staple length was 5½ inches, a little long for carding. To make drafting easier, I used a small amount of fiber per rolag and rolled each loosely. Because the fiber was already well prepared and to keep the color nuances intact, I carded minimally—two strokes, transfer to active carder, two strokes, back to passive carder, two final strokes, and the final transfer to form the rolag. Spinning traditional long draw was quick and easy from these rolags.

The next choice was the pattern. A simple brioche pattern knitted on large needles maximized the loft of the yarn. The woolen-spun Wensleydale Fiber:

Fiber: 4½ oz dyed Wensleydale top (generously donated by www.briarrosefibers.net).
Preparation: Handcarded into rolags.
Drafting method: Traditional long draw (woolen).
Wheel: Schacht Matchless.
Wheel system: Double drive.
Singles direction spun: Z.
Singles twists per inch: 8.
Singles wraps per inch: 21.
Twist angle: 15°.
Plied direction spun: S.
Plied twists per inch: 5.
Plied wraps per inch: 14.
Total yardage: 310.
Yards per pound: 1,102.
Yarn classification: Worsted.
Yardage used: 300.

Needles: U.S. size 10 for scarf; U.S. size 3 for lace edging; long double-pointed U.S. sizes 8 and 9 for twisted edging.

Crochet hook (for flower trim): U.S. size D (3 mm).

Notions: 6 buttons, 5⁄8” diameter.

Materials: Locking-ring st markers.

For Morning Glories Edgings, you’ll need about 6 yd yellow, 8 yd blue, 15 yd pink, and 30 yd green. For the lace Trellis Edgings, you’ll need 70 yd fingering-weight. For the Latvian Twist Edgings, you’ll need about 30 yd yellow (color A) and 10 yd each green (color B) and rust (color C).

Gauge: 5½ sts and 5 rows in brioche = 1”.

Finished size: 5½” wide x 97” long.
had more bounce than seemed possible from the lustrous locks, and that bulk combined with the stitch pattern to make a very cushy and soft-enough fabric. I like scarves I can wrap twice around my neck, so this one is long.

**Scarf**

Brioche stitch (multiple of 3 sts)

*All rows:* *Sl 1 purlwise with yarn in front, yo, k2tog; rep from * across.

After the first row, the k2tog joins the yarnover and slipped st of previous row.

Cast on 30 sts and work in pattern until scarf is desired length or you have 1½ to 2 yd of yarn left. BO loosely with elastic bind-off: K2, *insert left needle knitwise into the 2 sts on right needle and k2tog tbl, k1, and rep from * across. Weave in tails neatly on WS.

Gently handwash scarf in warm water and wool-safe soap, roll in towel to absorb excess water, and lay flat to dry. Sew on 3 buttons at each end about ½” up from bottom edge: 1 at center and the other 2 each about ¾” from side.

**Morning Glory Edging**

At SOAR 2009, I cruised by the Blue Moon Fiber Arts booth several times but couldn’t decide what to buy. On the last day, I stopped again and found several bags of dyed Wensleydale locks that had just been put out. What luck! Afterward I couldn’t make up my mind about how to process and spin them until I saw the Morning Glory motif in Crochet Stitch Motifs (see Resources). I combed the locks with three passes on handheld two-row St. Blaise combs and drew off the rovings directly (no diz). For relatively smooth but not too dense yarn, I spun short backward draw from a wide drafting triangle. Occasionally I pulled forward to even out the yarn or smooth an extra fuzzy spot. I treadled slowly to avoid excess twist and kept my hands 5 to 6 inches apart so I could draft the almost-spun fibers a bit more if the yarn got too thick. Because it works better for my crochet method (yarn thrown over hook with left hand), I spun the singles S at 9:1 and plied Z at 11:1 on my Schacht Matchless. The two-ply sport-weight yarn is 96 yards per ounce or 1,536 yards per pound and 18 to 20 wraps per inch.

**Morning Glory Motif**

Adapted from *The Harmony Guides: Crochet Stitch Motifs: 250 Stitches to Crochet.* (Loveland, Colorado: Interweave 2008.)

With U.S. size D hook and yellow, ch 4 and join into a ring with sl st.

**Rnd 1 (with yellow):** Ch 3 and then work 11 dc around ring (covering beg tail at the same time). Join to top of beg ch with sl st (= 12 dc around).

**Rnd 2 (with blue):** Ch 1, 2 sc into same place as last sl st, 2 sc through back loops in each dc around, end with sl st to first sc (24 sc).

**Rnd 3 (with pink; all sc through both loops):** Ch 1, 1 sc into same place as last sl st, *ch 10, sl st into 8th ch from hook (forming an 8-ch loop), ch 2, skip next 2 sc, 1 sc in next sc; rep from * 7 more times, joining last ch with sl st to first sc.

**Rnd 4 (with pink):** Sl st into each of first 2 ch, [1 sc, 5 dc, 1 sc] around first ch-8 loop, *[1 sc, 5 dc, 1 sc] around next ch-8 loop; rep from * 6 more times, sl st to first sc.

Cut yarn and weave in tails neatly on WS.

Make 6 flowers following instructions and steam-press them before joining. Make trellis: With green and U.S. size D hook, ch 51, turn, and sc into 2nd ch from hook. Sc into next 4 ch, ch 2,
Skip 2 ch (= buttonhole), place locking ring marker (pm) around chain loop, sc 17, ch 2, skip 2 ch, pm around chain loop, sc 17, ch 2, skip 2 ch, pm around chain loop, and end sc 5. Feel free to adjust size and spacing of buttonholes as necessary, making sure that buttonholes will be fairly tight around buttons so the edging won’t accidentally fall off. The markers will help you spot the chain loops.

Turn with ch 1 (= 1 sc) and sc across, working 2 sc into each ch-2 loop = 50 sc. Turn with ch 1 and sc across, joining flowers at the same time: Sc 4, *hook through next sc on trellis and center dc of a petal (WS of petal faces you) and then complete sc, sc 5, sc through center dc of next petal (flower 1 attached); sc 10, attach petal, sc 5, attach next petal (flower 2 attached); sc 10, attach petal, sc 5, attach next petal (flower 3 attached), sc 5; turn.

Last row: Make tendrils as desired. I began the row with ch 10, turn, sc into 2nd ch from hook, and sc into next 8 ch, sc a few stitches along edging, ch and single crochet back, and sc along edging. I used 10 to 20 ch for the tendrils, varying the length as well as the number of sc between tendrils. Cut yarn and thread through last loop. Weave in all ends neatly on WS. Make the other border the same way. Steam-press edgings.

**Trellis Lace Edging**

I bought these washed locks from Red Oak Farm at the 2010 Wisconsin Sheep and Wool Festival. The wool was silky and wavy, but the cut ends were somewhat matted, and I had to tug a little to separate the locks. I opened each lock slightly by hand and then carefully combed through the lock with a fluff carder. To avoid losing too much fiber, I held the lock against a piece of card stock and gently brushed through it, starting with the top third, then the bottom third, and then the center. For the lace yarn, I spun short forward draw. I began spinning from the tip end of a lock at a 9:1 ratio, but the fibers slid past each other too much. I changed to an 11:1 ratio and drew each lock into a roving before spinning. That made all the difference. The fingering-weight yarn, plied at 11:1, has 2,272 yards per pound and 28 wraps per inch.

**Trellis Border**

From “Weldon’s Practical Knitter, Sixth Series” in Volume 2 of Weldon’s Practical Needlework (Loveland, Colorado: Interweave, 2000). I modified the edge stitches and rewrote the pattern in contemporary United States knitting terms.

With U.S. size 3 needles, CO 20. Purl 1 row.

**Row 1 (RS):** Sl 1 kwise, k2, yo, k2tog, yo, k2, (sl 1-k2tog-psso) 2 times, yo, k1, yo, (k2tog, yo) 2 times, k2.

**Row 2:** K6, p9, k1, yo, k2tog, p1.

**Row 3:** Sl 1 kwise, k2, yo, k2tog, yo, k1, sl 1-k2tog-psso, k1, yo, k3, yo, (k2tog, yo) 2 times, k2.

**Row 4:** K6, p10, k1, yo, k2tog, p1.

**Row 5:** Sl 1 kwise, k2, yo, k2tog, yo, k1, sl 1-k2tog-psso, yo, k5, yo, (k2tog, yo) 2 times, k2.

**Row 6:** K6, p11, k1, yo, k2tog, p1.

**Row 7:** Sl 1 kwise, k2, yo, k2tog, yo, k2tog, k1, yo, k7, yo, (k2tog, yo) 2 times, k2.

**Row 8:** K6, p13, k1, yo, k2tog, p1.

**Row 9:** Sl 1 kwise, k2, yo, k2tog, yo, k1, yo, k4, sl 1-k2tog-psso, k4, yo, (k2tog, yo) 2 times, k2.

**Row 10:** K7, p13, k1, yo, k2tog, p1.

**Row 11:** Sl 1 kwise, k2, yo, k2tog, yo, k3, yo, k3, sl 1-k2tog-psso, k3, (yo, k2tog) 3 times, k1.

**Row 12:** K7, p13, k1, yo, k2tog, p1.

**Row 13:** Sl 1 kwise, k2, yo, k2tog, yo, k5, yo, k2, sl 1-k2tog-psso, k2, (yo, k2tog) 3 times, k1.

**Row 14:** K7, p13, k1, yo, k2tog, p1.

**Row 15:** Sl 1 kwise, k2, yo, k2tog, yo, k2, sl 1-k2tog-psso, k2, yo, k1, sl 1-k2tog-psso, k1, (yo, k2tog), 3 times, k1.

**Row 16:** K7, p11, k1, yo, k2tog, p1.

**Row 17:** Sl 1 kwise, k2, yo, k2tog, yo, k2, sl 1-k2tog-psso, k2, yo, sl 1-k2tog-psso, (yo, k2tog) 3 times, k1.

**Row 18:** K7, p9, k1, yo, k2tog, p1.
For scarf edging, work Trellis border pattern a total of 5 times, ending with Row 17 on last repeat. With elastic bind-off (see scarf instructions; p2tog when joining purl sts), BO knitwise over 7 sts, purlwise over 9 sts, and knitwise over last 4 sts. Do not cut yarn. With WS facing, pick up and purl 45 sts through chain edge loops = 46 sts. Next, work buttonhole row: K5, yo, k2tog, k15, yo, k2tog, k15, yo, k5. On next (WS) row, knit yarnovers through back loops to tighten. BO with elastic bind-off on RS.

Make another Trellis border the same way. Dampen both pieces and pin out to block. I used about 70 yards of yarn for my edgings.

Latvian Twisted Edging

I had planned to spin a wild encased yarn (locks of Wensleydale encased within two fine singles) for the final sample and was disappointed that it was too wild to ply on any of my wheels (the small sample at the top of the photo here was the result of plying and manually winding on—not very efficient). Plan B was this fuzzy singles yarn. I handcarded batts on my Louet wool cards and spun each from the center of the short side so that the ends of the locks could stick out. I treadled slowly on the Louet S90 at a 6:1 ratio, drafting as for woolen spinning and adding just enough twist to hold the yarn together. To make this yarn successfully, you have to draft very slightly and let the twist wrap into the fuzzy mass between your hands. The more you draft and pull back, the less fuzzy the yarn will be. The fiber was dyed by Blue Moon and was rather sticky, a plus for this particular style of drafting, so I washed it in very hot water only after it was spun. I spun 46 yards of singles. The washed yarn weighed 0.75 ounces or 61 yards per ounce (976 yards per pound) for a worsted-weight yarn at 12 wraps per inch.

Wensleydale is a lovely fiber to play with. However, it is fuzzy no matter how well you try to smooth it, so be careful when you work with it. It is not easy to rip back, especially for errors in crochet. You might want to size a warp yarn or space Wensleydale yarns in a wide reed or alternate them with smoother yarns in between if you use the yarns in your weaving.

Latvian Twisted Border

This edging is worked with the three colors of fuzzy singles yarns described in Sample 3 of the Fiber Basics article (see page 86). With long U.S. size 9 dpn and color A (yellow), CO 30 sts and, on WS, knit 1 row (do not cut yarn). Change to B (green) and knit 2 rows; cut B. Change to C (rust) and knit 2 rows; cut C. With A (bring strand up side of knitting), work twist row.

Twist row: K3, twist, *k6, twist; repeat from * across and end k3. To twist: Hold the working yarn in the right hand; turn the left needle by moving it back away from you, down (under cast-on row), and then forward.

With A, U.S. 8 needles, and beginning on WS, work 5 rows in stockinette, slipping first st of each row knitwise and purling last st. Set piece aside.

Make another Latvian twisted edging as for first, but cut A after first knit row and work twist-ed row with C. After completing twisted row, join the two pieces. Hold the longer piece behind (with RS facing you) and shorter piece in front (RS also facing you) and knit the two sets of sts together. With A, purl 1 row and then work buttonholes: K3, BO 1, k9, BO 1, k10, BO 1, k2. On the next row, BO knitwise, do a cable CO (bring yarn as if to knit between first 2 sts of left needle) at each buttonhole gap, immediately binding off the new st. Weave in all tails neatly on WS.
With their brightly colored spotted fleece, multiple horns, and expressive personalities, Jacob sheep have attracted people’s attention across the ages. Evidence of spotted, horned sheep shows up in an Egyptian wall painting from 1800 B.C., a Scythian gold necklace from 1000 B.C., and Sicilian pottery from 600 B.C., according to Fred and Joan Horak, Jacob breeders who’ve done extensive research into the origins of the breed. Drawings from more than 3,000 years ago, in what is now Syria, show a four-horned spotted sheep jumping high into the air. Images throughout history trace the movement of these sheep through North Africa, Sicily, Spain, and then on to England, about 400 years ago.

Many people like to link the origins of this breed of sheep to the Old Testament story of Jacob (Genesis 30), who was given all the spotted sheep and goats from his father-in-law’s flock as payment for shepherding for fourteen years. Jacob’s movement with his spotted flock was traced across North Africa in subsequent verses of the Old Testament.

Once called “Park sheep” in England, the small sheep were kept to grace the lawns and forests of estates. It is not known exactly when they began to be called Jacob sheep, but according to the Horaks, an account dated June 1834, listing the holdings of Earl Fitzwilliam, Wentworth, Yorkshire, includes the entry: “Jacob sheep — 11” among the 777 sheep and hogs inventoried.

By the end of the First World War, most of the flocks of spotted, multihorned sheep in the United Kingdom had disappeared, and by the mid-1900s the country had few Jacob sheep. In 1969, led by the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Araminta Alt- ington, British Jacob sheep owners formed the Jacob Sheep Society with ninety-six members and 2,700 registered sheep to restore this rare breed. The Society now has more than 850 members, and around 2,000 sheep are registered each year in the flock book.

The British Jacobs have been selected, or bred up, to compete with commercial breeds for wool and meat, according to Marilyn McBirney, who works with Jacobs at the Pueblo Zoo, in Pueblo, Colorado, and has spent many years developing her own flock. Marilyn points out that British
Jacobs are bigger and more consistent in fleece and conformation than American Jacobs.

American Jacobs are a small primitive sheep, with ewes ranging from about 80 to 120 pounds and rams 120 to 180 pounds. Typical Jacob wool is a medium grade with a Bradford count of 44s to 56s. Standard markings include a fleece that is 35 percent black and 65 percent white, a "badger face," and black patches on the legs. The fleece is open and contains little lanolin. Jacob sheep are the only polycerate (multihorned) breed of sheep that are not double-coated. The four- to six-inch staple length makes it easy to spin.

American Jacob is also known for having a variable fleece. The breed standard for Jacob fleece is the widest of any breed, allowing for a Bradford count of 44 to 56, and a micron count of 34.40–36.19 (44s) to 26.40–27.84 (56s). This variability in wool allows for a great deal of versatility. Many animals are kept simply to preserve the breed. Some individual sheep show a lot of kemp (coarse, brittle hair) throughout the fleece, some have kemp only in the britch (the hind leg area), and others are kemp free.

All Jacob sheep in the United States are descended from stock believed to have been imported in 1954, 1976, and 1977; however, the actual dates and sources with supporting documentation are still being researched. Zoos made most of the early importations from Britain. As the zoo population increased, some Jacobs were sold to Charlie Hume, Dr. Fell, Bill Reynolds, and Fred Meyer, according to the Horaks’ research. Because there was no Jacob sheep registry in the United States at that time, these sheep were never registered. They moved from zoos to small farms that raised exotic stock.

“When I worked at the Houston Children’s Zoo in the early 1980s,” says Marilyn, “they were just starting a flock.”

There are now three registries in the United States: the Jacob Sheep Conservancy, the Jacob Sheep Breeders Association, and the American Jacob Sheep Registry. The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy lists the American Jacob as a rare breed because there are less than 1,000 registered annually in the country.

Teresa and Alan Stoa raise Jacob sheep on their Rancho Piñon, high in the mountains of New Mexico. They wanted sheep that would survive well on their land and help them care for it, and they’ve found Jacobs to be a resilient and low maintenance breed.

1. American Jacob sheep are a small primitive sheep. This lamb belongs to Jeanette Larson’s flock on the Laffing Horse Farm in La Junta, Colorado.
2. Stewart’s fleece is typical of a Jacob sheep.
3. Jacob sheep are the only polycerate (multihorned) breed of sheep that are not double-coated. Their fleece is known for being easy to spin because it contains little lanolin and is very open.
“I like the Jacob sheep because they are hardy,” says Teresa Stoa. “We picked them because of their endangered status. They’re unique and they needed rescuing. The primary importance to me is continuing the breed.”

Every Jacob sheep breeder mentions personality when they discuss their flocks. “I really like them for the spotting that allows you to identify individual sheep from a distance,” says Marilyn Mc Birney. “I like to watch their behavior and interaction, and being able to identify individuals helps me do so. The Jacob seem to have more personality than other sheep, perhaps in part because you can tell them apart so easily.”

“Our sheep lamb easily and twin a lot,” says Teresa. “They don’t need much hoof care, but they do need horn maintenance. The horns can be a pain; they get caught in feeders and fences. But they are a real help for handling.”

While some breeders work at preserving the primitive traits of Jacob sheep, others practice selective breeding.

“I like the variety of breed characteristics,” says Marilyn. “You can breed for horns, spotting pattern, fleece, conformation, or traits such as easy lambing.”

With the growth of the handspinning niche market, some Jacob sheep breeders are beginning to combine the idea of preserving a rare breed with focusing on the potential of marketing the wool.

The Stoas market Jacob fleeces, felting batts, spun yarns, and handwoven blankets and scarves.

“I love to needle felt, and Jacob fleece felts so well,” says Teresa. “It’s so easy to spin, and weaving it is really nice. There are so many textures in Jacob fleece.”

Teresa found that she had to educate people about Jacob fleece when she first started selling her animal’s fiber, the market for her wool is mostly handspinners who want naturally colored wool.

“It spins well in the grease,” Teresa observes. “And with Jacob fleece you really can spin it in the grease, unlike other fleeces. It’s not greasy, but because it is an open fleece, it can get really dirty.”

Mickey Ramirez of the Broken O Ranch in Fort Collins, Colorado, is another person who loves to felt Jacob wool. Mickey makes hats—spotted ones—from ball caps to top

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<td>Rancho Piñon</td>
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<td>Alan and Teresa Stoa</td>
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<td>Swallow Lane Farm and Fiberworks</td>
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<td>Cathie and Mark Williams</td>
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hats, and anything in between. She layers the fleece as she felts it, often basing the hat’s pattern on the pattern of the coat of the sheep that the wool came from.

“When I felt, I notice differences. Some sheep have finer wool than others,” says Mickey. “I use all of it to see how it turns out. One ram has a fine fleece. One ram has a short staple. Bernie has a beautiful crimp. Baabs has a straighter shorter staple. I want to try them all. I’ve been told there is no bad fleece. Each has a purpose, be it a rug or a sweater or a fine pair of mittens.”

Many spinners and breeders focus on the natural colors available in Jacob fleeces. The white fleeces range from true white through shades of cream, while the dark fleeces can be anything from lilac gray to chocolate brown to true black. Teresa loves the way the Jacob wool dyes.

“The gray overdyes well in roving, that is the best way to dye it,” she explains. “It does dye nicely with both synthetic and natural dyes.”

Jacobs provide a versatile fleece that is easy and fun to spin; it is ripe with the possibility of unique creations.

Jeanette Larson of La Junta, Colorado, and her life-partner Shawn Hoefer share their Laffing Horse Farm with Jacob sheep, Angora goats, guardian llamas, and French Angora rabbits, as well as teenagers and other animals who don’t produce fiber.

Resources
Research by Fred and Joan Horak of St. Jude’s Farm posted on the Jacob Sheep Conservancy website, www.jacobsheepconservancy.org.
American Jacob Crocheted Slippers
Multicolored fun and warmth

By Jeanette Larson

Shearing time on the Laffing Horse Farm is a lot like Christmas. As we shear each Jacob sheep, it is like unwrapping a gift. The fleece rolls back in front of the shears and a new world of possibilities unfolds. The variety of colors, length, and texture is almost endless.

Our flock is a pretty typically sized Jacob flock. With just Shawn and me working on the flock, our preference for gentle handling, and using hand shears, it takes us one whole weekend to shear our thirteen ewes, three rams, and two wethers. While there are flocks of 100 and more Jacob sheep in the United States, most Jacobs are kept in small family flocks like ours. Jacobs are listed as a rare breed with the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, which reports fewer than 5,000 registered American Jacobs.

Jeanette Larson spun a thick yarn to make warm slippers from the multicolored fleece of her Jacob flock.
Slippers

My current passion for using the fleece is crocheted slippers, and I love the variety of colors and patterns I can work up from only one fleece.

Use this pattern and combine the colors from the fleece you have in any way to make a design that is uniquely yours. Begin by separating the colors before you wash the fleece.

Washing Jacob fleece

Jacob fleece is easy to wash. Since I live in a 114-year-old farm house, I’m not worried about making a mucky mess out of my bathroom. I skirt the fleece well and then pick out as much vegetable matter as possible. I like distinct colors, so I usually divide the fleece by color. I wash one color at a time, normally about a pound or two, but no more, of raw fleece.

I run a tub of hot water (140 degrees Fahrenheit) about half full and drop the fleece over the top of the water. I gently push it under the water and let it rise, then submerge it a few times. Then I drain the tub and gather the fleece in a pile at the end of the tub. This is the first rinse.

Next, I fill the tub with hot water again, add about ¼ cup of our homemade wool wash (mild laundry soap like Drift works well, too), and swish the soap around to let it dissolve. I put the fleece back in the tub, spread it out, and push it up and down in the water a few times, but I do not swirl the fleece around or agitate it. I let it soak for at least half an hour.

Then I drain the tub again, gather the fleece up, put it back on a towel and refill the tub with fresh, clean water. I usually use warm water for this step. As before, I drop the fleece in, push it up and down, and then drain. I repeat this rinse step one more time for most fleeces. It is a rare Jacob fleece that needs more than two rinses because it is such an open fleece, but an exceptionally dirty fleece may need two soap washes.

Carding and spinning

After the fleece is dry, card it into rolags, blending colors as you see new combinations. I think this is a great project for beginners. I just learned to spin on a wheel after years of spinning on a handspindle, so my wheel-spun yarn is a little inconsistent. I spun the yarn for this project at a 6:1 ratio and plied it at 5:1 on my Babe Fiber Starter.

I used my friend’s Fricke drumcarder to make drumcarded rolags. The drumcarder makes nice batts—we just fluff the washed locks by hand, and feed it in. One of us feeds the locks while the other turns the crank. When there is enough fiber on the drum for a batt, I doff it off and roll it into a rolag for spinning. I used the short-draw method to spin a soft, heavy yarn so the slippers would be durable and warm. Jacob fleece is really all-purpose: I’ve used it for everything from hats for friends’ new babies to the rugs on my kitchen floor.

Truth be known, I’m usually in such a hurry to get started on a project, that I crochet right off my spindle or bobbin. However, when I do finish Jacob yarns, I wind them off the bobbin onto my two-yard skein winder and tie the skeins in four places. I then soak the skeins in hot water for a few minutes and stretch each one between two bungee cords on a metal panel on the front porch until they are dry.

Even with fibers from the same fleece, each color and blend will have a slightly different feel and draw as it is spun. I usually spin all of one color and ply it before I go on to the next. I like to keep a ball of yarn of the first color next to my wheel as a visual reminder of the weight of yarn to spin.

Spin two fairly heavy singles with an S-twist (clockwise), and then ply them Z-twist (counterclockwise) to get a bulky yarn that measures 5–7 wraps per inch. I like to ply two colors for a striped yarn. Your slippers can be all one color, or of varied colors for a striped effect.

I like to make the slipper soles with a coarse, dark color, work the tops with a softer yarn, and finish with the softest yarn around the cuff.

Sole

Row 1: Ch 16; turn; working in top loops of chain only, sc in third ch from hook and in each ch to beginning. 5 sc in first ch, then sc back along
the bottom of each ch to end, finishing with
3 sc in fourteenth chain; slip-stitch to turned
chain (34 sts).
Row 2: Ch 2; turn ; sc in next 14 sc, working
through both loops. Increase around the end by
working 2 sc in next sc, 1 sc in next sc, and then
2 sc in next sc. Sc in each of the 14 sc down the
side and repeat the increase on the end. Sl st in
chain; ch 2; turn work.
Rows 3–5: Continue working as for Row 2, increas-
ing around the end as before, until the sole of
the slipper is the size you need it to be.

Body of slipper
Row 6: After the ch 2, do not turn. Work the sc for
this row in the bottom loop of single crochets
on Row 5—the loop inside the sole, not the one
on top. Do not increase as you go around the
ends. Sc one sc in the bottom loop of each row 5
single crochet. Sl st to the ch 2. Turn.
You are now working up the body of the slipper
which is a good place to switch colors if you want
to make stripes.
To switch colors, simply pull a loop of the new
color through the loop in your work and ch 2 with
the new color. If you are going to do stripes, leave
the old color attached. If you are done with that
color, cut your yarn about 3 inches from the slip-
per and weave in the end under the next several
single crochet.
Row 7: Sc in both loops of the single crochets on
row 6, all the way around the slipper. Sl st into
the ch 2 beginning. For stripes, add in the new
color yarn here by pulling in a loop from the
new yarn, dropping the old yarn, and chaining
2 with the new yarn.
Rows 8–13: Repeat row 7, alternating yarns if you
are making stripes.
Row 14: Ch 2, sc in each sc of previous row to
front point of slipper. You can count to the
center or just mark it by folding the slipper and
running a marker through the center front.
When you reach the center front, join the two
sides together with a sl st between the tops of
the row 13 single crochet on one side and the
row 14 single crochet on the other side. Sl st 18
in the same manner to close the slipper from
toe to instep of the slipper. Then continue to sc
in each sc around back to chain. Sl st in ch; ch
2; turn work.

Cuff
Rows 15–16 (or until cuff is desired length): Sc in
both loops of each sc of previous row, sl st in
beg ch, ch 2, turn.
Row 17: At center back: 6 tr into one sc, work-
ing through both loops, ch 1, skip 1 sc, sc, ch
1, skip 1 sc, 6 tr in next sc, ch 1, skip 1 sc. Sc
around to last 5 sts; ch 1, skip 1 st, 6 tr in next
sc; ch 1, skip 1 sc, sc, ch 1, skip 1 sc and join
with slip st to first tr.
Pull remaining yarns through chain, clip, and
weave in ends. Work second slipper as for first.
You can embellish the slippers with a bell on the
toe points, or add bells, beads, or fringes around
the cuff. Wash as you would any wool product.

Jeanette Larson of La Junta, Colorado, and her life-partner
Shawn Hoefer share their Laffing Horse Farm with Jacob
sheep, Angora goats, guardian llamas, and French Angora
rabbits, as well as teenagers and other animals who don’t
produce fiber.
Before the opening of the Estes Park Wool Market, the vendors open their booths to class participants for a sneak preview. On the shelves of Gleason’s Fine Woolies, brightly colored batts and balls of natural-colored roving sit atop a few dozen freshly shorn fleeces ranging in color from white to silver, brown, gray, and black. A few minutes after the doors open, a black fleece has already been claimed by an eager handspinner.

Standing in the tidy, inviting booth, Joanna Gleason looks calm and unhurried. Bringing great fleeces to handspinners, though, is a round-the-clock effort that has taken years of hard work, breeding, and international connections. Read on to learn what it takes to get great fleeces ready for spinners.
Well-Dressed Sheep

On a windy day in March, Joanna and Keith Gleason stand among their Bond and Bond-Corriedale-cross sheep. In the month or two before shearing, the sheep’s fleeces are long, stretching the white cloth coats tight across their backs. Carrying an armful of clean white coats in extra-large sizes, Joanna catches a few of the ewes and gently lifts their back legs in turn to free the coats. Before putting on a fresh coat, she parts each fleece on the back and flank to look at the staple length, crimp, and density.

Joanna makes and repairs the coats herself, and they must be changed several times a year as the fleece goes from freshly shorn to four to five inches. Changing the coat is a two-person job, as the sheep don’t like to stand still. Leaving a sheep in a coat that’s grown too snug can cause the tips of the fleece to rub together and become felted, ruining it for spinning.

Joanna Gleason offers directions for making sheep coats on the Gleason’s Fine Woolies website.

Though this year-round rotation isn’t easy, it is an important step in producing an excellent handspinning fleece. Hay and grass from the sheep’s diet, dust picked up from lying on the ground or windstorms, and other debris can take a fleece from prime to unusable, and the coats help keep the fleece as clean as possible.

In the spring, the sheep’s coats are snug and their faces are surrounded by a wooly mane. Photo by Joanna Gleason.
Breeding Bonds

Bond sheep are uncommon in the United States, and creating their Bond and Bond-cross flock was a long international effort for the Gleasons. After years of breeding “old-style” Corriedales—small-framed, with dense fleeces and long staples—the Gleasons decided to bring new genes into their flock. Bond sheep were developed in Australia and share some of the same traits as Corriedales; they arose from a cross between Merino and Lincoln sheep, like Corriedales, and are also considered a dual-purpose breed. As a handspinner, Joanna decided that fine, long-stapled Bonds would be a welcome addition to the American sheep repertoire. She began a correspondence with Cyril Lieschke of New South Wales, Australia, a respected breeder of colored Corriedale, Merino, and Bond sheep who had bred for fine, dense fleeces. At the time, there were no Bond sheep in the United States, and so the Gleasons set about importing two ewes and two rams, all warm chocolate brown in color. The young sheep spent three months in quarantine and transit until they finally reached their new high-country home. The Bond sheep currently in the United States are descended from the four original Australian transports, and the Gleasons have established a registry of Bonds in the United States.

The four original Bonds were all moorit, or natural brown. Joanna explains that the brown color is the least common and most recessive; besides producing beautiful fleeces, the moorit coloring is an indication of the degree to which the Bond genetics are present in a particular animal. A majority of the Gleasons’ flock is now some shade of moorit.

Despite the huge effort required to establish Bond genetics, the Gleasons are pleased with the flock they have built. Bond brings fineness to the fleece that can be comparable to Merino, but Joanna admits that part of the decision was a question of personal preference. “When you have to get up at two in the morning and look at the sheep to check on lambing progress,” she comments, “you have to like how they look!”
Dinner Is Served

“If you’re going to get wool,” Joanna says, “you need to talk about feed. Next to genetics, food is the most important factor.” Examining the hay in the barn, she points out the high proportion of soft leafy grass and low amount of hard dry stalks. The Gleasons try to buy the most desirable brome hay, which comes from the second cutting and has more nutritional value.

Hay is crucial because the high altitude and low rainfall in Lyons, Colorado, means that the pastures can’t be counted on to produce enough fresh grass to sustain the flock. Looking out over the tan fields of early spring, Joanna says, “In the summer, if we’re lucky and it rains, the sheep can just graze, but in Lyons that’s generally not enough. We feed year-round. There’s never a time when we’re not feeding.” During years of drought, the challenge is especially acute.

In the Australian climate from which the Bonds were imported, sheep can graze on pasture year-round, with no need for hay or other supplemental feeding. The paddocks where the sheep graze don’t freeze—“sheep heaven,” Joanna remarks. In wetter climates, there tends to be a higher risk of parasites; in Colorado, the high elevation, cold winters, and dry weather that limit the ready food supply also limit parasites.

During years when high-quality hay isn’t available, the shepherds have to conserve and make adjustments to their plans. “You have to be very careful about changes in diet,” Joanna explains. “Garbage in, garbage out. The key is, if you don’t feed them, they don’t grow wool.” The quality of the food can affect the staple length of a fleece by up to one inch in a year. When ewes are pregnant—the coldest part of the year—their hay is supplemented with alfalfa pellets. The Gleasons sometimes limit breeding during years when the feed supply isn’t desirable or adequate.

With adequate rainfall, there can be enough grass to sustain the sheep on pasture. The Rocky Mountain setting of Gleason’s Fine Woolies offers wonderful views but scarce grass. Photos by Joanna Gleason.
New Beginnings: Lambs and Shearing

My next visit to Gleason’s Fine Woolies falls in May, when the sheep have traded their extra-large coats for smaller sizes after the spring shearing. In among the ewes, a dozen small moorit lambs gambol and bounce, racing away to play and back to their mothers for a snack. Only a few ewes have been bred this year; the aim is not to increase the flock but to maintain and improve it. Lambing is one of the most intense periods of the calendar; after careful breeding, feeding, and other year-round care, the future fleeces (and genetics) of the farm depend on complication-free deliveries of healthy lambs. It’s a time of sleepless nights for sheep and shepherd.

Although the days can still be chilly, the sheep are sheared before lambing in March. Some of the fleeces have already been sent to handspinners who have purchased as soon as shearing was finished, and a few have been sent away to be commercially processed into roving. Most of them sit carefully wrapped in plastic bags and stacked in locking tubs.

The final steps before a fleece reaches a spinner’s hands begin on shearing day and finish after lambing, when the weather is warm enough to work outdoors. After all the efforts to grow wool, the last step—skirting—involves deciding what to keep and what to throw away. The least desirable parts of the fleece are left on the floor after shearing, but each fleece sold for spinning must be carefully gone over by hand to remove any parts that are cotted, stained, or from a part of the animal that produces less than prime wool. After only the best parts of the fleece remain, Joanna Gleason rolls it up and stores it safely. When a spinner puts her hand (or her nose) into the fleece, the softness and crimp will be there waiting to be spun into a wonderful yarn.

Resources:
Gleason’s Fine Woolies

In an undignified but painless process, this ram is getting his spring haircut. Photo by Joanna Gleason.

These lambs play together but run back to their mothers for reassurance and milk. Photo by Anne Merrow.
In her original pattern for *Tops with a Twist*, a collection of handspun hats selected in a 1999 *Spin-Off* contest, Susan Z. Douglas said, “This hat reminds me of white chocolate candy.” With a cable that travels around the brim like piped chocolate on a truffle, the hat was indeed “good enough to eat.” With a few modifications, the pattern is shown here as an almond hued confection.

A soft, fine Bond fleece purchased from Joanna Gleason at the Estes Park Wool Market came back from processing in lovely pin-drafted coils perfect for spinning with a long backward draw. The resulting woolen-spun singles were plied into an airy three-ply, then slightly fulled for structure and a soft surface. The resulting hat is warm and light.

A double-wave cable encircles the hat, and a reverse stockinette brim rolls up for a casual finish. *Photo by Joe Coca.*
Stitch Guide

2/2 Left Cross (2/2 LC) Slip 2 sts to cable needle (cn) and hold in front, k2, k2 from cn.

2/2 Left Purl Cross (2/2 LPC) Slip 2 sts to cn and hold in front, p2, k2 from cn.

2/2 Right Purl Cross (2/2 RPC) Slip 2 sts to cn and hold in back, k2, p2 from cn.

2/2 Right Rib Cross (2/2 RRC) Slip 2 sts to cn and hold in back, k2, [p1, k1] from cn.

Notes
Because the short-rows are worked garter stitch, there is no need to work the wraps together with their wrapped stitches. Simply knit each wrapped stitch as you come to it.

Finished size: 21¼” (54 cm) head circumference and 8” (20.5 cm) tall with lower edge allowed to roll; to fit an adult.

Yarn: Aran-weight 3-ply yarn, about 155 yd (142 m).

Fiber: Bond fleece from Gleason’s Fine Woolies Ranch, carded and pin-drafted by Morro Fleece Works.

Spinning: Singles: Spun Z (right or clockwise) using long backward draw (woolen).

Plying: S (left or counterclockwise), 3 plies.

Yarn measurements: Yards per pound: 800. Wraps per inch: 10. Suggested substitution: Lion Brand Lion Wool Solids (100% wool; 158 yd [144 m]/3 oz).

Needles: Size 8 (5 mm). Adjust needle size if necessary to obtain the correct gauge.

Notions: Crochet hook size I/9 (5.5 mm); waste yarn; cable needle (cn), tapestry needle.

Gauge: 14 sts and 36 rows = 4” (10 cm) in garter st; 24 rows from cable side of chart measure 4¼” (11 cm) high.

Cables and Short-rows

Project Notes

k on RS; p on WS
k on WS; p on RS
wrap and turn (w&t; see Glossary)
st left unworked during short-rows
2/2 LC (see Stitch Guide for all cables)
2/2 LPC
2/2 RPC
2/2 RRC
Hat
With crochet hook and waste yarn, use the crochet provisional method (see Glossary) to cast on 38 stitches. Change to main yarn, and work your choice of charted or row by row instructions as you prefer.

Charted version
Beginning with WS Row 1, work Rows 1–24 of Cables and Short-rows chart 4 times, then work Rows 1–23 once more, ending with WS Row 23—95 chart rows completed; piece measures about 21" (53.5 cm) from cast-on.

Row by row version
Row 1: (WS) K6, [p1, k1] 4 times, p2, k4, p2, k12, w&t.
Row 2: (RS) K16, p4, k2, [p1, k1] 4 times, p6.
Row 3: K6, [p1, k1] 4 times, p2, k4, p2, k12, w&t.
Row 4: K12, 2/2 LC, p2, 2/2 LPC, [p1, k1] 3 times, p6.
Row 5: K6, [p1, k1] 3 times, p2, k4, p2, k12, w&t.
Row 6: K12, 2/2 LC, p2, 2/2 LPC, [p1, k1] 2 times, p6.
Row 7: K6, [p1, k1] 2 times, p2, k4, p2, k12, w&t.
Row 8: K12, 2/2 LC, p2, 2/2 LPC, p1, k1, p6.
Row 9: K6, p1, k1, p2, k4, p2, k12, w&t.
Row 10: K14, p4, k2, p1, k1, p6.
Row 11: K6, p1, k1, p2, k4, p2, k10, w&t.
Row 12: K12, p4, k2, p1, k1, p6.
Row 13: K6, p1, k1, p2, k4, p2, k11, w&t.
Row 14: K13, p4, k2, p1, k1, p6.
Row 15: K6, p1, k1, p2, k4, p2, k13, w&t.
Row 16: K11, 2/2 RPC, p2, 2/2 RRC, p1, k1, p6.
Row 17: K6, [p1, k1] 2 times, p2, k4, p2, k13, w&t.
Row 18: K11, 2/2 RPC, p2, 2/2 RRC, [p1, k1] 2 times, p6.
Row 19: K6, [p1, k1] 3 times, p2, k4, p2, k13, w&t.
Row 20: K11, 2/2 RPC, p2, 2/2 RRC, [p1, k1] 3 times, p6.
Row 21: K6, [p1, k1] 4 times, p2, k4, p2, k13, w&t.
Row 23: K6, [p1, k1] 4 times, p2, k4, p2, k16.
Row 24: K18, p4, k2, [p1, k1] 4 times, p6.

Rep Rows 1–24 three more times, then work Rows 1–23 once more—95 rows completed; piece measures about 21" (53.5 cm) from cast-on.

Finishing
Remove provisional cast-on and place revealed stitches on needle. Use the Kitchener stitch (see Glossary) to graft cast-on row to last row—that circumference measures about 21¼" (54 cm) around brim. Weave in ends. Block hat over a form if desired, allowing lower edge to roll to the RS as shown.

Crochet Chain Provisional Cast-on
With waste yarn and crochet hook, make a loose chain of about four stitches more than you need to cast on. With needle, working yarn, and beginning two stitches from end of chain, pick up and knit one stitch through the back loop of each crochet chain (Figure 1) for desired number of stitches. Work the piece as desired, and when you’re ready to work in the opposite direction, pull out the crocheted chain to expose live stitches (Figure 2).

Kitchener Stitch
Step 1: Bring threaded needle through front stitch as if to purl and leave stitch on needle (Figure 1).
Step 2: Bring threaded needle through back stitch as if to knit and leave stitch on needle (Figure 2).
Step 3: Bring threaded needle through same front stitch as if to knit and slip this stitch off needle. Bring threaded needle through next front stitch as if to purl and leave stitch on needle (Figure 3).
Step 4: Bring threaded needle through first back stitch as if to purl, slip this stitch off, bring needle through next back stitch as if to knit, leave this stitch on needle (Figure 4).
Repeat Steps 3 and 4 until no stitches remain on needles.

Short-rows
Work to the turn point and slip next stitch purlwise to right needle. Bring yarn to front (Figure 1). Slip same stitch back to left needle (Figure 2). Turn work and bring yarn into position for next stitch, wrapping the stitch as you do so.