

Preparing Wool for Rug Hooking

I hear this over and over from new rug hookers -- "I bought wool . . .now what?" or "I went to the thrift store and bought some wool skirts - now what should I do to them?"

With the information about Types of Wool to buy and the information on this page, you should have no trouble getting started on your wool hunting journey. I will tell you how to prepare the wools you find so they will work well in your hooking.

Using Recycled Woolens

Make the Goodwill or local thrift store one of your favorite places to visit! If you want to build your wool stash quickly and inexpensively, and continually add to it — this is the best place to go.

Look for the wools that I mentioned in the previous section that are best for hooking. Go first for the larger sizes in skirts, dresses and pants—more wool for your money! Most thrift shops sell skirts and pants for less than \$4.00 each — no matter the size. So you will get lots more wool in a size 18 skirt, than in a size 8! Choose the colors and textures that you like, that you need, and that you know will work for hooking. You will get much better at this as you go along. I can now just scan the racks and see what I need.

Read the Labels

Choose wools with the wool mark label, 100% wool (not washable wool.) Besides Pendleton, look for the high-end designers' wools, like Harve Bernard, Leslie Faye, Ralph Lauren, and others. Remember that you are going to rip these apart, then cut them into strips, so don't overlook those garments that have small holes, broken zippers, or open seams.

Avoid garments that have very open, loose weaves, and those that are very flat and shiny (some gabardines are not marked as such) — these are not going to behave for you.

This is most important: NEVER bring these garments inside your house until you are ready to take them straight to the washer! Critters, moth larvae and other critters can lurk inside—you do not want to expose your carpet, clothing, or other hooking wool to these garments until you clean them. Keep them in the plastic bags in your car trunk or garage until you are ready to wash them.

Before Washing

You can disassemble recycled garments before or after you wash them - it's personal preference. Try it both ways and decide which way suits you.

Since I do not like to open the garments and rip them apart while they are dirty, I just cut off the waist bands with scissors, then remove the linings. Next, I wash the garment with the other seams intact. I like to minimize my own exposure to the stuff that falls out of a used garment — although I do make a habit of

checking pockets for junk I don't want in my machine and on the wool, like tissue, matches, or whatever. So be sure to empty pockets before you wash.

About Washing Wool

To wash wool in preparation for hooking, use warm or hot water and a cold rinse on your washing machine. Do not use any detergent containing bleach additives—bleach will dissolve wool. I prefer to use powdered Tide detergent (it is inexpensive to buy and it does not contain any added perfumes or bleaches.) Use the regular cycle on your washer to ensure sufficient agitation for fulling the wool. Gentle cycles will not agitate enough and your woolens will still be too thin and flat for hooking. The factors that cause sufficiently fulling woolens are the temperature change from hot to cold and agitation. Spinning at the end of the cycle will not hurt your wool.

Remove the wool as soon as the wash cycle completes

NOTE: Wool fuzz & lint can easily clog your washer. Be sure to thoroughly clean the left-overs from the inside of your washer after the wool comes out. At the end of your wool washing day, run a cycle of hot water with bleach through your washer to help break down and pass through any wool that might be stuck in your hoses or washer tub.

Washing the Wool

If you buy wool off the bolt (as-is) or recycled woolen garments for rug hooking, the first thing you will do is wash the wool. If the wool is new off the bolt, this will wash out any sizing that was put in the wool during processing and also will shrink the fibers (full the wool) to thicken it for hooking and to prevent the edges of your cut strips from raveling as you hook with them.

If the wool is recycled, washing does the necessary fulling for these woolens, but it also washes out any body soil, oils, dry cleaning fluid residues, or dirt that would attract moths and their wool-eating larvae

Disassembling Garments

After washing, I start at the bottom of the skirt or the leg of a pair of pants, snip through the hem in the seam going up the side, then rip the seam out just by pulling — wet wool and threads rip very easily. I open all the seams that run up the sides and back or front of the garment. If it's a skirt, I just have to open the hem and I am done (I already took off the waist band.) If there are pockets, I simply cut them off and throw them away. For a pair of slacks, I would next open the seams at the crotch, cut off and discard the pockets, and I have 4 panels of wool. For dresses, I just follow the same procedure as for skirts, discard anything that doesn't give me a decent size piece of wool.

Drying & Storing Wool

Put your wool in the dryer on regular heat with a fluffy terry towel and a dryer sheet. The towel will help the wool to get fluffy and dry fast, and the dryer sheet will help prevent the wool from getting wrinkled and stuck to itself. Remove promptly, and either fold or roll the wool. Add it to your stash!!

Store your wool in a place where it will not be affected by accumulated moisture (plastic bags and plastic tubs are not the best choice.) If you have some shelves or a cupboard or dresser where the temperature is stable, that is a good place to store your wool. Plastic bags & boxes are okay, if they are not kept in a hot or damp place, and it is a place with low humidity. Lavender blossoms will keep the moths out, and also make your wool smell heavenly! Make several little sachet bags filled with lavender and tuck them among your woolies.



Visit Folk 'n' Fiber at <http://www.folkandfiber.com>