

COMBINING THE RIGHT FLEECE WITH THE RIGHT FIBER

From *In Sheep's Clothing.*

A Handspinner's Guide To Wool,

by Nola Fournier & Jane Fournier

Fiber length. Although it's not strictly necessary to match the lengths of the fibers to be blended, doing so simplifies preparation and spinning. With fibers of equivalent length, any of the preparation methods that permit blending will give you a homogeneous yarn. When one type of fiber is longer than the other, the preparation method must be chosen with more care.

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Elasticity & loft. Two of the most important and closely related properties that wool can lend to other fibers are elasticity and loft. The amount of elasticity in a fleece is related to the type of crimp it has. With their well-developed spiral crimp, down-type fleeces have the most elasticity. Fine wools are a close second and divide roughly into two groups for crimp pattern: Rambouillet and breeds with Rambouillet blood, which have well-developed, irregular, three-dimensional crimp; and Merino and breeds with Merino blood, with well-developed, well organized crimp. Fine crossbred wools or longwools, which have a crimp pattern similar to that of Merino but with fewer crimps per inch, also have a good to moderate amount of elasticity. Longwools and strong crossbred fleeces, with their long wavy or curly crimp, have the least.

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Softness. How soft a fleece feels is almost directly related to the fineness of the wool fiber. The higher the count (or the smaller the micron measurement), the softer the fleece. Conversely, the lower the count (the higher the micron measurement), the harsher the handle. Although a considerable range of fiber diameters can be found within each of the three broad groups of fleeces (fine wools, longwools, and down-types), if softness is a priority, look for a suitable fleece among the fine wools. Most down-type fleeces fall in the medium range, whereas crossbred and longwool fleeces range from medium to strong.

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Durability. Wear resistance comes from a combination of resilience and fiber diameter. Longwool and crossbred fleeces are usually very hard-wearing. Down-type wools, strong fine wools, and fine crossbred fleeces are good for moderate wear, whereas the remaining fine fleeces are better known for softness than ruggedness.

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Washing, finishing, & fabric care. The care requirements of the fibers that you choose to blend together must be compatible within the context of the yarn's use. If the piece that you are planning will require frequent washing, there must be a washing method that will clean both fibers electively and yet preserve their desired qualities.

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