

## Spinning

The history of spinning is as ancient as mankind. As long as there were fibers to work with, either plant or animal, they were spun into thread or yarn to make clothing, accessories, bags for carrying or storage, nets, etc. Initially, the fibers were twisted by hand, or rolled against the leg or other part of the body until tight enough to hold the twist. Later, a whorl was added to keep the fibers spinning longer. Whorls were originally stones with a hole drilled into the middle; later they were made of clay. Sometime later, a stick or shaft was added. Much later in time, whorls were carved from wood. Many pieces of carved soapstone or molded and baked clay were often artfully designed and or decorated, but the important thing was the balance of the weight needed to obtain a smooth, even thread. Use of a spinning wheel is much more recent, and in many cultures, not available in medieval times. In most pre-medieval cultures, the women were the spinners and weavers; it was only later that men became the weavers of cloth.

The basic equipment needed are a fiber source and a drop spindle. It is easiest to learn how to spin using wool than any other fiber and then progress to various plant fibers, such as flax, nettle, or thistle. Cotton was not used in medieval times, and because of the shortness of the fiber, it is much more difficult to work with. Silk is also a bit more difficult to work with and it is also quite expensive.

There are numerous sources of commercially prepared wool; however, don't forget to check with your rural areas. Some people keep sheep as pets, children raise them for 4-H projects, etc. and I have obtained most of my wool free from these sources. But then you have to prepare the wool for spinning. This includes skirting the fleece, carefully, gently washing it, air drying it, teasing it, carding or combing the fibers, and then you are ready to spin. It usually takes me a day or so to completely prepare the fleece for spinning.

There are also numerous sources of drop spindles as well as simple ways of making your own.

### **GLOSSARY**

Fleece – one year's growth of wool sheared from a lamb or sheep, usually in one mass

Skirting -- removal of excess dirt, manure, etc.

Teasing – pulling the wool fibers, to untangle them and continue the cleaning process.  
Also allows for removal of short pieces.

Carding – systematic brushing of fibers with two wire brushes; continues cleaning process; lines up the fibers into a consistent bunch or rolag, and makes them easier to spin.

Combing – actual combing of fibers into an even bundle.

Drop spindle – tool used for spinning fibers into thread, string or yarn

Whorl – a weight added to a stick or shaft to increase the momentum and duration of spinning.

**Bibliography:**

Marilyn Kluger.	<u>The Joy of Spinning.</u>	ISBN: 0805013970
Carol Kroll.	<u>The Whole Craft of Spinning.</u>	ISBN: 0486239683
Lee Raven.	<u>Hands On Spinning.</u>	ISBN: 0934026270
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Mabel Ross.	<u>Essentials of Handspinning.</u>	ISBN: 0950729205

**Websites:**

Demonstration of how to use a drop spindle

<http://www.monroehistoricsociety.org/spinning.html>

This site provides short videos of different techniques

<http://www.icanspin.com/>

Sources of drop spindles; many of these sites are also sources of prepared wool:

<http://www.woollydesigns.com/spindles/>

<http://www.dettaspindle.com/>

<http://www.susansfibershop.com/spindles.htm>

<http://store.carlsonwoollies.com/spindles.html>

<http://www.davidreedsmith.com/>

<http://www.greensleeveesspindles.com/>