

WASHING MOHAIR

by Marny Pavelka of Sister Sheep

So you picked the right kind of mohair in the best condition possible. Buying “raw” (unwashed) mohair is your best deal. Farmers like me are busy enough with the animals (and usually real jobs!) that they will give excellent prices to customers who buy raw mohair.

Mohair fibers have a coating called “yolk” that protects them from the harsh environment. This yolk keeps the fiber soft and lustrous but can be difficult to wash out. Some yolk is so thick it feels like the mohair has been dipped in wax.

Kid mohair and “dry” mohair (from Cashgora or Navajo type Angora goats) have little or no yolk, making the mohair easier to wash. While the mohair with the thicker yolk is more difficult to wash, under the yolk lays a shiny, wonderful fiber full of luster, which has been protected from wind, rain, and other detrimental elements. This beautiful mohair makes the chore of washing well worth the extra effort.

PREPARE YOUR FIBER

1. Pick out large pieces of hay, straw or other “non-mohair” items (VM). Dirt and yolk come out in the wash. Washing does not remove VM. Mohair is a slick fiber without scales like wool so more VM will fall out when the mohair is dry. It is best, however, to remove large amounts of VM that can be spread throughout the fleece during the washing process.
2. Shake out the mohair locks to remove any 2nd cuts.
3. Some people like to “tease” the tips of mohair locks to open then and remove more dirt. If you use the locks for spinning or wigs or Santa beards, don’t disturb the locks.
4. Separate discolored fibers (yellow urine stains or green alfalfa stains). These are great for dyeing but that is best done separately.
5. If you have a full fleece, it is also good to separate the mohair into like lengths. This allows consistency in spinning or other projects.
6. It is best to wash small amounts of mohair at a time. This is what the books say. Given that, I usually wash 5-6 pounds at a time in the tub and am very happy with the results.

WASHING

1. Loosely place mohair in a mesh bag. I use a lingerie bag with 1 pound or less when washing in the sink and a big onion or potato mesh bag when washing a full fleece in the bathtub.
2. Rinse the fiber in running water to remove as much dirt as possible. You can do this with the garden hose outside.
3. Fill the sink or tub with very hot water. If you can put your hands in the water without rubber gloves, it isn’t hot enough. 125 - 145 degrees is about right.
4. Add cleanser. My favorite is Dawn dishwashing detergent. If you use that type of detergent, use enough that the water feels slick.
5. Place the bag of fiber in the water with detergent and push the bag under the water a few times. The water and cleanser should flow through the bag at each dunking. Mohair does not felt as easily as wool but you don’t want to overly agitate the fiber.
6. Let the bag soak for 15-45 minutes. Depends on what you get distracted doing! Flip the bag over, push the bag under water a few times and let it soak for another 15-30 or 45 minutes.
7. You want to keep the water hot so it is best to cover the container with a lid. If the water cools down, the yolk will redeposit itself on the fiber. You want to keep it hot to keep it “melted”. If the yolk cools down and re-attaches to the mohair, it is an awful mess trying to get it back off again.
8. Take out a lock and rinse it in hot water. If it feels clean, great! If not, you may have to soak longer or wash again in clean water. This will be determined by how dirty the water is and how hot it still is. If the water cools off, the yolk reattaches itself to the fiber. **(I know I said this already, but want to make sure you were paying attention!)** Keep the water HOT, HOT, HOT if the fiber has heavy yolk.
9. Once clean, squeeze the dirty water out and submerge in a new bath of HOT water. Keep the mohair in the bag. It is easier to keep the fiber out of your drain and in the lock that way. Mohair is very wispy feeling in water and can be hard to manage.
10. Work the bag in the water and change to clean water if necessary. You can also rinse under running water but that wastes lots of water.
11. When the mohair is clean, squeeze out as much water as you can. I put the bags in the washing machine on spin cycle to pull out most of the water.

DRYING

1. In the summer, I put the mohair on towels on the deck to dry in the sun. The mohair dries in a few hours. Flip over once or twice. Watch the dogs and cats as they love to play in the drying mohair!
2. In the winter or when raining, I place the mohair on towels near the wood stove and they may take a couple of days to dry. Using a laundry rack or bread racks also work well. Don’t get the mohair too close to the fire! Mohair won’t burn but it sure will scorch.

