

Wool Washing and Fiber Preparation

The keys to washing fine wool are

- **HOT water, keeping the temperature constant**
- **Gentle, gentle - NO agitation**

Popular wool scours – Kookaburra Wool Scour, Table Rock llama Wool Scour, Orvus Paste, Dawn liquid detergent

Suggestions for Preparing Wool for Washing

- Sort wool – sort by lack of VM, sort by color, sort by length of locks
- Keep wool in lock formation, as much as possible
- Examine tips
- Examine cut ends for second cuts (where the shears have gone over the sheep twice and left a shorter cut through the fiber)
- Place locks in lingerie bags for better control, ease of handling, and less opportunity for agitation.

Removal of VM (vegetable matter)

- remove as much VM as possible before washing
- tease apart tips so that VM falls out before washing
- consider flick carding or combing after washing to facilitate removal of VM
- use a picker after washing to facilitate removal of VM
- consider washing individual locks by hand teasing locks open in wash

Processing after washing

- Carding – drum carder, hand cards
- Combing – keep locks in formation for worsted spinning
- Flick carding

Terms:

Washing refers to removing the suint in wool and can be done with cold water.

Scouring refers to removing the grease or lanolin in wool and requires hot water and plenty of detergent (I prefer wool scour).

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Scouring Process

- Weigh wool you plan to wash so that you can determine how much scour you will need to use – usually 1-2 ounces per pound of raw fiber.
- Initial Rinse to remove dust and dirt:
 - Fill container with HOT (125 - 140 degrees) and a little splash of wool scour to break the surface tension and allow the wool to get wet – I often include some boiling water
 - Place lingerie bags full of wool in hot water bath.
 - Let soak for 10 min or so – COVERED so that the heat does not escape.
 - Remove from water – **very gently** squeeze out excess water (do not wring) – set wool aside.
- Full Scour:
 - Refill container with HOT water and full amount of wool scour based on weight of dry wool – usually 1-2 ounces per pound of raw fiber – we tend to use the higher amount for our Rambouillet and CVM because of the grease.
 - Place lingerie bags in hot water scour bath and allow to soak for 30 – 60 minutes, covered so that heat does not escape.
 - Periodically squeeze **gently** to expedite escape of grease and dirt
 - Final **gentle** squeeze and removal from scour.
- Rinse:
 - Refill container with HOT water (keep the water hot so you don't shock the wool and cause felting AND so that the grease stays dissolved in the water and does not re-stick to the wool)
 - Place lingerie bags in rinse – allow 10 minutes for soak
 - Repeat until clear – usually two rinses are sufficient. If still extremely cloudy, a second scouring may be necessary.
- Dry:
 - You may place squeezed out bags in your washing machine on spin cycle – NO WATER SPRAYING IN!
 - Empty wool from lingerie bags and allow to dry in air

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Extra tips:

Dry washed fleece will feel tacky if the grease has not been completely removed – re-scour.

You may add white vinegar to final rinse to balance pH.

You may hang lingerie bags to drip instead of squeezing which results in even less agitation.

References:

- Fournier, Nola and Fournier, Jane, In Sheep's Clothing: A Handspinner's Guide to Wool, Interweave Press, 1995.
- McCuin, Judith MacKenzie, "On Washing Fleece", in Spin-Off, Fall 2008, pp. 64-68.
- Russo, Robin, "Washing Wool", Spin-Off, Fall 2009, pp. 34-36.