



Sorting the Fibres Angora Produce

By Nancy Rowell (Featured in the National Angora Club yearbook 1995)

Angora rabbits grow fibres of varying quality, that is not to say good varying to bad, but soft to coarse, short to long, or young to old etc. The rabbits body produces different wool in different areas, the back and sides being first grade wool (though having shade variations). The chest is coarser, almost wiry in the older doe, and the tummy likewise though it doesn't grow so long. Ironically, this wool often has a lovely colour. Age sees changes too, with a general firming of all the fibres. The appearance of white hairs, particularly in the guard hairs requires careful thought as I will mention later.

Harvesters using clipping to collect wool are simply waiting for the wool to achieve the required 2 ½ " to 3" and then shearing off the wool. However, it would be a mistake to throw the whole lot into a bag perhaps with other fleeces and then spin. Clipped rabbits are growing the new dark tipped coat but also the roots of the previous coat, which though light in colour will be very soft. Nonetheless, the guard hairs will still be in there. They may be short and unnoticeable now but will stand proudly out of your finished garment later. Using old rabbits, particularly does, can backfire if used for a scarf or evening jumper worn next to the skin, because guard hairs break off and can be itchy. By all means take the whole fleece off including tail chest and feet but before storing, sort. Remove all under-length wool, tangles, clumps of guard hair. I separate the back and sides, the chest and tummy and then the face and ankles and feet (if I've clipped them) into 3 packages. Details such as name, date, age, health and working condition of does (e.g. pregnant or lactating), are carefully noted. It's as well to check for breaks in the staple before storing too. Hold a toosk of wool at the root and tip and tug firmly, if the wool breaks across the toosk then the wool must be put in the under-length pile. Carding is a good way of evening the colour but will find any "broken" wool you may have missed.

Harvesters using plucking gather one coat at a time. They can take the guard hairs off first and take the wool separately. The different qualities of wool are readily visible as are colour variations. If some areas are slightly under length they can be left on for later plucking.

Whatever your method of harvesting sort your rabbits into age groups, or perhaps 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc so that wool from all your older rabbits is not mixed with that of the softer and younger rabbits. However, you make your information records they must tell you all you need to know to make an even and practical garment. No good using a few rows of a young rabbits wool in a garment made of two year old rabbits wool as when you wash it the few rows will probably shrink to look like a row of shirring!.

Do not throw away wool that is not 1st grade. Wools from youngsters makes excellent felt, coarse fibres make warm outer garments, guard hairs make a strong angora statement when used as a decorative feature. Even tangles and webbing can be used for quilting, padding, cushion pads and felt. They say necessity is the Mother of invention. Decide you are not going to waste what you are not using and use your imagination.