

TECHNIQUES OF SPINNING

If you have not spun before, it is best to learn to spin with sheep's wool first because it is much easier to spin than angora. This is because wool fibres have little barbs running along their length which help bind them together when spinning. Carding is not my favourite pastime, but carded wool is easier to spin and is essential if you want to produce a very fine even yarn - the type you need to ply with a thread of finely spun angora. First you must mark your carders 'left' and 'right'. Tease the wool out first with your fingers to remove any dirt or debris, then spread over the edge of the left carder - do not put too much on at once.

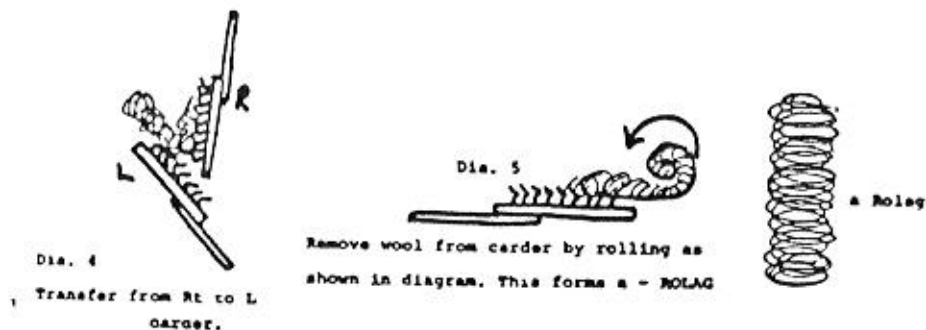
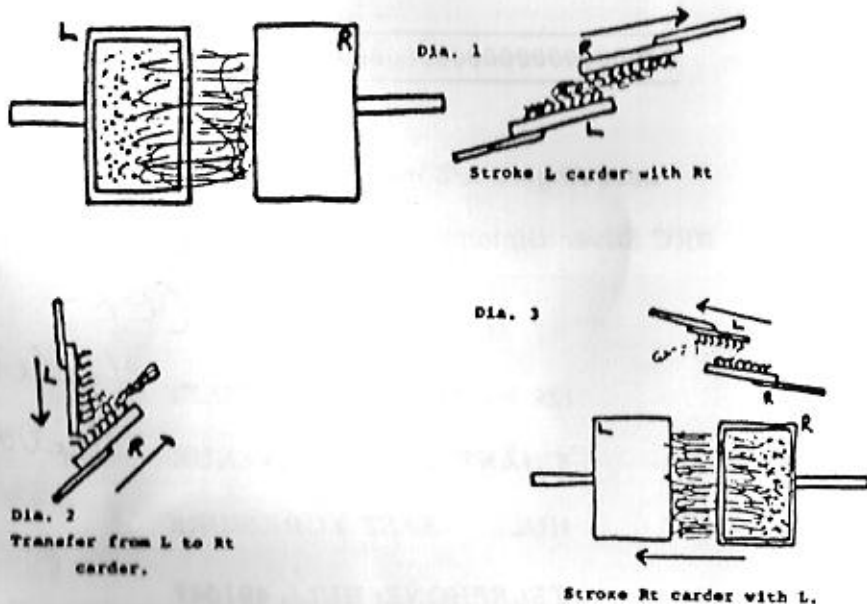
CARDING

(Diagrams 1-4 below)

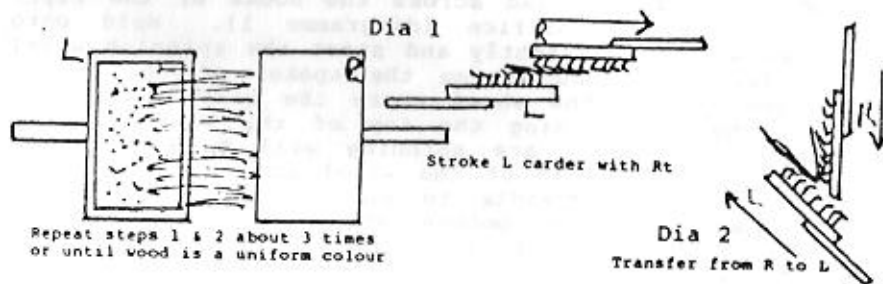
Stroke gently with right carder. Transfer to right hand carder; repeat stroking; transfer to left hand carder; transfer back to right hand carder. This can only be mastered by practising and is easy when you know how! About four transfers is sufficient, then roll into a rolag. Although some find carding irksome, it is very therapeutic and spinning from a rolag infinitely more satisfactory.

Avoid: putting too much fleece onto carder
 placing fleece right up to handle of left carder initially
 combing too harshly

Diagrams 1-4



Carders can be useful when spinning coloured angora. By using them to blend the wool prior to spinning, a very even colour can be achieved. Spread the wool in a thin layer on the edge of the left carder. Stroke gently with the right carder. Transfer back to the left carder. Stroke again with right carder. Transfer back to the left carder. Stroke again with right carder. Transfer back to left. Carefully lift the carded wool off the carder - do not roll. One edge will be 'blunt' - it is difficult to describe, but obvious when seen! - and it is from this edge that you start spinning. If you have sweaty hands, a little talcum powder sprinkled on them prevents the wool you are holding from matting. It is best to keep a pair of carders specifically for angora - grease and angora do not mix. It is possible to buy very fine carders specifically for luxury fibres (you can buy them from Tasseltips Angoras).

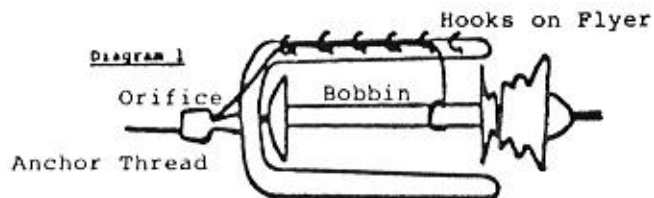




SPINNING

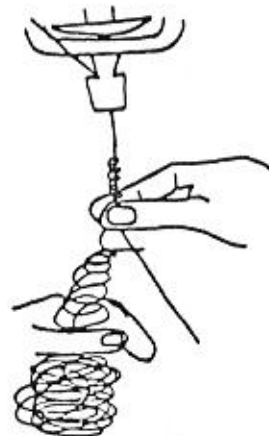
So you've taken the plunge, you've gone out and purchased a monster that sits in your living room ready to gobble you up as soon as you sit down to try and use it! At least when you try to spin on your newly acquired spinning wheel, it gobbles the wool and your fingers if you don't let go in time. First you must learn the rhythm of your particular wheel, for this will vary with each make of spinning wheel because it will depend on the actual diameter of the wheel itself. Sit down and treadle the wheel without trying to spin. Learn to treadle the wheel very slowly, for the faster you treadle, the quicker the wool you are spinning will be pulled onto the bobbin and the faster your hands will have to work to keep up. At first the urge is to treadle at speed - generally much too fast for your hands to be able to cope. It is possible to treadle very slowly and still produce a continuous thread. Once you feel comfortable with the rhythm of your wheel, try and forget your feet and concentrate on what your hands should be doing. It is at this point a swear box is needed! Tie a fairly long piece of commercial yarn to the bobbin firmly, so that it doesn't slip around when the wheel is going, but actually pulls in and starts to wrap around the bobbin when you treadle. This is the anchor thread to which you attach the unspun wool as you begin to spin. The same starting technique is used for Angora.

- Tie anchor thread to bobbin firmly.
- Feed the anchor thread across the hooks of the flyer and through the orifice (diagramme 1). Hold onto the anchor thread lightly and start the spinning wheel with the other hand using the spokes of the wheel, not the top of the wheel where the band is (if you start the wheel using the top of the wheel, grease from the wool you are spinning will be transferred to the band and rim of the wheel and cause the band to slip off). Treadle to check the anchor thread is drawn onto the bobbin while you offer slight resistance to the pull by allowing the thread to run through your fingers.



- Take one of your previously prepared rolags and pull out a few fibres from one end. Hold the rolag between thumb and forefinger of one hand, with the fibres pulled out protruding. Lightly hold the anchor thread with the same fingers while you start the wheel with the other hand.
- Now while treadling slowly, take the anchor thread with the hand that started the wheel. Hold lightly so that it can slip through your fingers to wind onto the bobbin.
- Allow the pulled out threads from the rolag to wind onto the anchor thread. Now grip the anchor thread firmly to stop it feeding onto the bobbin and at the same time pull back with the other hand that is holding the rolag, to withdraw some more fibres of wool (Diagram 2).

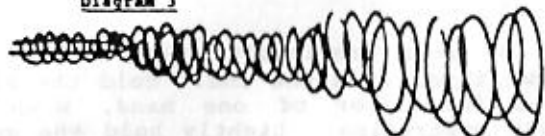
Diagram 2



- Release the pressure on the anchor thread sufficiently to allow it to be pulled onto the bobbin with the threads of wool pulled out from the rolag twisted around it.

- g) Continue in this way until you reach the end of the anchor thread. Then you will begin to spin just the wool, allowing the fibres of wool to be twisted up upon themselves and feed through your fingers to be wound onto the bobbin.
- h) If you allow the twist to run down into the main body of the rolag thus:

Diagram 3



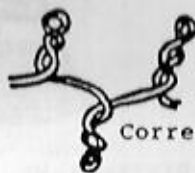
making it impossible to pull the fibres of wool from the rolag. The only solution is to stop spinning and remove the thick lump. Once again pull a few fibres from the remains of, or a fresh rolag, to rejoin in the same manner as described above, onto the anchor thread or the end of your spun thread. Spinning is a matter of co-ordinating your hands and feet into a harmonious rhythm - something which seems impossible at first - but believe me, with practise it is achieved - honestly!

Tension

At first, do not worry about what the thread you are producing looks like. Concentrate solely on producing a continuous thread, with lumps, bumps, overspins, the lot! Once you are proficient at the technique of spinning, it is then time to start refining it. To judge the correct tension at which to spin, stop the wheel, let the thread you are spinning twist up upon itself. It should produce one long twistle if spinning with wool and lots of twistles if spinning with Angora.

Diagramme 4

Correct for Wool



Correct for Angora

If lots of little twistles form then you are overspinning.

Overspun wool is hard to the touch, not nice and soft and bouncy. Increase the tension slightly, so increasing the drag on the bobbin and so reducing the twist on the thread.

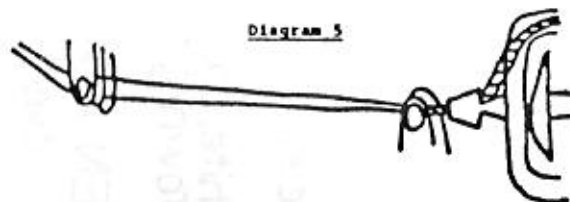
If you are underspinning, decrease the tension slightly, decreasing the drag on the bobbin and so increasing the twist on the thread.

For Angora you need to OVERSPIN, in fact you cannot overspin Angora, it needs as much twist on the thread as possible. Don't worry, the yarn produced will still be very soft.

Plying

Twisting two threads together to form a yarn. It is best to leave your wool on the bobbin for 24 hours after spinning and before plying to set. When you have spun two bobbin fulls of wool you then ply them together. Have the wheel at the same tension used when spinning, but the wheel is turned in the opposite direction to that used when spinning originally. Put the bobbins to be pleyed together onto your Lazy Kate (a shoe box and two knitting needles are just as effective, if you have no Lazy Kate). Take the ends of the threads from both bobbins and secure them to the ends of the anchor thread (simply tie a knot!). Take both threads in the hand that usually holds the rolag and place them either side of your index finger - this keeps them from tangling as you ply.

Diagram 5



Start your wheel and let the anchor thread run in. Hold the twist at the orifice and then counting the number of treadles, run your fingers along both threads. Let the twisted yarn run in onto the bobbin, then repeat the process by running the twist along the two threads for the same number of treadles. This should help keep the plying even.

Diagram 6

