

# DEVON GUILD OF WEAVERS, SPINNERS & DYERS

## SPINDLE SPINNING – GETTING STARTED

Using a spindle is a very economical way to learn hand spinning for a beginner - they are inexpensive to buy and very easy to make. Once you have mastered the spindle you will have learned the steps needed for spinning on the spinning wheel: drafting out fibres, twisting the fibre into yarn and winding up/storing the spun yarn. The following basic instructions are “lifted” from a couple of the many, many websites that exist on learning to spindle spin. Learn a little from us at the Devon Guild then use these websites and the vast number of video clips available online to practice and improve.

There are two basic types of spindles readily available, a top whorl and a bottom whorl – which you use is a matter of personal preference and may stem from what you learnt on.

### Tying on the Leader

- Attach a ‘leader’ to your spindle by tying a piece of yarn (hand spun or commercial) about 45cm long onto the shaft right next to the whorl.
- Top whorl: take the yarn over the side of the whorl.
- Bottom whorl: take the yarn over the side of the whorl, loop it around the shaft underneath and back over the side of the whorl.
- Run the yarn through the hook, leaving about 15cm free above.

### Spinning

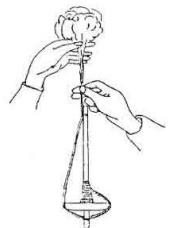
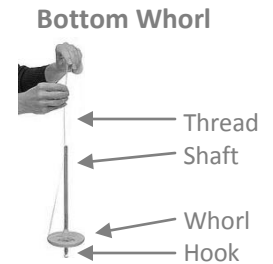
- Let the spindle hang beneath your hand, suspended by the leader. With your other hand, hold the shaft lightly in your fingers and spin the drop spindle clockwise – this is the direction you will be spinning to make the yarn. *Allow yourself time to practice making the spindle rotate.*
- Repeat this process of spinning the spindle in the same direction until the leader begins to take in the twist and leave a fluff of fibre at the end for joining on more fibre.

### Joining More Fibre

- Overlap the fluffed end of the new wool a few centimeters over the fluff of drafted fibres and let them catch and twist into the leader.
- Let the twist run into the joined fibres, add more twist by spinning the spindle before you continue making a new length of yarn otherwise your join may not be secure. *it is important not to try and make a new join of new fluff fibres over an already spun section of yarn.*
- It is good practice to test the join before continuing.
- Give the spindle another twist and bring your hand back to where the other hand is holding the yarn. Move your hand back about 10cm, pulling and drafting out more fibres of wool and letting the spindle turn around a few times.
- Let go of the yarn and let the twist move up into the fibres as before.
- Gently pull our more fibres from the fibre mass by pulling back with your hand, allowing the twist to run into the drafted fibres.
- Always keep tension on your newly spun yarn in order to allow the twist to run into the newly drafted fibre - if you release the tension the twist will not travel up.
- Repeat this process a couple of times and check to see that there is enough twist before moving on. If the yarn pulls apart or is too slack, spin the spindle again to store more twist.

### Winding On

- When the yarn is long enough to cause the spindle to almost touch the ground, unhook the yarn and wrap it around the base of the spindle next to the whorl - you have just spun what is called a **single**.
- Leave enough yarn unwound in order to slip it back on the hook with a few centimeters to spare and loosen the end fibres.
- After you have wound off a considerable length of single the spindle will become too heavy and will start to wobble a lot as you are spinning it. When this happens it is time to stop spinning and remove the single from the spindle.



## Transfer the yarn from your spindle.

Use a shoe box with a knitting needle pushed through as a spindle holder - the box keeps the spindle steady so you have both hands for winding.

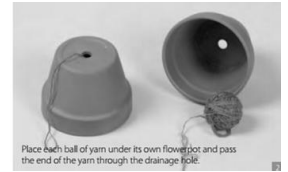


## Plying

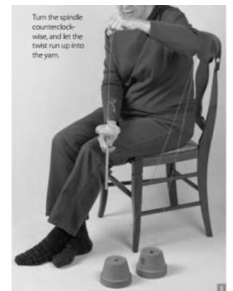
Plying on a spindle is easy and there are many ways to do it. The simplest is to take two singles you have spun, attach them together to the spindle and spin the spindle anticlockwise (the opposite direction to the one you spun the single in).

### Flowerpot plying

- Wind the singles from your spindle firmly and evenly around small felt or rubber balls. Keeping the yarn under tension makes plying easier and helps even out the twist.
- Spin more yarn and wrap another ball.
- To keep the balls from running amuck, place each one under its own upside-down flowerpot. Thread the yarn through the drainage holes of the pots, and you are ready to ply.
- Tie your two singles to the leader of your spindle with an overhand knot. Hold the yarns in your fiber hand with a finger between them so they won't twist together until you are ready.
- With your twist hand, turn the spindle counterclockwise or opposite to the direction your singles were spun.
- After the spindle starts turning, slide the twist hand up and pull down lengths of yarn, letting the plying twist run into this section.
- Make sure you keep the yarns tensioned evenly as you ply.
- When the yarn has enough twist, pull out another length of yarn and add more twist.
- When your spindle reaches the floor, stop and wind the yarn onto the spindle shaft.
- Let the yarn rest overnight to relax the twist before plying.



**Helpful hint:** As you are spinning your singles, make a sample of balanced plied yarn by letting a length of your freshly spun yarn twist back on itself and tie the ends together in a loop. Ply to match that sample.



## Finishing

- When your spindle is full of plied yarn, put it back in the shoe box and wind your yarn into a skein. Be sure to add some ties to keep it neat.
- Set the twist by washing the skein in warm, soapy water and then rinsing in clear, warm water.
- Snap the skein between your hands a couple of times to straighten it out and move the twist around a bit.
- Hang it to dry. Since you have removed some twist in plying, most skeins will not need weights when drying but if your yarn is very curly try using a light weight at the bottom of the skein. A clean tea towel rolled lengthways and inserted through the loop of the skein should be enough to weight the skein without stretching it.

**Use for a very special project when dry!**

## Troubleshooting

- **If your yarn pulls apart** - you need to add more twist: to connect the ends back together untwist both ends again and loosen the fibres. Lay one side on top of the other and twist the fibres together as before.
- **If the spindle gets away from you** - and the twist runs up into the fibre mass (a common occurrence for beginners) stop the spindle and untwist the fibre mass then start the drafting process again.
- **If the yarn is over twisted** - loosen some of the extra twist by drafting out more fibres.
- **If there are fat, soft areas (known as 'slubs') or thick and thin spots in your yarn** - you can keep them and make a novelty yarn (the really expensive ones to buy!) or you can remove them by pinching the yarn with both hands a centimeter or two on either side of the slub and untwisting it until you can draft the fibres out a little.

