

Wool Presentation

by Venus R. Thomas

What is the difference between felted wool and wool felt? Both start with the same raw materials, however their structure and applications differ significantly. Felted wool begins with a woven textile which undergoes a 'felting' process through heat, moisture and agitation which results in a soft and puffier fabric. After felting most wool will not fray or fray less. Wool felt begins with non woven fibers and by using heat, moisture and agitation compresses the fibers resulting in a denser and more sturdy fabric.

How to determine if textile is wool or wool blend? Take a few fibers from an inconspicuous spot and put a flame to it. Wool will smell like burning hair and leave a soft, crumbly ash residue. A blend will smell like chemicals and leave a hard plastic like pellet. There's also a water test although not quite as accurate. Real wool will absorb water slowly with the fibers darkening as the water is absorbed. Blends or other fibers will absorb water more readily with no perceivable change in color. There is also a bleach test.

How to 'felt' you wool: wash in the hottest water you can get with a small amount of soap. Rinse in cold water and dry with high heat. NOTE: Do not use fabric softener sheet. (Remove from dryer immediately to help prevent wrinkles.) This shocks the wool and causes it to shrink up becoming thicker and less likely to fray. NOTE: Be sure to put a filter on your drain hose as there will be a lot of fibers that will clog your drain. Clean/remove filter after washing. Also be sure to wipe out the washing machine tub.

If buying wool that has not been felted to use in a project be sure to take into account that it will shrink during the felting process. On average will shrink 20 – 50% in height and 20 – 25% in length making it difficult to know exactly how much to purchase.

The most common form of wool work is penny rugs. The name is derived from using pennies as patterns years ago. Various size circles were cut from wool and then sewn in a base layer.

How to cut wool patterns: Trace the pattern on the dull side of freezer paper. Cut around pattern leaving a small outer margin. Iron onto wool with SHINY side of down using NO steam. Then cut on traced line. If wool is thick, hold your scissors straight up and down to prevent getting a bevel on the wool piece. The freezer paper peels off easily although you may need to run your fingers under the edges as it's removed to prevent the piece from stretching.

NOTE: If your wool is still fraying a good bit you can iron a lightweight stabilizer on the back before cutting your pattern out.

The blanket stitch is the most common stitch used in wool work although many other decorative stitches as well as beads, fibers, etc. can be used.

