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WOOLBUDDIES

20 IRRESISTIBLY SIMPLE NEEDLE FELTING PROJECTS



JACKIE HUANG
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANTONIS ACHILLEOS

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GETTING STARTED

≡ WHAT IS NEEDLE FELTING? ≡

Welcome to the wonderful world of Woolbuddies, which makes use of the popular fabric art process of shaping raw wool with special barbed felting needles. When the needle is pushed through loose wool, the needle's barbs catch and pull the fibers so they tangle and bind together to create a matted felt fabric. Using a single needle or a handheld tool with a cluster of felting needles, you can create any shape imaginable. What's more, with just a little practice, you can achieve fine and unique details. So grab some wool, a needle, and let's get started!

TOOLS AND MATERIALS

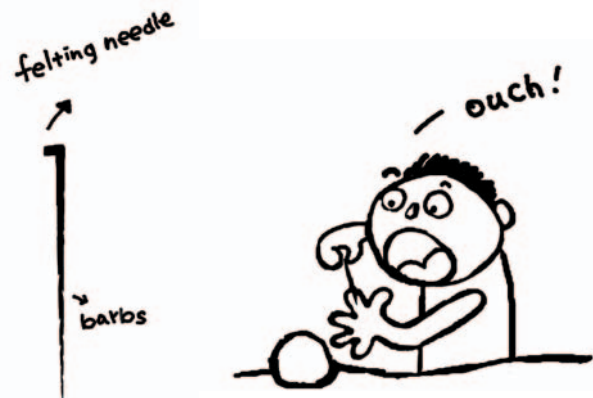
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Needle felting requires only a few basic tools and materials, available at many craft stores and online. See Resources, page XX, for suggestions on where to purchase a variety of felting supplies. Following is a list of the felting tools and materials needed to complete the projects in this book.

FELTING NEEDLE

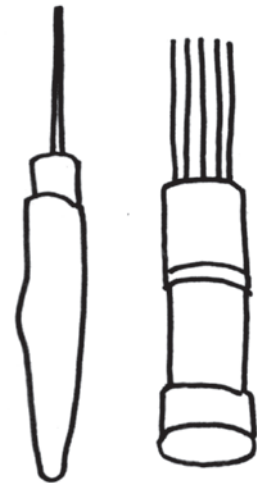
This needle is used exclusively for felting, as it is designed to push and interweave the wool fibers. Felting needles have a small lip at the top to make thrusting easier, though some needles attach to or are designed with a handle, which makes holding them even more comfortable. Needles are available in various sizes or gauges and commonly have a triangular blade. A star blade offers an extra blade edge, which can be useful for a faster finish if you are an advanced felter. A 36- or 38-gauge needle with a triangular blade works well for most felting work done with medium-grade wool, which is what I recommend using for the projects in this book. A 38- or 40-gauge needle is best for finer fibers.

CAUTION: Please take great care when working with felting needles, which have tiny barbs along the bottom half and extremely sharp tips. Keep needles away from small children and pets and carefully supervise use by older children. Be sure to store needles in a safe place when not in use.



FELTING NEEDLE TOOL (OPTIONAL)

A handheld needle felting tool offers a comfortable grip and the option to work with multiple needles. Pen-style tools generally hold up to a few needles, while larger-capacity tools can hold as many as twenty needles at a time. While a tool like this isn't strictly necessary, the flexibility to work with a few needles at once will save you time when doing the less detailed work, such as creating a body base that requires a lot of needle poking. When you want to do more detailed work, simply remove the other needles and work with just one.



MOLDS

If you're new to needle felting or want to achieve a consistent look, you can use molds to guide you in making basic shapes. For example, you might use a star-shaped cookie cutter to make Pointy the Starfish (page XX). You can purchase premade molds specifically for needle felting (see Resources, page XX, for suggestions on where to find needle felting supplies). Just roll the wool, push it inside the mold, and gently poke to make your shape. Be careful not to poke at the mold itself, as this can break your needle.

THIMBLES (OPTIONAL)

Thimbles can be used to protect fingertips while felting and are great for those who are new to the craft. Since your dominant hand holds the needle, you really only need thimbles for the hand holding the wool. You can use thimbles on all fingers, or just the ones that may be most in the way of a sharp needle—your thumb, pointer, and middle fingers. Thimbles come in a range of colors and materials, including rubber, leather, and metal. Choose thimbles that fit comfortably in the material of your choice.

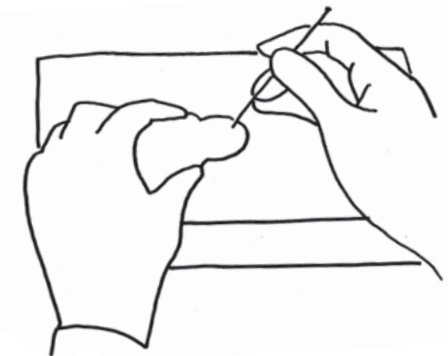


WORK SURFACE

A felting pad or other soft work surface acts as a backstop, allowing the sharp point of the needle to pass through the wool and then safely catching the needle on the other end. Using a soft pad as your work surface will help you avoid breaking needles as well as accidentally poking your fingers, lap, or tabletop with a sharp needle.

You can use a variety of pads for needle felting, including a felting mat or a foam block. A brush pad-style felting mat has bristles to hold the wool in place while allowing the needle points to pass more easily through the fiber. The downside to a brush pad is that the bristles tend to pull at the fiber, making it fluffy again and requiring you to do some extra poking to smooth the shape. A foam block offers more protection if you prefer to felt on your lap rather than placing the felting pad over a firm surface, such as a tabletop. When using foam under your wool, avoid jabbing the needle repeatedly into the same spot as that can damage the pad.

You'll see that I've used a variety of surfaces when making my buddies; it's really up to you to decide which padding you prefer. While I tend to use a surface for forming only the finer detailing on my buddies (like ears and eyes), I recommend you start by always working on a felting pad or other soft surface until you get the hang of the process.



WOOL ROVING

Used for lots of different crafts including spinning, wool roving is wool that has been combed, formed into a clump, then lightly twisted to hold the fibers together. Roving is sold by weight, rolled gently into a ball, and can be packaged separately or with a multitude of other colors. Look for wool that has a lofty, springy texture, without lumps. It should be loose and easy to pull apart, like thick cotton candy. The projects in this book call for 100 percent

medium-grade wool, which you can purchase by the ounce. Finer wools, such as alpaca and merino, are more challenging to work with because the fibers do not tangle together as easily, so you'll need to spend more time and effort poking them. Check the materials list included with each project to know how much roving you'll need in each color to make your Woolbuddy.

TECHNIQUES

The essential felting process is rather straightforward: Roll a piece of woolen fiber into the basic desired shape. Place the wool on your work surface and push the needle in and out of the fiber in a straight motion until it holds together and reaches the desired firmness. Here's a closer look at the process and some tips to make things easier.



NOTE: You can speed up the felting process by shaping the wool before you start poking. If you want a two-dimensional piece, flatten the wool with your hands to compress the fibers. For three-dimensional pieces, such as the body base or eyes, roll the wool into the desired shape and then get cracking with your needle. To learn how to make some of the basic shapes you'll use to make Woolbuddies, see page XX.

WORKING WITH THE NEEDLE

Use your thumb and pointer finger to grasp the upper section of the needle. If you are working with a handled needle, you can hold it like a pen or a doorknob, depending on the design. Do not bend or twist the needle as you work. Felting needles are made of highly tempered steel, which means they are very sharp and brittle and can break easily.

WORKING WITH WOOL

Needle felting is a bit like sculpting with clay—you can make your project larger, add layers, and cover up mistakes by felting more wool on top of your project. You can also poke to attach other felted pieces of the project to the main shape. For example, you will attach the Woolbuddies' limbs to the body. Felting wool is easier and holds better when the wool is fresh versus already felted. When felting the separate pieces, leave the roving loose on the end that will be attached to the main shape. This way the fluffy, unfelted fibers can be easily interwoven with the other felted piece. If you try to attach a fully felted wool piece to another fully felted wool piece, they may not attach seamlessly, since the fibers are already matted together.

≡ BASIC SHAPES ≡

NOTE: Felting can be a slow process—especially if you’re working with only one needle—so find a comfortable place to work and be patient. (If you are working for several hours, remember to take an occasional stretch break.) Smaller projects with fewer intricate details will of course take less

time than larger, more complex ones. A basic shape with a few details, such as Pointy the Starfish (page XX) or Shana the Penguin (page XX), could take anywhere from forty-five minutes to two hours, while Hex the Octopus (page XX) or Jimmy the Giraffe (page XX) could take a few days.



As you start to make shapes, you’ll see just how easy it is to work with felt. You can sculpt it into any shape you like or combine many small parts to build your creatures. Here are some of the very basic shapes that you’ll use in almost all the projects. To practice, use as little or as much wool as you’d like. Refer back to these pages anytime you need a refresher.

MAKING A BASIC BODY SHAPE



1



2



3

Use your hands to roll the wool tightly to make the base for the body shape. By compressing the fibers together, the needle can pass through more of the shape at once (instead of just poking at air), thereby speeding up the felting process.



4

Place the wool piece on a felting mat, foam block, or other soft surface. Poke your needle repeatedly into the wool until it becomes the desired tube or egg shape that you’ll use for most of the Woolbuddy body shapes.



5

If you want to form a roundish ball, position the shape on its end and poke at the top to push the tall side down.



6

Continue needling the wool until the shape is evenly round.



ZEKE

≡ THE RABBIT ≡

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Everyone knows how much rabbits love their carrots, and Zeke is no exception! Here, you'll practice making basic shapes and adding color detail. To finish, you'll create a sweet treat for your rabbit friend to nibble as he hops along the bunny trail in his trendsetting trousers.

Rabbit approximate finished size: 7½ in/19 cm tall by 6 in/15 cm wide

Carrot approximate finished size: 3½ in/9 cm tall by 1 in/2.5 cm wide

MATERIALS

Felting needle
Felting mat or foam block
2 oz/55 g white or natural-colored wool for base pieces (for the body, base, ears, eyes, and arms)
Scraps of light pink wool (for the ears)
Small handful brown wool (for the nose, eyes and mouth)

Scraps of black wool (for the eyes)
0.5 oz/15 g blue wool (for the trousers)
Scraps of light blue wool (for the polka dots)
Small handful of orange wool (for the carrot)
Scraps of green wool (for the carrot stem)

MAKING THE RABBIT'S BODY



1 Take one half of the white wool and use your hands to roll it tightly into a thick egg shape.



2 Use the felting needle to poke the wool repeatedly until the body shape is about 3 in/7.5 cm wide.

MAKING THE HEAD



3 Place a small handful of white wool on a felting mat. Roll wool into a tube shape and poke from the top until firm, leaving the roving loose on the bottom end of the ear.



4 Poke at the fluffy base to attach the ear to the head and repeat step 3 for the other ear.



5 Set aside scraps of brown wool for the eyes and mouth. For the nose, roll the rest of brown wool into an oval shape. Place the nose in the center about two thirds of the way up the head and poke it into place.



WILL PHOTOSHOP OUT BLUE PANTS NEXT ROUND

6 For the mouth, roll a thin strand of brown wool and poke an upside-down T into place below the nose.

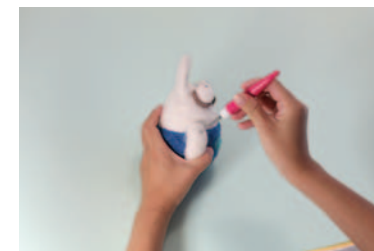
FINISHING THE BODY



7 Using scraps of white and black wool, follow the instructions on page XX to make and attach the eyes on either side just above the nose. Outline each eye with a thin strand of brown wool to create shadows.



8 Stretch and wrap the blue wool around the bottom of the rabbit's body, folding the top end over and poking along the fold to make a clean line. Roll pinches of light blue wool and attach in a polka dot pattern.



9 Divide the remaining white wool in half and roll each piece into a tube. Attach one arm to the side so it rests against the body. Partially attach the second arm, leaving the crook of the arm unattached.

MAKING THE CARROT



10 Roll the orange wool into a tube shape.



11 Place the orange tube in the unattached crook of the arm and poke to form a carrot shape. Needle at the base to attach the carrot to the body.



12 Attach a scrap or two of green wool to the end of the carrot for the stem.

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SHANA

≡ THE PENGUIN ≡

What penguin doesn't love to waddle around and dive into icy waters? But Shana is a very special penguin: she was the first character introduced into the Woolbuddy world! In this project, you will learn how to apply color accents to your creature's basic shape in smooth, straight lines.

Approximate finished size: 4 in/10 cm tall by 3½ in/9 cm wide

MATERIALS

- | | |
|--|---|
| Felting needle | 0.4 oz/10 g gray wool (for the body) |
| Felting mat or foam block | 0.4 oz/10 g black wool (for the head, face, and eyes) |
| 1 oz/30 g white wool (for the body base, face, and eyes) | Scrap of yellow wool (for the beak) |

MAKING THE BODY



1 Take three quarters of the white wool and use your hands to roll it tightly into a ball.



2 Use the felting needle to poke the wool repeatedly to form a firm, oblong shape.



3 Stretch a layer of gray wool to fully cover the lower half of the body shape.



4 Attach the gray wool to the body by first poking the outer edges and working inward until the felt layer is smooth.



5 Take a small handful of black wool and attach to the upper half of the body, following the instructions for making a clean line on page XX.



6 Continue poking to shape and attach the black wool so that it fully covers the remaining white shape and smoothly meets the gray section. The basic body will now be black on top and gray on the bottom.

MAKING THE HEAD



7 Roll a small handful of white wool into an oval shape for the face.



8 Poke the white wool onto the front of the head, leaving a thick outline of black on all sides.



9 To make the nose, attach a scrap of black wool where the head meets the face, continuing about halfway down the face.



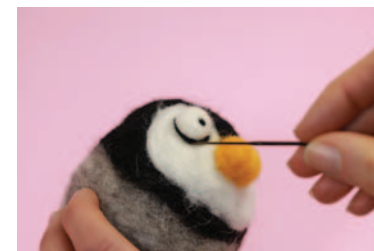
10 Roll the yellow wool into a small ball and attach below the nose to form the beak.



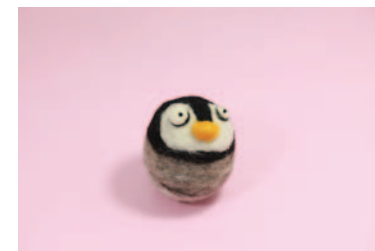
11 Using small scraps of white wool, follow the instructions on page XX to make and attach the eyes.



12 Roll a pinch of black wool into a tiny ball and poke into the center of the eyes for pupils.



13 Outline each eye with a thin strand of black wool to create shadows.



14

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AMELIA

THE OWL

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Her friends all assume Amelia is smart—and she is! With just a few easy steps, you can create your very own wise owl: just form a two-toned body, add some wings, and give Amelia her signature big blue eyes—or whatever color eyes you choose. A few more details and you're done!

Approximate finished size: 4 in/10 cm tall by 4 in/10 cm wide

MATERIALS

- Felting needle
- Felting mat or foam block
- 1 oz/30 g white wool (for the face and body base)
- 0.3 oz/9 g dark brown wool (for the back)
- 0.1 oz/3 g light brown wool (for the wings)
- 0.1 oz/3 g light blue wool (for the eyes)
- Pinch of black wool (for the eyes)
- Scrap of yellow wool (for the beak)
- A few strands of green (for the belly)

MAKING THE BODY AND WINGS



1 Take all of the white wool and use your hands to roll it into a ball. Then, use the felting needle to poke the wool repeatedly until it becomes an egg shape.



2 Set aside a scrap of the dark brown wool for the ears. Stretch the remaining wool to cover half of the body shape and attach by first poking the outer edges and working inward until the felt layer is smooth.



3 Divide the light brown wool in half and roll each piece into a ball. Poke to shape and attach a wing to each side of the body, layering the light brown over the dark brown wool.

MAKING THE EYES AND BEAK



4 Divide the light blue wool in half. Stretch one piece around the top of the head in an O-shape and poke repeatedly to attach the eye to the head. Repeat to make and attach the other eye.



5 Continue needling each eye until it becomes smooth.



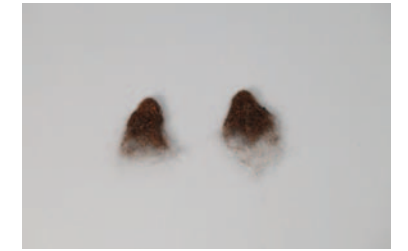
6 Take a pinch of the black wool and roll between your hands into a small, round ball. Attach to the center of one eye. Repeat to make and attach the other pupil.



7 Roll the yellow wool into a teardrop shape and poke into place directly beneath the two eyes.



8 To decorate your owl's belly, attach small green dots in the pattern of your choice.



9 Divide the reserved dark brown wool in half and place the pieces on a felting mat or other soft surface. Shape the pieces into two small triangles, leaving the roving loose on each bottom edge.



10 Attach each ear to the upper part of the head by poking at the fluffy base of the triangles.



11 Ta da!

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