

Simple Felt Making For Mittens, Toys or Anything Else

by Suzanne Pufpaff

The first rule of felting is, any animal fiber will felt. The second rule of felting is, no two fibers felt exactly the same way. When frustrated by the second rule of felting, always remember the first rule. Here is a simple technique for making felt out of most any animal fiber lying about.

Materials Needed

- Animal fiber
- Hand Cards
- Two old clothes, about 3 feet square. Old sheets work very well.
- A pan of very warm water to which a minute amount of detergent has been added. Vinegar can be used in the water in place of detergent.
- A flat surface to work on which water will not hurt.

The Process

- Card enough fiber to cover about a 2½ foot square with 2 or more layers of fiber. The fiber can be carded with hand cards, drum carder or commercially carded. The thinner the layers, the easier it is to get at uniform felt. Thin layers may require more layers. Enough fiber should be carded to cover the square to a depth of 1 to 2 inches thick.
- Lay the cloth on a flat surface. Cover the cloth square uniformly with one layer of fiber. The fibers should all be running approximately the same direction. Make the edges of the square as even as possible.
- A second layer of fibers should now be carefully placed on top of the first layer. The second layer should be placed so the direction of the fibers run at an angle to the first layer. Additional layers should be added until the desired thickness is reached. Always lay the next layer in a different direction from the previous one.
- After all the layers have been added for the desired thickness, carefully place the second cloth over the square pile.
- Sprinkle the fiber sandwich with some of the warm, soapy water. Press gently on the top cloth to reduce the thickness of the package. Do not soak the cloth and fibers. The first step of the felting process is best done with as little water as possible. The goal of this step is to get the fibers in closer proximity to one another so the tangling of the fibers will be more

effective. Again, be gentle and just slightly jiggle the hands on the surface of the cloth.

- After most of the loft has been reduced, roll the cloth into a loose cylinder shape and add a little more soapy water. Again, less water is better at the beginning. More water can always be added during the rolling process. Now, roll the cylinder back and forth on the table to start the felting. Begin gently. Roll the cylinder for a few minutes in one direction, then unroll the cylinder and reroll it from a different edge of the square. Continue in this manner around all four edges of the square. The square must be worked, or rolled from all directions to have the felt keep its original shape. The direction the felt is worked, or fulling, is the direction it will reduce in size.
- After the fibers have been worked from all four directions inside the cloth, carefully lift one corner of the cloth to see if the fibers are beginning to hold together. If they are, the cover can be removed. If not, continue to roll the sample inside the cloth until more fibers are adhering to each other than to the cover.
- When the covers are ready to be removed, what comes out is first stage felt. This is not a real durable felt. The fulling or shrinking of the felt is what increases its durability.
- The fulling process is doing whatever it takes to shrink the felted piece down in size. As the size decreases, the density of the felt will increase. Fulling consists of more rolling, squeezing, scrubbing and beating of the felt to get the fibers to entangle. When fulling, the cloth cover can be draped loosely around the young felt while it is being rolled, squeezed and beaten to discourage the surface fibers from adhering to anything other than other fibers. More water can be used in the fulling of the felt. The hotter the water, and the harder the bearing, the faster the felt will full. Always use caution when using hot liquids and don't take unnecessary risks. A reduction of 15 minutes in the fulling time is not worth body burns.
- After the piece has reached its smallest size, it is now ready to be used for a project requiring a strong, washable, warm fabric, like mittens. The pattern for a simple set of mittens is right at the end of your arm.

Making The Pattern

- **Step 1:** Draw the hand of the lucky person who is going to get the mittens. Draw the hand with the fingers together and the thumb stretched out to the side on a piece of paper. Make sure to draw down the arm the desired length of the cuff.
- **Step 2:** Take a pencil and draw around the hand print $\frac{1}{4}$ " outside of the drawing completed in Step 1. Since this is going to be a mitten, round the tips of the fingers and thumb into smooth curves. The length of the cuff was determined in the first step, so there is no need to extend the drawing beyond the bottom of the cuff.
- **Step 3:** Cut out the drawing on the outside line just completed. This is the pattern for the palm of the mitten.
- **Step 4:** Lay the pattern for the palm of the mitten onto another sheet of paper. Draw a line $\frac{5}{8}$ " outside of the pattern onto this second sheet of paper. Again, do not extend the pattern on the bottom of the cuff. Cut out the second drawing on the completed line. This is the pattern for the back of the mitten.

The mitten pattern custom made for the hand which will wear it is now completed. The directions for construction aren't any harder than the creation of the pattern.

Construction The Mittens

- **Step 1:** Cut two of each piece, the palm and back. Make sure to reverse the direction the thumb is pointing when laying out the two palms and the two backs. That way, one mitten is for the left hand and one is for the right.
- **Step 2:** Pin a palm to a back, right sides together. Match the tips of the thumbs, the fingertips and the wrists first. Then ease the extra from the back piece around the rest of the palm piece as the two are pinned together. Do not pin the wrist opening closed. Since felt is flexible, the two pieces should ease together without any excess on the back piece. Felt does not ravel, so there is no need to finish seams.
- **Step 3:** If a sewing machine is available, stitch a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam around the pinned edge of the two pieces. A hand stitched seam will work just as well and can even be done in pieces of scrap wool yarn which may be lying around.
- **Step 4:** After seaming the two mittens, turn the seam side in. As the mittens are worn, the seam will begin to blend right into the mitten and almost disappear.

Another feature of felt mittens, is they tend to take on the shape of the hand as they are worn, making them progressively more comfortable.

Options

A leather palm can be cut and sewn to the palm before it is stitched to the back of the mitten for added durability and grip. The pattern for the palm can be drawn by using the hand print and just slopping the leather where it is to be placed on the hand.

This felt mitten pattern has been tested in a wide range of environments. The most serious problem found with them is, dogs can't resist chewing them up, so beware. If the felt is thoroughly fulled before the mittens are cut out, the mittens will be completely washable. This comes in very handy when the mittens are for small children or serious barn work.

This is just one suggested use for felt made in flat pieces. Don't stop here! Any commercial stuffed toy pattern can be adapted to use on felt. Jackets, vests, home decor items, and more can be made. Let the imagination run wild, and happy felting!

From The Marker, March 1996.