

spinning daily  presents

## Drop Spindle Spinning: Learn How to Spin with Drop Spindles





Welcome to the world of handspinning! So, you've decided to take the plunge and explore the wonders of making your own yarn with a drop spindle. Not only are you in for a treat, but you've also started at the right place. Learning how to spin your own yarn is pretty easy and straight forward, especially when you have access to great teachers. To make this free eBook, we pulled from some of our best content from the pages of *Spin-Off* magazine.

One of the oldest of Interweave's publications, *Spin-Off* is a quarterly magazine that has been around since 1977 inspiring spinners new and old to make beautiful yarn and find enchanting ways to use it. We also host the spinning community, [spinningdaily.com](http://spinningdaily.com) complete with blogs, forums, and free patterns, *Spin-Off* Autumn Retreat (SOAR)—an intense and inspirational week with like-minded spinners, and our series of workshop videos where the living treasures of the spinning world share their knowledge with you. We're devoted to bringing you the best spinning teachers, the newest spinning ideas, and most inspirational creativity right to your mailbox, computer, and ultimately fingertips.

We hope you enjoy your spinning journey—come tell us about it at [spinningdaily.com](http://spinningdaily.com).

Happy spinning,

Amy Clarke Moore  
[aclarkemoore@interweave.com](mailto:aclarkemoore@interweave.com)



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# Make Your Own Handspindle

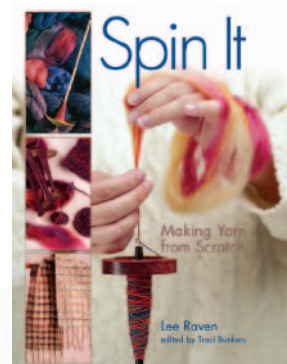


## Materials:

- 2 recycled compact disks (CDs)
- 1 3/8 inch diameter dowel (12 inches long)
- 1 eye hook (3/4 inches long)
- 1 rubber grommet with an inside diameter of 3/8 inch and an outside diameter of 5/8 inch

## Tools:

- Drill and drill bit slightly smaller than the eye hook
- Safety goggles
- Needle-nose pliers (with no teeth)
- Vise clamp
- Pencil
- Sandpaper
- Permanent ink marker



## A BOOK EXCERPT

from *Spin It: Making Yarn from Scratch*  
By Lee Raven, Edited by Traci Bunkers  
(Interweave, 2003)



You can make a simple spindle using recycled compact disks, a grommet, a small eye hook, and a dowel.

Sand the ends of the dowel so they are smooth and have no burrs. On one end of the dowel rod, find the center and mark it with a pencil. Wearing safety goggles, secure the dowel in a vise clamp and drill a starter hole for the eye hook in the center. Screw in the eye hook, then open it with the needle-nose pliers so that it creates a hook.

With the marker, draw a clockwise arrow on the top CD. Place the two CDs together and insert the grommet through the center hole of the CDs so that the CDs rest inside the groove. Insert the dowel through the grommet and position the CDs about 2 inches down from the hook for a top whorl spindle or 10 inches down for a bottom whorl spindle.

Test your spindle for smooth rotation and balance by placing the end with the hook on the table and giving the top of the shaft a hearty spin. Keep it upright by loosely enclosing the top of the shaft with a circle of your fingers and thumb; allow it to spin freely. You'll need a bit of practice to get the hang of turning the spindle efficiently. If it turns smoothly like a top, you're in business. A little wobble is fine, but if your spindle wobbles a lot and slows down quickly, make another spindle. You'll enjoy spinning more with a spindle that works well.

Grommets available from Bonkers Handmade Originals, PO Box 442099, Lawrence, KS 66044, [www.bonkersfiber.com](http://www.bonkersfiber.com).



A CD spindle nestled in a basket full of Bonkers Handmade Originals dyed tops.



# High Whorl, Low Whorl

By Abby Franquemont

If you're thinking about picking up a spindle for the first time, you may find yourself asking if you want a low-whorl or a high-whorl spindle—or even what the difference is between the two, and if it matters. So what's the deal? What is the difference? How much does it matter, and when? Why do we even have different kinds of spindles, anyway?

The spindle, one of humankind's oldest tools, existed in many forms throughout many cultures for tens of thousands of years. Some of the earliest were basically just a stick used to assist in the twisting of fibers drawn out into thread, while also providing a place to store the yarn that had just been formed. Once a sufficient weight of yarn had been stored on the stick, it developed the ability to keep rotating, even when let go. These early spindles evolved into the suspended spindle (also called a drop spindle), which has a weight placed on the shaft so it's easier to keep it spinning from the start.

Despite its simplicity, the spindle is an incredibly productive tool that has been refined for specific purposes through trial and error. One major difference among spindles is where on the shaft the weight (called a whorl) is placed. On a high-whorl (or top-whorl) spindle, the weight is at or near the top of the shaft; on a low-whorl spindle, it is at or near the bottom.

Individual cultures tended to develop very specific spindles tailored to spinning the fibers they had available into the yarns they needed and to practice techniques ideally suited for those tool and fiber combinations. One major source of specialization involves how much twist is needed to spin the fiber available. For cultures spinning long-staple fibers, which need lower amounts of twist, high-whorl spindles seem to have



Some spinners only spin with top-whorl spindles, while others swear by bottom-whorl. What's the difference? And what's the best spindle for you?





High whorl.

been more popular; for cultures spinning shorter stapled fibers or very high-twist yarns, low-whorl spindles dominated.

When it comes to drafting technique, any method you can use with a high-whorl spindle can be used with a low-whorl spindle and vice versa. There are things that are easier to do with a supported spindle than a suspended spindle (that's another whole subject!), but many drop spindles can be used if supported by resting the bottom on a surface or in a bowl. The only time this becomes a challenge is if the base is really broad, and there is a lot of friction. You need a pointy tip at the bottom for best results when spinning with the spindle supported. In general, though, your range of drafting options doesn't change from low whorl to high whorl—the biggest changes are usually with how you set the spindle in motion and how you store your spun yarn.

### Low whorl

Low-whorl spindles, with the weight at the bottom, have a low center of gravity and are more stable as a result—less prone to having their spin disrupted by a kick or a strong gust of wind. They tend to be forgiving of minor flaws in balance or shaping, so they're easier to make with limited tools or materials. A very heavy low-whorl spindle will spin better than a heavy high-whorl. A low-

whorl spindle may or may not have a hook, notch, or other device to assist with keeping the spun yarn secured to the spindle while you spin the next length. If there is no notch or hook, a half-hitch knot is used to secure the stored yarn. The cop (the yarn you've already spun and wound on the spindle) is stored above the whorl, either snug against it or just farther up the shaft. As a low-whorl spindle fills with yarn, the more regular its spinning action will generally become, as its weight distribution either continues to grow toward the bottom or else centralizes. Low-whorl spindles are most commonly set in motion with a finger flick, meaning you need only a small amount of shaft to grip to get it started; if you don't have a hook on the shaft, you can also roll your low-whorl spindle to get it going—just as you can also flick your high-whorl spindle. All of this means that you can pack a lot of spun yarn onto a low-whorl spindle.

### High whorl

High-whorl spindles, with the weight at the top, are somewhat more demanding in terms of precision crafting. A small imbalance can make a much bigger difference in the spindle's performance. However, they are generally more able to take advantage of slight gyroscopic stabilizing forces than low-whorl spindles. This means that



High whorl.

In practical terms, what does this mean? If you want a spindle that spins fast—for fine spinning or for short-staple fibers such as cotton or animal downs—choose a center-weighted spindle. If you want a spindle that spins slower but for a long time so you can spin thick yarn or spin very long spans of yarn before winding on, you might prefer a rim-weighted spindle.

If you want a very light spindle, a top-whorl spindle is probably going to perform better than a low-whorl spindle. If you're making your own spindle, a low-whorl spindle will probably be easier to make and get good performance from than a high-whorl spindle. For carrying around in a bag, a spindle with no hook is much easier to manage. If you want to pack lots of yarn onto a spindle, a low-whorl spindle is an excellent choice. For spinning in close quarters, a tiny top-whorl spindle is usually easier to manage than anything else.

Unlike ancient spinners, you don't have to commit to using only one spindle or only one type of spindle! Today, it's possible to buy or make almost any spindle imaginable—and choosing between low whorl and top whorl is only the tip of the iceberg in the range of options out there.

Some say *Abby Franquemont*, of Lebanon, Ohio, never leaves home without a spindle, even though she keeps emergency spindles stashed everywhere, including in her husband's truck and in-laws' home. Her family could not be reached for comment.

extremely light high-whorl spindles tend to spin better than extremely light low-whorl spindles. It's also rare to find a high-whorl spindle that doesn't have a hook or cleverly designed notch system for securing the yarn. Cops are built as close as possible to the whorl, so in contrast to low-whorl spindles, they get more top-heavy as they fill, with motion becoming irregular sooner as they fill. Cops are also at somewhat greater risk of becoming unstable or slipping off a high-whorl spindle, meaning care must be taken when winding a cop to ensure that it is stable. High-whorl spindles are often set in motion with a rolling movement. They are commonly rolled up or down the thigh; this requires a greater length of shaft without yarn wound onto it than the finger flick does. These things mean that high-whorl spindles generally don't hold as much yarn in a single cop as low-whorl spindles do.

### Other spindle characteristics

Regardless of whorl placement, a major factor in spindle performance is whether it's rim weighted (with weight concentrated to the outside of the whorl) or center weighted (with weight concentrated toward the shaft). A rim weighted spindle will tend to spin longer but slower; a center-weighted spindle will tend to spin faster, but not for as long, and with greater variation of spin speed.



Left to right: two low whorls and a high whorl.



# Spindle Spinning

By Maggie Casey

Several years ago at *Spin-Off* Autumn Retreat (SOAR), a friend and I took Rita Buchanan's drop spindle retreat session. During the class we challenged each other to make something out of our spindle-spun yarn. My favorite mittens are the result of that challenge. Rita's retreat and those mittens renewed my love affair with hand-spindles, and here are some tips to make you fall in love, too.



Your first spindle should weigh 2 to 3 ounces. Many beautiful lighter-weight spindles are available, but wait before you try one because a medium-weight or heavier spindle will keep turning while you learn to draft out the fibers. Don't choose one that is too heavy, however, or you will learn why they are called drop spindles. A well-balanced spindle is a delight, so check to see how well yours spins—tie on some yarn and give it a twist. The spindle should turn smoothly without a lot of wobble and continue to spin for some time.



**(1)** Once you have chosen a spindle, take a piece of plied wool yarn about 18" long and tie it onto the spindle shaft (leader). **(2)** If you have a top-whorl spindle, tie the leader underneath the whorl, bring the leader up and over the whorl, and catch it with the hook. You can wrap the yarn around the hook once for security, if you like.



**(3)** With a bottom-whorl spindle, tie the leader above the whorl and then spiral the yarn up the spindle shaft. **(4)** If your spindle has a hook (rather than a groove), catch the yarn with it and you are ready to go. If you have a groove, you will have to make a half-hitch knot to hold the yarn to the spindle.

**(5)** On bottom-whorl spindles, some spinners tie the leader above the whorl and bring the yarn down under the whorl, around the bottom of the shaft, and then back up to the top. Both ways work; see which one you like best.

**(6)** Once the leader is on, start practicing with the spindle. Remember that most singles yarns are spun clockwise (to the right). Most spinners hold the fiber in the left hand and the spindle in the right hand, but try both ways and see which feels comfortable to you. Hold the leader in one hand and with the other hand, give the spindle a twist. Practice until you can get the spindle to turn smoothly. Periodically you will have to let the leader unwind so you don't accumulate too much twist. **(7)** Wool is the easiest fiber to spin; carded wool is much easier to spin than combed. A nice, clean, medium wool is lovely to work with. Before you use the spindle, practice drafting out the fibers. Take a handful of wool in one hand and with the other hand, gently pull some of the fibers away from the mass and then add some twist by twisting the fibers in one direction between your fingers.



**(8)** That is what spinning is all about—drawing out the fibers and adding twist until you have created a stable yarn. Continue to pull out the fibers (drafting) and add more twist. If you don't have enough twist, the yarn will fall apart. If you have too much twist, you won't be able to draw out the fibers. Spend a few minutes drafting out the fibers and adding twist—you will need to be able to maintain a comfortable rhythm when you start spinning. Once you are comfortable drafting out the fibers and twisting the spindle, put these actions together. Start by sitting down, if you're not already, because your lap will be a valuable tool. **(9)** Before you start to spin, fluff out the end of the leader.



**(10)** With one hand, hold a handful of fiber and the leader together.

**(11)** With the other hand, twist the spindle clockwise. Watch the twist run up the leader and grab the fibers in your hand. You've just made a join.

**(12)** After you have made the join, twist the spindle and then stop it in your lap so it can't go backward. Slide your twisting hand above the spindle, pinch the leader, and draft out some fibers.



**(13)** Once the yarn is the right size, open up the pinching hand and let the twist run up and stabilize the fibers you have just drafted. Continue to twist the spindle, stop it in your lap by holding the shaft between your knees, pinch and draft. You determine the size of the yarn by how much you pull the fibers out. A few fibers make a fine yarn; many fibers add bulk. If too much twist gets into the fiber, slide your fiber hand back a little and then draft out those fibers. **(14)** When the yarn is longer than your arms, it's time to wind it onto the spindle. Keeping the yarn taut, wind it on the spindle clockwise and make a cone *under* the whorl on a top whorl and an upside-down cone *on top* of the bottom whorl. The neater you wind the yarn on, the easier it will be to remove from the spindle.



**(15)** Pinching the yarn keeps the twist from running up into the fiber source. The twisting/pinching hand keeps the twist under control while the fiber hand drafts out the fibers to the correct size. **(16)** After you feel comfortable spinning the spindle and stopping it on your lap, it is time to spin with the spindle suspended in the air. Continue to draft the fibers out the same way, but instead of stopping the spindle in your lap, let it keep spinning. When it stops of its own accord and starts to twist counterclockwise, add more clockwise twist. If the spindle keeps going backward, the twist will come out of the yarn, turn it back into fluff, and the spindle will drop.

**(17)** Soon you will have a spindle full of yarn. Now you can wind the yarn off the spindle and into a skein. Use a shoe box with holes punched in either side to hold the spindle. Niddy-noddies (pictured here) work for making skeins, but so does a chair with a straight back: Gently loop the yarn around and around the chair back until the spindle is empty. Tie the two ends of yarn together and before you take the yarn off the chair or niddy-noddy, put a couple of figure-eight ties through the skein.

**Maggie Casey** author of *Start Spinning* (Interweave, 2008) and *Start Spinning DVD* (Interweave, 2009), spends her day working and teaching at Shuttles, Spindles, and Skeins in Boulder, Colorado. She loves teaching spinning because she learns so much from her students.



# Drafting for Woolen and Worsted-Style Yarns on a Spindle

By Carol Huebscher Rhoades

**S**PINNING ON A SPINDLE doesn't mean that you are limited to one type of yarn. It's the same working on a spindle as it is on a spinning wheel: you can choose a fiber, its preparation, and a drafting technique to get the yarn you want. To get a particular yarn, select an appropriate spindle. The finer and lighter the yarn, the lighter the spindle—so use either a very lightweight spindle (less than 1 ounce) or a supported spindle. Conversely, it is best to spin a heavy yarn on a heavier (2 ounces or more) spindle.

The principles for spindle-spinning either woolen or worsted-style yarns are the same as for wheel spinning.<sup>1</sup> The tricky part is coordinating your hand movements. When I am spinning woolen (long draw) on the spindle, my right hand is in charge of turning the spindle and pinching the twist off and on as I draft back with my left hand. For worsted spinning (short draw), my left hand holds the fiber while my right hand controls the spindle, drafts fiber forward, and controls the twist as it enters the drafted fibers. I also work with my hands at a slight angle along a horizontal plane; that is, my spindle-controlling hand is slightly lower than my fiber-holding hand. The angle between the yarn and the spindle hanging down from the spindle hand and the yarn and fiber between my hands is about 100 to 110° F. This position allows me to work with my shoulders and elbows relaxed. Many spinners, however, prefer a vertical alignment of spindle, yarn, and fiber.<sup>2</sup> Experiment with various positions to see what is most comfortable for you. You may find that one way is more comfortable for woolen drafting and another for worsted.

I try to keep my movements as even as possible during spindle spinning. I can control the size and density of the yarn by using evenly prepared fibers, moving my drafting hand at set lengths for each



draft, and keeping the spindle turning as consistently as possible. When the spindle gets close to the floor while my hands are in the “home” position (see fig. 5), then I stop, hold the length of yarn under control, and wind on. It is tempting to start raising the arms up to get just a bit more spinning done before winding on, but that shift in position can cause a difference in the drafting and the resulting yarn. Usually people tend to draft more thinly as their arms go up because gravity helps pull more fiber from the mass.

<sup>1</sup> For more on these techniques, see Carol's Spinning Basics articles in *Spin-Off*: “Handcarding with a Light Touch,” 25, 3 (Fall 2001), 74–79; “The Long Draw,” 28, 4 (Winter 2004), 74–76; and “The Short Draw,” 29, 1 (Spring 2005), 30–31.

<sup>2</sup> Priscilla A. Gibson-Roberts discusses spindle, yarn, and hand positions on pages 73–81 of *High Whorling: A Spinner's Guide to an Old World Skill*. Cedaredge, Colorado: Nomad Press, 1998.

*Carol Huebscher Rhoades* lives in Madison, Wisconsin where she spins, knits, translates, writes, and edits. She most loves spinning primitive wools to knit up into traditional Scandinavian garments.

## Woolen drafting on the spindle

**(1)** In the home position the hands are about 4" apart. To begin spinning, rotate the spindle with the spindle hand. I usually start with a slow spin and then add more spin as I draft back the fibers. Pinch off a section of rolag (about 1 to 1½"). Be sure that there is some yarn between the spindle hand and the section of rolag. The spindle hand stays close to the home position (for me, slightly above and to the right of the navel) except when I'm turning the spindle.

**(3)** When the yarn has been drafted to the desired diameter, and there is only a small amount of unspun fiber at the tip of the pinched-off section of rolag, move the fiber hand back toward the spindle hand. The fiber hand is still pinching off the rolag to prevent the twist going up into the unspun fibers while the fingers of the spindle hand open slightly to allow the newly spun yarn to drop down toward the spindle. Note that the hands do not meet when they're going back to the home position.



**(2)** As the spindle turns, elongate the pinched-off section of rolag by extending the fiber hand. Do not let more fiber enter from the rolag. As necessary, open and close the thumb and forefinger of the spindle hand to allow twist into the yarn being drafted.



**(4)** Back to the home position and ready to start drafting another section of the rolag.



## Worsted drafting on the spindle



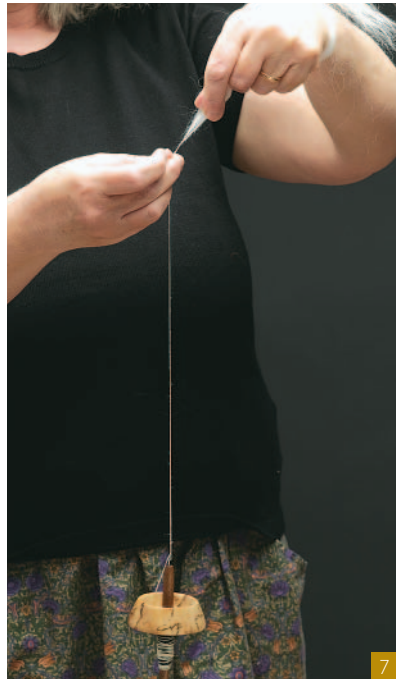
(5) In the home position, the hands are about 1 to 2" or half a staple length apart. Rotate the spindle so that it spins fast enough to keep an even spin while you draft and add twist to several lengths but not so fast that you feel tempted to draft out overly long lengths. Note how the strip of top is wrapped around my wrist to keep it under control during spinning. You can also use a wrist distaff to hold the fiber.<sup>3</sup>

(6) I draft about half a staple length of fiber forward, pulling it from the fiber mass with my spindle hand. As soon as the fiber is drafted, the spindle hand moves toward the fiber hand, guiding the twist into the drafted fibers and smoothing the yarn. Note that the hands do not meet but go back to the home position, about half a staple length apart.

(7) If you draft back with the fiber hand, the spindle hand pinches off the twist as the fiber hand releases fibers into the drafting zone. The spindle hand then moves toward the fiber hand, guiding the twist into the drafted fibers and smoothing the yarn. Both hands should then move back to the home position rather than continue upward or sideways.

(8) With a close-to-vertical drafting method, both hands are raised high and the arm with the fiber hand is at 90° from the body. This angle gives you more yarn length before winding on, but it is tiring. An angle halfway between vertical and horizontal should feel more comfortable and allow you to spin a good length before winding on.

<sup>3</sup> For making one type of wrist distaff, see Linda Hendrickson, "Ply-Splitting for Wrist Distaffs: Something New to Do with Your Handspun," *Spin-Off*, 29, 2 (Summer 2005), 50-57.



### Easing body movements during spinning

SUGGESTIONS FROM ELIZABETH HENSHAW, B.A. MOVEMENT STUDIES

For spindle-spinning while standing, your stance will depend on which arm extends and to what degree. Try various positions and use what is comfortable. Always try for fluid movements that use the energy from gravity, up through the body and out to the arms and hands. Move as you work rather than stand rigidly. Work with your feet apart and toes pointing a little outward. The foot opposite the arm that extends should be slightly forward of the other foot—about half-a-foot length. Now you can use the energy from the bottom of your foot up to your hand as you spin. As the arm extends for drafting, the back foot pushes forward (the heel raises slightly off the ground) while the front foot lightly presses into the ground. As your hands return to the starting position, shift your weight toward your back foot.

Take frequent breaks from spindle-spinning to relax your shoulders and stretch your back, hands, and fingers.

# Managing Your Yarn

By Carol Huebscher Rhoades



Umbrella swift

Ball winder

**A**fter you've spun a singles yarn onto a bobbin or spindle, you have to decide how to manage it so that you can ply and wash it. What you do depends partially on the fiber and the amount of twist in it and partially on what equipment you have on hand. In this column, we'll look at how to get your yarn off the bobbin for plying and skeining.

## Lazy kate

If you have enough bobbins, you can spin all your singles yarn onto the bobbins and then ply directly from them. It is best if your lazy kate (the rack that holds bobbins) has a tensioning device, so you can ply rhythmically and smoothly, and the yarn won't suddenly fly out and tangle. Of course, you also have to hold each strand with an even and relatively firm tension as you ply. If your singles yarn has a high amount of twist, tension very carefully so that snarls don't get trapped in the yarn. I usually wind cotton singles yarn onto a PVC pipe with holes in it, boil it for 30 minutes, and then wind the yarn onto a niddy-noddy to dry. After that, I wind it back onto a bobbin to ply from. Work from bobbins and not balls when plying high-twist yarns to avoid tangling and frustration.

If you don't have enough bobbins or a holder for plying directly from spindles, you can ply low-to medium-twist singles from balls made on a ball winder or a *nøstepinne*. Each of these tools has advantages and disadvantages.

## Ball winder

A ball winder has a cone for holding the yarn, a yarn guide, a crank mechanism, and a clamp for attaching to a table or board. You can hold a ball winder in your hand rather than clamping it to something, but it gets a bit tricky if you have to hold the clamp at the bottom away from the crank as you wind and hold the yarn as it goes through the eyehook guide.

I use my ball winder to wind singles yarn from the bobbin while it is still on the wheel or to wind plied yarn from an umbrella swift (a cage-like apparatus for holding skeins of yarn). For winding singles, leave the bobbin on the spinning wheel and hold the ball winder parallel to the bobbin about a foot or so away from it. Run the yarn tail across the hooks and under the flyer arm to ten-



sion it, thread it through the eyehook, and then double the tail about 2 inches and put it firmly into the slot at the top of the cone on the ball winder. Turn the crank smoothly at a medium speed and check the tension of the yarn as it winds. Too little and the ball will be very sloppy; too much and the yarn is stretched, and the ball can collapse inward. If you can't tension the yarn on the hooks and flyer arm, use your fingers to hold and tension the yarn. You can also position the bobbin on a tensioned lazy kate. After the ball is wound, if it isn't on a removable cone that the yarn will stay on, insert a piece of heavy paper or a folded index card into the center of the ball as you remove it from the top of the cone to keep the ball from collapsing inward.

### Nøstepinne

A nøstepinne or winding stick is a handheld tool for winding yarn into balls. In the United States, we use the Norwegian term; the Swedes call it a *nystpinne* and the Danes a *vindepind*. If you are going to buy or make a nøstepinne, make sure there is a notch around the top and that the top half is smooth and tapers from the center to the top. My favorite nøstepinne is 3½ inches in diameter at the center and 2⅝ inches just under the top notch. A notch at the bottom is handy, and the tool should fit comfortably in your hand.

You can hold the nøstepinne in whichever hand is comfortable. Start by wrapping the yarn around the bottom notch two or three times to hold it. Bring the yarn up to the top and wrap it once or twice around the top notch. If your nøstepinne doesn't have a notch at the bottom, simply wrap the yarn around the top notch and hold the tail with your thumb below the spot where you start winding. Now bring the yarn from the top notch down about 1½ to 2 inches (the bigger the ball will

be, the lower you want to start winding it). I hold the nøstepinne in my right hand and guide the yarn with my left hand, winding it diagonally from the lower left up to the right. The key to making a ball successfully is winding with the yarn at an angle, just the way yarn is wound in a commercial ball of yarn. You want an egg shape, not a round ball. At first you may have to hold the yarn in place with your fingers as you wind. Wind a few turns, and then roll the nøstepinne slightly in the direction from which you start the wrap. Since I wrap from left to right, I roll the nøstepinne to the left. Continue winding and rolling the nøstepinne until you have a nice, egg-shaped ball of yarn. Remove the ball from the top of the nøstepinne, keeping hold of the original tail if you need it to ply or knit from. The ball should have an open center that won't collapse.

Ball winders are good for winding large amounts of yarn and for making a flat-bottomed ball that can sit on the floor or in a box without rolling around. If I have a large project, I wind each bobbin of singles yarn onto a ball winder and stack the balls in order so I can ply the first and last balls together, the second and second-last together, and so forth. That way, any differences in the yarn grist will be more or less evened out. While you can ply from the two ends of the ball produced on a ball winder, the center can collapse and it can be tricky controlling the tension of the two yarn ends.

Nøstepinnes are convenient for winding small amounts of singles yarn that can be plied from the ball. Plied yarn is also wound onto a nøstepinne for two-end knitting (which uses two strands alternately throughout) so that you can easily pull the strands from the center and outside of the ball. The disadvantage of a nøstepinne is that winding on is slow and you have to be care-





ful to wind evenly and smoothly so that the yarn doesn't slide or tangle. Yarn wound onto either a ball winder or *nøstepinne* can also acquire or lose twist. For more on this, see Rita Buchanan's excellent article on center-pull balls listed in Resources.

### Niddy-noddy

After you've plied your yarn, you can skein it onto a niddy-noddy. This is a tool for skeining and measuring yarn. It has a center "stick" that is usually carved so you can hold it easily. Each end of the stick has a crossbar with one end curving upward and the other tapering down (sometimes one crossbar has curves at both ends). There is often one flat end so that you can slide the yarn off the niddy-noddy. The crossbars are offset 90° from each other.

Start winding the yarn by holding the tail at

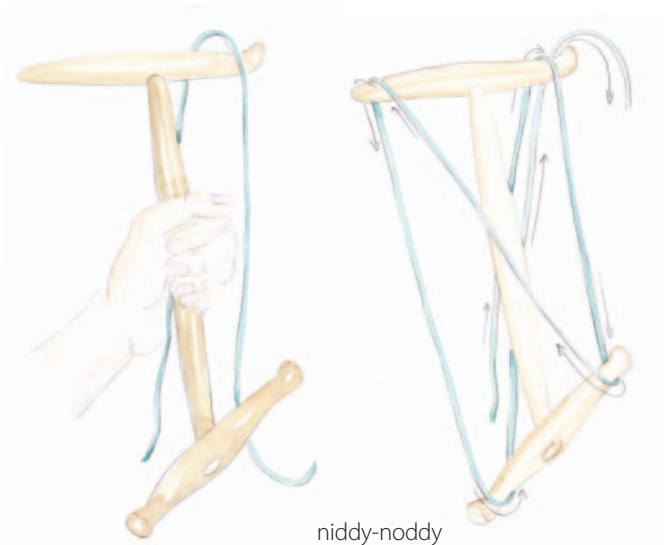
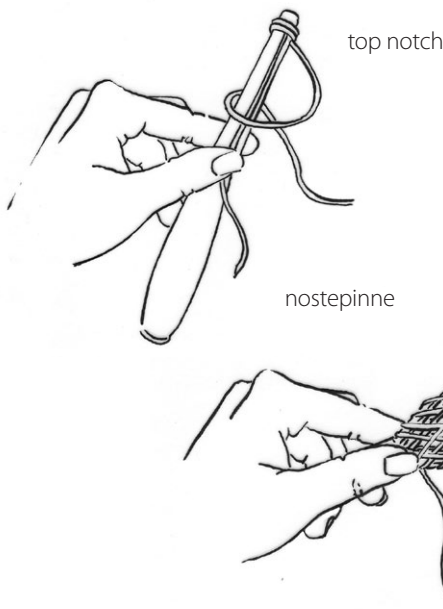
the center of the handhold and keep hold of it as you wind. Then take the yarn up over the left end of the top crossbar, down and under the right-side end of the lower crossbar, up and over the other end of the top crossbar and then down and under the other end of the lower crossbar. When you get back to the starting point, begin counting complete wraps as you continue to wind. Measure the yardage for one wrap, and then you can multiply by the number of wraps for the skein total (for more details, see Rita Buchanan's article on measuring yarn listed in Resources). Wrap evenly and with medium tension. Wrap too tightly and you can't get the yarn off and your yardage count will be overly optimistic; wrap too loosely and the yarn falls off or slides to the wrong part of the crossbar. After you've wound the yarn, secure each end with a short piece of waste yarn tied around the skein in a figure eight, and then tie the skein in at least two more places before removing the yarn from the niddy-noddy. Your yarn is now ready to be washed and used.

*Carol Huebscher Rhoades* lives in Madison, Wisconsin where she spins, knits, translates, writes, and edits. She most loves spinning primitive wools to knit up into traditional Scandinavian garments.

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### RESOURCES

- Buchanan, Rita. "A Closer Look: The Ins and Outs of Centerpull Balls: How to Avoid Tangles and Frustration." *Spin-Off* 24, 4 (Winter 2000), 26–29.
- Buchanan, Rita. "Measuring Yarn, Part I: Length, Weight, and Grist." *Spin-Off* 16, 3 (Fall 1992), 46–51.





# Tying a 2-Yard Skein

By Pat Noah

I'm often asked, "What is the proper way to tie a skein?" It is a good question—because a properly tied skein helps avoid tangles and frustration when you process the yarn to set the twist.

After you have spun and plied your singles, you need to take your yarn off the bobbin or spindle and make it into a skein. A niddy-noddy simplifies skein-making. Niddy-noddies are designed to produce different sizes of skeins—the most common size makes a 2-yard skein.

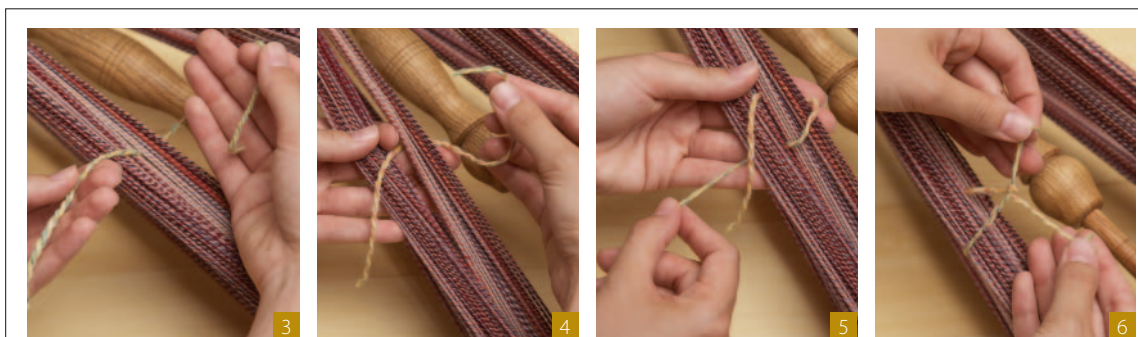
If you are going to enter your yarn into a skein

competition, most judges prefer a 2-yard skein tied in several places to secure it. You can make figure-eight ties out of the same yarn as the skein or use a contrasting color yarn to make the ties easier to find. It has been my experience that this does not make a difference to most judges as long as the ties are neat and all one type of yarn. After tying the skein, trim the ends of the ties to about 1 inch.

After retirement and learning to spin from Maggie Casey, *Pat Noah* of Gill, Colorado, has been involved in many spinning activities.



After winding the yarn on the niddy-noddy (1), tie the end of the yarn to the beginning of the yarn with a bow tie (2).



Before taking the yarn off the niddy-noddy, space four figure-eight ties (with a square or overhand knot) evenly around the skein. **3–6**) Select the section of the skein to be tied, divide it in half, and weave the tying yarn around, through the center, back around, and through the center again, making a figure-eight shape. If you want to dye the yarn later, do not make these ties so tight that they prevent the dye from completely saturating the yarn. If you have wound a very fine or slick yarn (such as silk), you may need six or eight ties. If you have wound a thick skein, you may need longer ties to weave two or three figure eights through the skein.



Remove the skein from the niddy-noddy.

# Plying on a Spindle

By Maggie Casey



Wind yarn from spindle to ball.

1



Place each ball of yarn under its own flowerpot and pass the end of the yarn through the drainage hole.

2

**P**lying on a spindle is easy! In fact, there are many ways to do it: Andean plying, multiple spindles, center-pull ball, etc. I've tried them all and find that I make my best yarn when I transfer the yarn from my spindle to a storage device before plying. Small balls and clay flowerpots work well; the balls hold the yarn and the pots hold the ball. It is a trick Rita Buchanan taught at *Spin-Off* Autumn Retreat (SOAR) one year. You can also use weaving bobbins and a lazy kate to hold your singles, just as you would for plying on a wheel.

To transfer the yarn from my spindle, I use a shoe box with a hole punched in the side as a spindle holder. The box keeps my spindle steady so I have both hands for winding.

## 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.

## Plying with a lazy kate

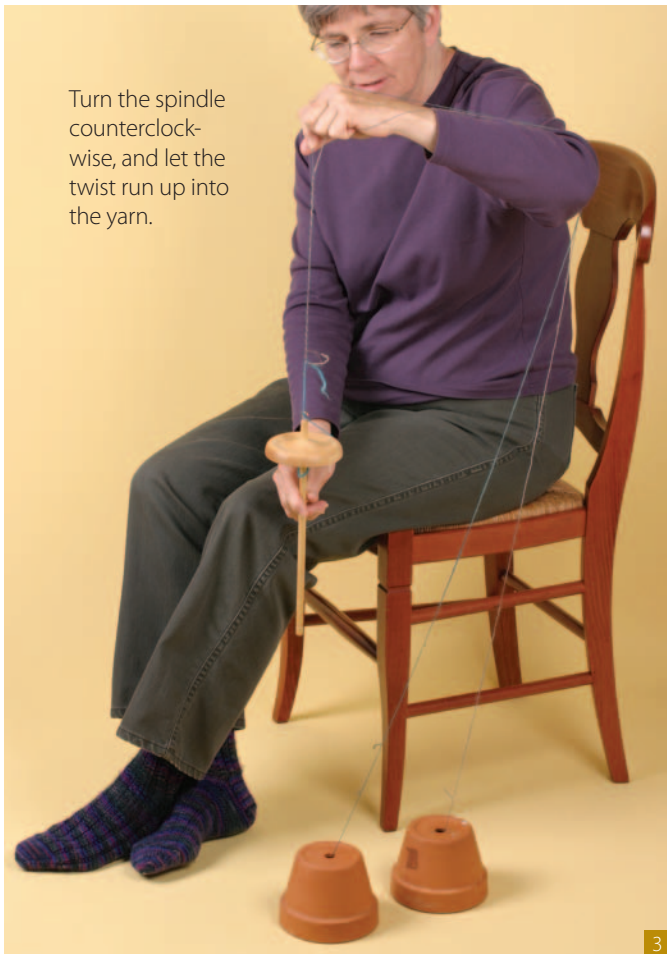
If you are a weaver or have a friend who is—try this method. Put a boat shuttle bobbin on a bobbin winder and wind the singles from your spindle (secured in the shoe box) onto the bobbin just as if you were winding a bobbin for weaving. A smoothly wound bobbin makes plying a breeze. Fill a second bobbin, put the bobbins on a lazy kate, and you are ready to go.

## Plying on your spindle

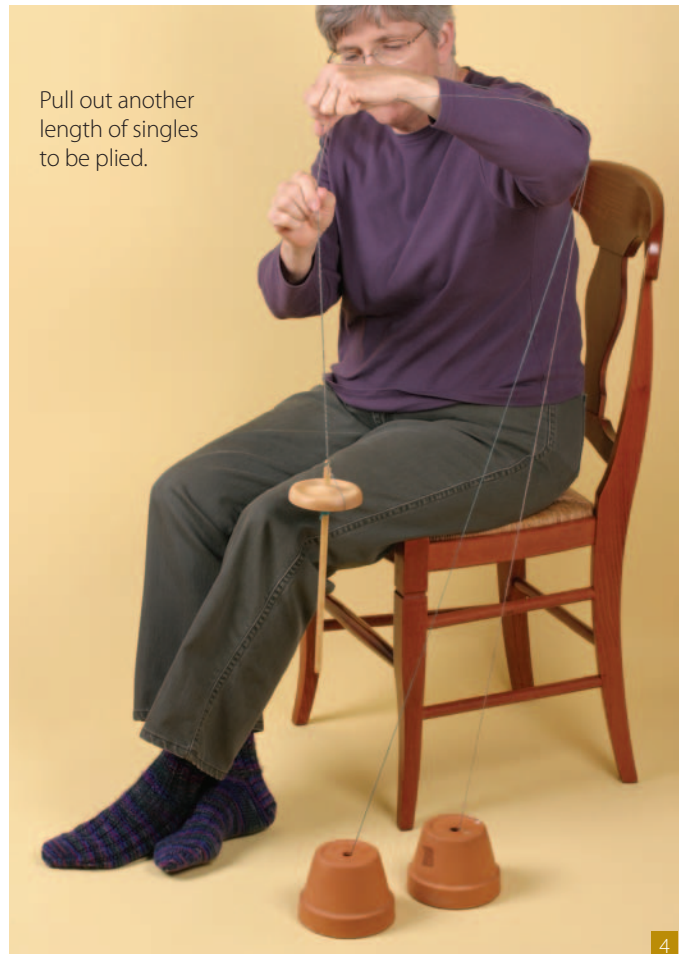
Tie your two singles to the leader of your spindle with an overhand knot. Hold the yarns in your fiber hand with a finger between them so they won't twist together until you are ready. With your twist hand, turn the spindle counter-clockwise or opposite to the direction your singles were spun. After the spindle starts turning, slide the twist hand up and pull down lengths of yarn, letting the plying twist run into this



Turn the spindle counterclockwise, and let the twist run up into the yarn.



Pull out another length of singles to be plied.



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. I tend to spin the yarn at a 90-degree angle, but I ply holding my fiber hand halfway between my shoulder and waist and letting the spindle hang straight down.

### Helpful hints

- 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.
- Let the yarn rest overnight to relax the twist before plying.
- I find it helps to keep tension on the singles by having them come over my shoulder, but see what feels comfortable to you.

When your spindle is full, 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.

While your yarn is drying—dream of all the wonderful ways you can use it!

*Maggie Casey* author of *Start Spinning* (Interweave, 2008) and *Start Spinning DVD* (Interweave, 2009), spends her day working and teaching at Shuttles, Spindles, and Skeins. in Boulder, Colorado. She loves teaching spinning because she learns so much from her students.



If you have a bobbin winder (for weaving), wind your spindle yarn onto weaving bobbins to make plying more manageable.

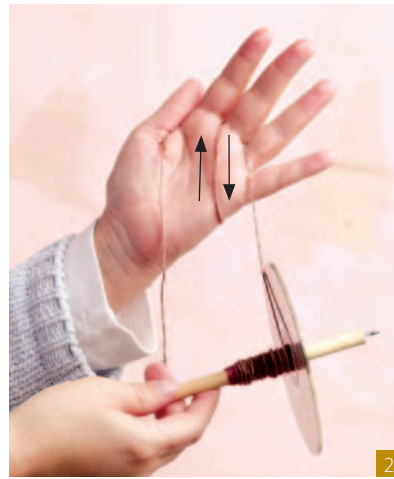
# Andean Plying

By Amy Clarke Moore

**N**amed for the virtuoso spinners who spin and ply while tending their flocks and walking great distances in the Andes, Andean plying is an ingenious technique for plying a small amount of yarn from a spindle. Start with just a few yards to get the hang of this technique. You won't want to ply large amounts of yarn this way because it gets cumbersome and it is inconvenient to be, literally, tied up for large amounts of time—but for a short length of yarn, it's very handy.



1 Hold the yarn supply (either in a ball or on the spindle) in your right hand, and the end of the yarn with your thumb on your left hand.



2 Pull yarn around the back of your left hand and loop the yarn over your middle finger.



3 Go back around the back of your hand again, by the way of your pinkie finger.



4 Travel around the back of your hand, around the base of your thumb, and then to the front and loop around your middle finger again—this time with the yarn going first around the right of your finger, then back to the front of your hand, to travel to the back of your hand by way of the base of your thumb.



5 Repeat steps 2 through 4 until you reach the end of the yarn. Keep the yarn loose around your middle finger so that you don't cut off the circulation to your finger.



6 Pull the yarn off the middle finger and pull the yarn bracelet down to your wrist. Hold both ends of the yarn together to ply them (in the opposite direction they were spun) from the yarn bracelet on your wrist. The yarn will pull off easily.