



Gossamer Felt from Icelandic Fleece

I have always wanted to make felt from my Icelandic fleeces. I had read that the fleece could be felted easily, but having seen felt made I realised that I had neither the time nor the muscle that was required for making it. THEN I was introduced to gossamer felt, and attended a day's practical Course on how to make this. The Course was run by Helen Melvin (www.fieryfelts.co.uk).

Gossamer felt is so easy to make! We used Merino 100's - the sheep version of silk! - during the Course, but I wondered if my drumcarded Icelandic fleece could also be used to make this fine felt. It might not be quite as silky but it would certainly be lightweight as the air would be trapped between the fibres.

Filled with enthusiasm from the Course I set to, and could not believe the speed with which my gossamer felted Icelandic fleece square was made! I made another square and sandwiched some slivers of coloured silk thread between the layers. This turned out OK too. So then I attempted to make a whole scarf and was delighted with the results. A few unexpected "lacy" bits (OK, holes), but not bad for a first attempt!

I was also shown how to make Lacy Gossamer felt and Structured Lace felt whilst on the Course. I'm sure Icelandic fleece could be used for these too.

Helen said that ultra fine Merino gives three great gifts to the felt maker. Firstly you can make very fine felt, so fine that each layer is partly transparent; secondly, it felts very fast; and thirdly, it feels very fine and soft against the skin. Well, Icelandic fleece can match those gifts although I acknowledge that it is not quite as soft against the skin. Possibly splitting the tog and thel of the Icelandic fleece, and just using the thel would produce extra softness. An experiment for another day!

Items Required to Make Gossamer Felt

- Bubble wrap
- Olive oil soap (produces little lather & is good for your hands)
- Cold water
- Empty Fairy Liquid bottle or washed plastic milk container with holes punched in lid
- Old towels (to soak up water spillage & to dry your hands)
- Washed and carded Icelandic fleece in whatever colours you fancy
- Possibly threads of spun wool or tog to put between layers of felt

How to Make Gossamer Felt

Place a towel on the flat surface that you are going to use to make your felt. Place the bubble wrap on top of this with its flat surface uppermost and bubbles underneath (unless you want a textured pattern).

Split the carded fleece into several sections lengthways. Hold one of these lengths and gently pull off a very fine tuft of 2 - 3 inches and place this on the bubble wrap. Continue to pull off further tufts and lay these down to slightly overlap the one adjacent to each until you have laid out a row of about 12 inches.

Lay out a second row overlapping the first like the tiles on a roof.

Continue with these rows until your piece is 12 inches long.

With DRY hands pat down the fibres.

Lay down further fine tufts of fibres in the same way to cover any gaps that now show up. Decorate the surface with any bits of yarn or silk, silkcap, etc, that you want - you don't have to do this though.

Then cover with a second layer of fibres at right angles to the first.

Again, pat the fibres down with dry hands and fill in any obvious gaps.

Sprinkle the surface of your fibre square with cold water until it is wet all over.

Thoroughly soap up your hands with the olive oil soap until they are very wet and covered in lather.

Carefully pat the soap from your hands into the fibre square until the soapy water has soaked into all the fibres. Keep soaping up your hands so that the fibres do not stick to them.

Then very gently start rubbing sections of the square with your hands or fingers - if you don't like the feel of the fibres you can use a crumpled up plastic bag.

As you start to rub pull the felt in towards the centre rather than pushing the fibres away from you which can cause holes to appear in the felt.

Increase the pressure as the fibres start to firm up and you cannot pull them up into a tuft.

Try and keep the shape of the square.

Crumple up the felt in your hands several times until you are happy that the fibres have all felted together.

The more you continue to felt the fibre the more it will shrink and the thicker it will become, so don't felt it too much!

When you have finished felting the square, rinse it out under cold water, then lay it out to dry. Once dry you can iron it flat.

Gossamer Felt Scarf

To make a scarf you will need a long length of bubble wrap. You have to lay out the fibres as above, sprinkle with water, partly roll it in the bubble wrap, then add on the next section, and so on until you reach the required length.

Then you have to unroll the whole thing and start soaping it in sections as above until you have soaped up the whole thing and can begin felting it.

Helen Melvin has produced a booklet about felting which includes sections on gossamer felting, lacy gossamer felting, and structured lace felting. These can be ordered via her website.

Happy felting!

Jill Tyrer©

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