

THE GLORIOUS ART OF MAKING A FLAT PIECE OF HANDMADE FELT ...IN A NUTSHELL !

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This worksheet is a culmination of years of practical experience making felt, and is a combination of many techniques learnt from others who have been so very generous in sharing their skills and from my own experience, trial and error.

Materials Needed

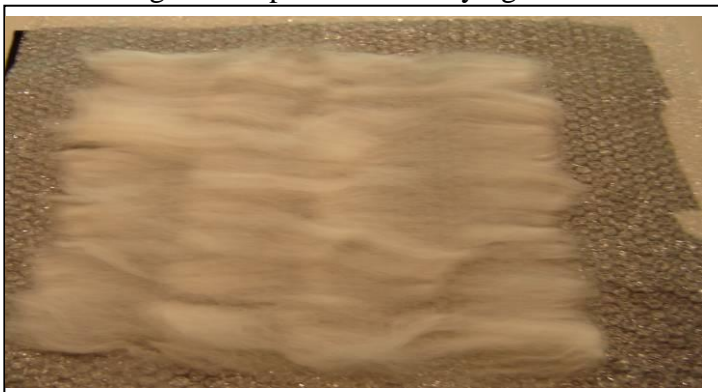
- Two same size pieces of bubble wrap (bubbles 1cm or smaller) at least one third bigger than the finished size felt you wish to make.
- One piece of stiff tulle netting big enough to cover the bubble wrap with a 5cm over lap all round.
- bucket filled with 1 litre warm water and 1-2 teaspoons of lux pure soap flakes
One or two old towels.

1. Place a thick towel on a bench or table for protection of work surface. Place sheet of bubble wrap, **bubbles up** on top of towel.

2. Lay your wool out **one third bigger** than you require it as the felting and fulling process shrinks the wool by approximately one third (more for harder felt). If you want a really hard piece of felt allow 50% shrinkage. Begin by laying a fine layer of wool tops. The most effective way to pull off even tufts of wool is to hold the length of wool top in one hand and grasp the entire width of the end of the wool between the fingertips and palm of the other hand. Only pull on the last cm of the wool to ensure an even, fine layer. Gently pull the wool and hopefully a very fine even layer will come away. **If the tuft is too thick you are pulling too far down the length of the wool top.**



3. There are two ends of the wool you have pulled off (drafted), I call them “floaty” and “stumpy” ends. Place this fine tuft down on to the bubble wrap making sure the “stumpy” end is on the edge of the piece. When laying out the wool **leave a 5cm frame of bubble wrap with**



no wool coverage around the edges of your piece as the wool spreads out when wet. Place the next tuft of wool down at the edge of the first horizontally-overlap slightly (half cm) Continue to place wool in this manner until the piece is the width you desire .

After you have laid the wool out to the desired width it is time to add the next **row**. Overlap (half cm) the

“floaty ends” of this tuft with the floaty ends of the already laid out wool. If done correctly, you will achieve a shingling effect that is even and fine (hopefully!). Continue laying out the fibres until you have the size and shape that you want. Now it is time for the second layer (white or coloured). Lay out in the same manner **but at a 90 degree**

angle from the first layer. If you want a thicker felt add more thin layers rather than thick layers. Thin layers give a good quality felt. Check for thin spots and fill in if necessary with tufts. Thin spots will be weak spots or holes in your felt. If you want a thicker piece of felt add more layers at right angles each time



5. Now add your decoration. Use the wool as you would collage or paint. Pull off fine tufts of different colours, use commercial spun or homespun pure wool, pieces of pre-felt that have been cut up into suitable shapes, pieces of fine cotton or silk gauze. Silk fibres finely pulled out (drafted) can be added at this stage and curls of mohair (cover with a fine cobweb of wool to aid it sticking on). Let your imagination run riot. **Have fun!**

6. When you are happy with the design carefully cover the whole piece with the netting, **making sure the netting extends over the edges of the wool.**



7. Get your bucket of water ready and dip an old plastic grocery bag into the soapy water and press the very wet bag onto your net covered wool soaking the fibres. Start in the center and work your way out to the edges. Use the



palms of your hands to press down, wetting the wool through and pressing out the air. **Do not rub just press the water through.** Make sure the piece is wet right the way through. Pay special attention to the edges as these can stay dry if not careful. The net keeps the wool and pattern from moving and stops the wool from sticking to your hands. Check to see how wet the wool is by pressing your hand down on the netting- if suds and water pool up between your fingers then the wool is too wet. **If the wool is too wet the fibres will float around on each other rather than felting to each other.** Dab with a towel to absorb the excess if this is the case. Also, be careful not to use too much soap. **It should not be sudsy at all.** The wool should look completely flat. If there are bubbles or raised spots then it is not wet enough. Add more water. On some simple pieces you can go straight to rolling now but if your piece has a very complicated pattern, uses mixed



fabrics and fibres or is a 3d template piece of felt definitely do step 8.

8. Remove the netting and replace with the second sheet of bubble wrap, make sure the bubbles are face down on the wool. You should have a "bubble sandwich", **wool sandwiched between two layers of bubbles.** Find an old recycled plastic shopping bag, sprinkle a little soapy water over the top layer of bubble wrap and start **rubbing the bubble wrap all over in a**

circular motion with the scrunched up bag or your soapy hand, whichever you find best. The water on the top is just for slippage. If the water dries up add more to enable easy rubbing. The bubbles massage the wool and begin the felting process. Rub for approximately 20 minutes or until the wool fibres cease to move if you rub them with a finger across the surface. Try the pinch test. If the wool is at the soft felt stage try and pinch some of the fibres between your fingers and pull up. The wool should come up as a whole. If the fibres separate more rubbing is needed.



9 Once the wool has reached the soft –felt stage it is time for rolling. This continues felting and fulls (shrinks and hardens) the wool. **Take off the top layer of bubble wrap and put aside.**

Roll up the soft felted wool tightly in the bottom layer of bubble wrap. You may like to put a dowel in the middle of the roll and others tie the bundle tightly with tapes to keep it together, I find I can manage with just rolling it carefully. Make sure it is resting on your wet towel so it doesn't slip about on the table.

Roll the bundle gently at first, increasing pressure slowly over time. Do about 100 rolls, unroll and rotate the felt. Roll back up. The felt shrinks in the direction it is rolled, this means you have to rotate the felt so it has been rolled four ways in total. At least 100 rolls each direction. **Continue until the felt has shrunk by about one third (or up to 50% if you want a very hard piece) and has a bubbly hardened texture.** To continue the fulling process you can now **throw the felt onto a hard surface** for a few minutes,



savage but fun!

You should now have a hard, well made piece of felt. The hardening of the felt is important as it will make it more serviceable and less likely to pill.

Lastly rinse out the soap from your piece of felt, then give it a vinegar rinse. Dash of vinegar (quarter cup) to a basin or sink of water. Soak for a few minutes, rinse in more clean water. Spin your felt in the spin cycle of your washing machine for 30 seconds or wrap in a dry towel to remove excess water, shape and lay flat to dry in the shade. Felt can be pressed with a steam iron on the wrong side on wool /silk setting.

Enjoy! Enjoy! Enjoy!

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