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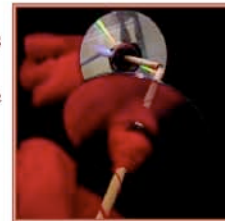
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## Making Do: Spinning On A Budget



Sometimes spinners are short on money or time, but of course, we still want to spin. Spinning can be soothing when you're financially strapped or stressed by work. How do you maintain enjoyment of your hobby when you can't afford to splurge? Here are several tips to help you keep spinning through difficult times.

1. **Stick to simple tools.** Throughout history, most spinners worked with few pieces of equipment. Although there are many kinds of outstanding spindles being made, you can make a functional spindle for less than five dollars. By keeping your tools simple, you can focus on the mechanics of spinning and slow down to enjoy the process.



A CD spindle

Beginning spinners can learn the basics with a few ounces of roving and a spindle made from a toy wheel or a CD. Instructions for making an affordable spindle can be found on the Internet.

If you are a beginner, a book with good instructions on how to make spindles and begin spindling is Connie Delaney's, *Spindle Spinning: From Novice to Expert*. Check your local library for a copy. If the library doesn't have it, ask them to inter-library loan it, or to purchase it for their collection.

Experienced spinners know that equipment alone does not produce a fine yarn. If you aren't cut out for a drop spindle and you're in need of a spinning wheel, you can spend very little by purchasing a Babe wheel or a second hand spinning wheel. Avoid bargain antique spinning wheels until you're able to evaluate whether the wheel is complete and ready to spin again. Restoring an old spinning wheel can be costly and takes time.

What if you want to process raw fleece? Raw fleece does not cost as much as roving and some spinners enjoy spinning in the grease or with hand processed wool. It takes time and money to acquire tools like a drum carder, hand cards, or combs. The easiest solution is an old fashioned one. Some kinds of wool can be spun from the lock. Others need to be teased into a fluffy cloud. Teasing or spinning from the lock requires no special tools to process wool. Another easy substitute for hand cards are

### Dealing With Problem Fleeces

I cope with very dirty fleece by taking time to wash it thoroughly, sometimes more than once. Teasing or picking out fleeces can eradicate a lot of vegetable matter, although not all of it. Using combs or a flicker card can also salvage a vegetable matter filled fleece. I will even stop every so often, while spinning, to pull out the vegetable matter that I missed in processing. Vegetable matter sometimes pops out on its own when spinning fine yarn. The only fleece filled with vegetable matter that I absolutely avoid is one filled with burrs or prickles. These are next to impossible to remove.

Some fleeces have a break in the staple, usually due to an animal's illness or malnutrition. If there is a long staple length before the break, each lock can be flicked, combed or even cut to get rid of the short nepps left by the break in the fleece.

Other wool can be stained or have yolk on it. As long as the wool is still sound, you can dye this wool before spinning and then card it to have a heathered yarn, or dye after spinning to get a greater color variation. If the stain won't wash out, it will often absorb dye at a different rate than the unstained wool, creating stunning color gradations in the finished product.

pet combs or brushes. A small pet comb can often serve as a flicker or you can use two for hand cards.



Wool fleece on the shearing table

2. **Garbage In, Garbage Out.** Many spinners insist on only spinning the highest quality fiber. These spinners work to produce an heirloom item and insist that their time is worth the money they spend on supplies. What if you can't afford the best? I've often been the recipient of free or low cost fleece with faults, offered to me by spinning or farming friends. In order to make high quality yarn, I've had to educate myself

to know how to deal with less than perfect fiber. See **Dealing With Problem Fleeces**.



Gerald Crowe shearing

It's helpful to know that spinning fiber is priced just like everything else. There are great bargains for beautiful fiber. There are also low quality fibers being sold for high prices. There are even expensive, high quality fibers that are worth every cent. It helps if you know how to identify good fiber when you see it. This comes with experience. If you have a spinning friend who really knows her stuff, ask her to take you along when she goes shopping for fleece at a festival or state fair. Go to a reputable farmer's shearing and take time to learn about wool while helping him to skirt fleece. Ask the shearer to tell you about each fleece as it comes off the sheep's back. Most shearers are thrilled to share what they know. If none of these options are available to you, ask questions at your local spinning shop or guild.

The best book to read on this subject is by Jane and Nola Fournier, called *In Sheep's Clothing*. This book not only explains the uses for wool from many sheep breeds, but it also explains what to do with a fleece that is stained, cotted, or damaged in some other way. Again, if you can't afford to buy it, borrow it from a library. Consider joining an email list or listerv. Spinners from all over the world will share their advice on washing and processing fiber, spinning difficulties and many other subjects.

Fiber is strange. Sometimes I spend \$11 a pound, and end up disappointed. Other times, I'm handed 35 lbs of free fleece, and it's a joy to spin. Your spinning time is what you make of it. Don't waste your time on *trash* regardless of what you pay for it. Don't let your spinning frustrate you. Instead, educate yourself to know quality when you see it.

3. **Time versus Money.** If you have the luxury of time, this

might be your chance to take a raw fleece, wash and hand process it, spin it up bulky weight, and knit it into a warm and durable sweater. If you lack time, consider buying roving. It's slightly more expensive but saves a lot of time. Spin fine, knit or weave a complicated pattern, and lengthen the time spent enjoying your expensive fiber.

When you've got the essentials but lack the time or cash for fun, consider working on something small and ornate. Finely spun exotics take longer to spin and knit or weave. . A lace scarf or shawl, made from cashmere or qiviut, takes a long time to make, but you'll cherish it forever. On the other hand, if you're cold, you may need something warm, cheap and functional. During graduate school, I made several sweaters this way. Our old house was drafty. We couldn't turn up the heat. Instead, I spun bulky yarn and knit up sweaters on size 13 needles. Those old sweaters are worn but still serve their purpose. I didn't need a masterpiece. I needed to stay warm.

What if you want to make something spectacular? A friend was moving to Minneapolis and I longed to make her something special. I found a chocolate



Hat, scarf, and mitten

brown bag of alpaca at a local spinning shop. On a trip to California, I bought tussah silk, dyed gold, on sale. I had some brown merino in my stash that matched. For \$20, I spun for weeks. I knit Fair Isle mittens, a scarf of double thickness, and a hat to match. My friend knew I didn't have much money and offered to pay for supplies. I accepted. My gift was my skill.



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## Making Do: Spinning On A Budget



● **Use Available Resources.** In most parts of North America farmers receive very little for their wool clip and it is often cheaper for them to throw it away than pay to deliver it to the wool pool. Meet your local sheep farmers and help them to sell their wool to fiber artists. Many people are starting to grow cotton in their backyards or gather cotton that has fallen off the trucks after a harvest in cotton growing regions. Dogs, cats and rabbits might have spinnable fiber. Have you checked? Your pets' fiber is free, and you have as much as they can shed.

Yard sales, junk sales and auctions often have cheap spinning and weaving equipment no one else wants. I bought a wooden Italian swift, worth about \$50, for \$2.50 at a yard sale. The find thrilled me, but no one else at the sale knew what it was. My husband went on a business trip to the Netherlands and found a used spinning wheel for under \$5. He got it home in pieces, transporting it through town on a bike, through Europe in a van, and then, packed half in his checked luggage and brought half as carry-on. Once I refurbished it, I sold it for \$100.

A small flock  
of sheep

● **Network and Become Generous.** Teach others, volunteer, and reap the returns. If you let people know you are a spinner, sooner or later someone is going to ask you to demonstrate spinning. It might be for the farmer's market or vacation bible school, but when they ask, take them up on the offer. It gives you a chance to educate future spinners. You never know what you'll get in return.

I once helped a friend demonstrate spinning at a festival at Cedarock Historical Park in Alamance County, North Carolina. They had a flock of white crossbred Columbia sheep. Several months later when they sheared those sheep, I ended up with 35 lbs of fine white wool.



Another friend put me in touch with a local farmer who raises colored mixed breed sheep for fun. His wool is Romney quality or finer, but he used to throw it out. He told me how he once dropped off a huge bag of free fleece in town for a spinner. She never even thanked him. For years afterward, he didn't look for a market for his wool because he thought it wasn't worth it. I saw his shearing

day invitation and the present of 6 fleeces as incredibly generous. When he declined any payment for the fleece I sent him a copy of In

Albert  
Petersen's  
sheep

Sheep's Clothing by Nola & Jane Fournier. That book was nowhere near as valuable as his present to me, but it made the exchange a positive experience for both of us.

If someone gives you cheap or free fiber, consider making them a present out of their fiber. See what they'd like. Sometimes a nice note and a photo of you wearing your sweater from their fleece will do, because this will help the shepherd sell more fiber in the future. If your benefactor craves thick winter socks, make socks. Do whatever you can to thank someone who has given you so many hours of pleasure.

● **Treat Yourself Nicely.** Spinning is your hobby; make things for yourself. When you treat others well, think about yourself, too. I get burnt out when I make lots of handmade presents for others; especially when they might not appreciate it. Consider making things for yourself. Remember that buying yourself a sweater, afghan, or hat would cost you money. Why not spend the same amount of money on luscious fiber, and start from there. It'll take longer, but you won't spend any more cash. Your time with the spinning wheel is enjoyable and the joy your handspun item gives you far outweighs what you could buy at a department store.

Acquire good quality tools when you can. Every so often, you may get a bonus at work or a present from a family member. Consider investing in your hobby. Replace those dog combs with proper wool carders. If you compare the cost of spinning with many other hobbies you will find it offers good value. Spinning related purchases can be good investments. Old fiber oriented magazines often sell for lots of money. Spinning wheels may be resold for what you paid, or even gain in value. If you can stand parting with your fiber arts investments in the future, you may make money as well as enjoying the experience. Invest in your future as a fiber artist. You deserve it.



Luscious spinning fiber

Joanne Seiff is a writer, educator and spinner. She lives in Bowling Green, Kentucky with her biology professor husband, and her dog, Harry. Her fiber-oriented work has appeared in Spin-Off, Interweave Knits, and Belle Armoire Magazines. Her handspun yarn and hand knits have won ribbons at the North Carolina and Tennessee State Fairs. In 2004, her knitted art won an award at the US Bank Celebration of the Arts Exhibition at the Kentucky Museum. Seiff hopes to integrate traditional women's skills into a 21st century feminist perspective in order to give these skills the credit they deserve.



#### Resources

- Spindle Spinning: From Novice to Expert by Connie Delaney, Interweave Press ISBN:
- In Sheep's Clothing by Jane and Nola Fournier. Interweave Press Inc. ISBN: 1-883010-11-X
- [Spin List](#) an email discussion group
- [FiberNet](#) an email discussion group