

what is felt? felt is dense, matted wool. this technique is a traditional method of felting, sometimes called direct or wet felting. starting with wool roving (wool before it's been spun into yarn) the process involves hot water, dish soap and friction. the tiny fibers on each strand of wool lift up, and become interlocked with each other to form one dense material.

materials needed: wool roving; a shallow container (cookie sheet, tupperware); dish soap (for natural soaps, seventh generation is the best brand; dawn, ivory, or most commercial brands work great too); hot and cold water (your tap water may be hot enough, if not, heat some up in a tea kettle--it should be hot, but not too hot to put your hands in).



step 1: laying out the wool
in your shallow, waterproof dish: pull small tufts of wool from the roving... hold the roving loosely with one hand and gently pull with the other 4-6 inches away.



lay these tufts of wool all in the same direction.

this is the first layer of fiber.



place a second layer of fiber on top of the first layer, but with the fibers perpendicular to the first.



arrange a third layer perpendicular to the second.

an accent color can be added at this stage, orient the fibers in the same direction.

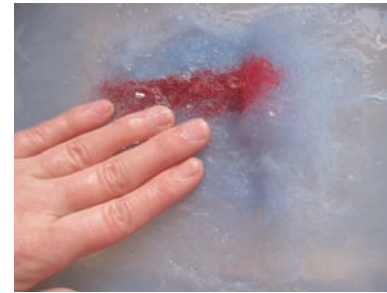


step 2: wetting the wool

drizzle a small amount of dish soap on top of the wool,



then pour a small amount of hot water over the top.

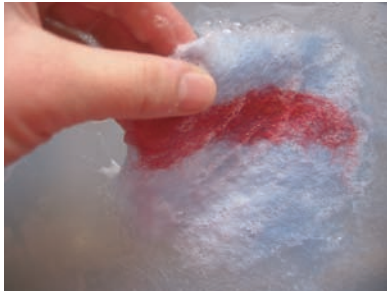


(pour slowly or let the water drip through your fingers, to avoid too much water at once, which will float the fibers apart)



press down gently with your fingertips until the wool is saturated.

press straight down to avoid pulling the fibers apart.



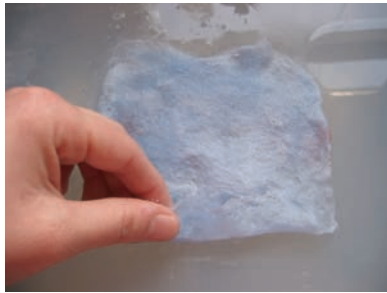
step 3: working the wool

continue to apply gentle pressure in small circles, until you can pick the felt up in one peice. turn the felt over.



the felt will continue to become denser and thicker as you continue to work it.

one of the best ways to apply pressure is between the tops of your palms.



gently fold in the ends of the fibers on each side for a more even edge (if you want a more lacy edge, you can omit this step).



another way is to fold the felt in half and rub the felt against itself.

keep in mind that the felt will shrink more in the direction of pressure, so keep turning the felt and working in multiple directions.



continue to work the felt on the second side.



step 4: rinsing

rinse the felt with hot water. you can continue to work the felt as before (this is called 'fulling') as much or as little as you wish. it will continue to become denser.



test the felt with the thread test: if you can pick the felt up in one peice when you pinch a few fibers, it's felted. if instead the fibers separate, continue to work the felt.



finally, rinse with cool water (make sure all the soap is rinsed out, as it will damage the wool over time). dry flat.