A Message from the President

Greetings all,
The weeds, and the lawn, are already ahead of me. The sheep would be very happy to assist in this, of course, but I will need to tackle this myself. May is always the most labor-intensive month for me, and a favorite none the less, as there is little that I enjoy more than watching the progress of old plant friends returning from their winter rest.

Unless it might be old spinning friends, I think. Our visit from Karen Stern of Windsong Farm in Burdett has been postponed. The fiber festival season has begun, and she is busy preparing for the Bouckville event. You can visit her website at windsongfarm.com for an overview of the operation; there is much more to keep her busy than fiber! Ellie and I will have examples of Wensleydale/Cotswold in the form of fleece, locks, and finished products, to demonstrate the versatility and loveliness of the fiber. We are prepared to provide info on how to use it in felting if anyone is interested.

Our condolences and caring thoughts go to Sue Quick, whose sister and best friend Mary passed away on May 2. We have you in our hearts.

We will also be discussing our upcoming dyeing adventure set for the June meeting. The guild will provide some fiber to experiment with, and you may bring along some item of your own. More on that at the meeting.

See you there!
**Fermented Suint Fleece Washing**

A way of washing fleece not for the faint of heart.

By Angelika St. Laurent

A raw fleece is for me the perfect base to start a new project. I love the smell and the feel of raw wool. I enjoy every step of washing, drying, carding or combing, until I finally get to spin it. However, washing fleeces with hot water takes a lot of energy, especially if there is a lot of fleece to get clean. So I was intrigued, when I came across a ravelry.com thread discussing the Fermented Suint Mix Method of washing fleece, which promised to remove lanolin from a fleece without the need of scouring at 140°F or higher, and no need for any kind of detergent.

The underlying mechanism of this method is as follows: The sweat of sheep is high in potassium salts. Sheep run around wearing a lot of warm wool, so they tend to sweat quite a bit. Since sheep don't bathe frequently, the dried sweat accumulates in the fleece as a substance called suint. Suint is water soluble and often a bit yellowish in color. Normally when washing a fleece, I would remove the suint along with a fair amount of dirt that tends to accumulate in the wool by cold soak or two, before scouring. However, for the fermented suint method it is essential that the suint remains in the fleece. Rather than rinsing the suint and dirt out, the skirted fleece gets submerged in all its sweaty, dusty glory into the fermentation vat. Then it's left to sit. The fermentation vat has barely enough water to cover the entire fleece. Slowly microbial activity begins to convert the potassium salts in the suint and the lanolin into a form of natural soap, thereby cleaning the fleece without any further input of heat or human labor. This microbial soap making seems to happen already to some degree, while the wool is still on the sheep, providing a bit of a self-cleaning mechanism. So far, so good.

Unfortunately, the microbial community in the fermentation vat does not restrict itself to producing nice biological soap, but it also produces substantial stench similar to that of a manure pile. As a rule of thumb, the first fleece submerged into a newly started fermentation vat is likely to be cleaned by the time it begins to stink. Once the first fleece is removed, more fleeces can be submerged into the already stinky fermentation vat thereby adding more suint and lanolin to feed an already active microbial community and can be cleaned in considerably shorter time.

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**Fibery Events**

BSHG Meeting, Sat. May 14th, “Wensley Dale/Cotswold sheep fleece discussion”

BSHG Meeting, Sat. June 11th, “Dyeing for Color”

See Wayne for further details.

**NOTE: Membership DUES ARE DUE starting in January for 1 year.**
See signup sheet at back of newsletter. Or bring $20 to the next meeting.
Once the fleece comes out of the fermentation vat, it needs to be thoroughly rinsed in order to remove the stinky fermentation liquid and the dirt that is still in there. After rinsing, the wool needs to be completely dried in order to be free of stench.

At our Guild garage sale in March, Sharon gave me two lovely fleeces from her flock. And with the weather so mild I took my chance and gave the fermented suint method a try. I submerged the first fleece into a 20 gallon garbage can full of water from my garden well. The water barely covered my fleece. Then I placed a good fitting lid on the can and waited. The lid is essential to keep excessive rain water, mosquito eggs and algae out of the fermentation vat. The lid is also very helpful to keep the developing smells from annoying neighbours and family.

Fig 1: The freshly started fermentation vat. The water barely covers the fleeces.
Four days into the experiment, there was a slightly unpleasant note mingling into the sweet sheep smell of the soaked fleece. After another seven days, the smell had changed to a very definite manure stench. I took out a handful of wool, rinsed it in a bucket of water and dried it. The result was clean, dry, grease-free wool without any bad smell. Nevertheless, I was still suspicious. What if the bad smell returned, as soon as the wool got wet again? I held my freshly dried wool under the running faucet. But to my relief, the stench was gone for good.

So the next morning I took the entire fleece out of the fermentation vat. The water in the fermentation vat had turned into an opaque, mud-brown liquid. I followed my nose in the choice of tool and took the fleece out of the vat with a pitchfork. (Smart people put their fleeces into some sort of netting, before putting them into a fermentation vat.) I let the stinky water drip off for a couple of hours and then divided the fleece into three parts and soaked each part for about an hour in 10 gallon of fresh water. I allowed the rinse water to drip off and did two more rinses. The first rinse was very dirty, the last one almost clear. Even black tips cleaned up during the rinsing. The weather was friendly and during the next few days the fleece dried and lost all bad smell. The second fleece went into the fermentation vat. After four days in the vat and three rinses it was as nice and clean as the first fleece.
**Fig 4 + 5:** Black tips, before and after the rinse. Sometimes the black tipped locks need a bit of agitation in the rinsing water.

All in all, I needed a total of 200 gallons water, no extra energy, and no detergent to clean two large fleeces leaving me with 10 pounds and 14 ounces of clean, dry wool. This is less water per pound fleece than my normal washes take. I will definitively use this method again in future. For all new raw fleeces? Probably not.

The fermented suint mix method has very clear benefits:
- It allows to wash a large quantity of fleece with comparatively little labor input, no energy costs, and less water consumption than any other method I have tried so far.
- There is very little danger of accidentally felting the wool.
- The fermentation vat can be reused. Some people keep it going for years.

It also has a few clear downsides:
- It stinks.
- The stench makes it a strictly outdoors activity, thus the success depends on the weather. Frost will slow down the fermentation process substantially. Heat can potentially speed up the microbial processes so much that the fleece might be damaged. Extended periods of humid weather can make it difficult to sufficiently dry the wool.
Membership Form

Please type or print

Date: _____________________________

Name__________________________________________________________________________

Address: _______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Preferred email: PRINT NEATLY ______________________________________________________________________________

Phone # ___________________________________________________________________________

This information will be shared with registered guild members. If you wish to remain anonymous, please let Vicki Marsted know.

Please list your wheel(s) _______________________________________________________________________________________

Do you spindle spin? Yes or No (circle)

Do you Knit? Weave? Crochet? Dye? (Natural or Chemical?):

Would you be willing to share your skills with other members (ie: teach beginners, present a meeting topic, demo to the public, etc?)

If you raise fiber animals, please list them here______________________________________________

We need your help on committee(s). If you would like to volunteer, let Sharon Gombas, our president know!!!

• Roc Day
• Programming
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Our newsletter is distributed electronically. If this is a problem, please contact Sharon Gombas.

Please fill this out and either bring it to a meeting or mail it with your check for $20 to: Vickie Marsted, 29 Lincoln St, Cortland, NY 13045
The cost for ads is $5.00 per month for non-members. Current members may submit one business-card sized classified ad per month for free. Send a check made out to BSHG to our treasurer, Vickie Marsted, 29 Lincoln Ave, Cortland, NY 13045. Send the ad in digital form to the newsletter editor, newsletter@blacksheephandspinnersguild.com. Black & white business cards are published free for current members.