

## Part 1 Introduction - Videos 1 & 2

### What we will do on this course

After a brief introduction and history of spinning and different fibre types, we will start by looking at how to spin on a high-top spindle. There is then a section on how to spin on a spinning wheel. Each section is mutually exclusive, there is no need to spin on a spindle before learning on a spinning wheel.

If you want to spindle spin, or be a 'spindler' - great if space and finance is an issue and you like all things low tech. If you want to spin on a spinning wheel, then get a wheel and learn that way.

Of course, you may want to just try it out before spending a lot of money on a spinning wheel and spindling is fine for that too. The fibre drafting skills are the same for both wheel and spindle so your efforts will not be wasted.

In this course we will learn about:

- Introduction - brief history of spinning and the pros and cons of a hand spindle versus a spinning wheel
- Fibre - different types, pre-prepared fibres and how to pre-draft fibre ready for spinning
- Spindles - different types
- How to spin on a high-top spindle
- Spinning wheels - how they work, diagram of parts, accessories
- Sourcing a spinning wheel, different makes and factors to consider, how to clean and maintain it and the advantages of spinning groups and Guilds
- How to spin on a spinning wheel
- How to ply to single threads together for a more usable yarn
- Troubleshooting and dealing with things that go wrong
- Further resources

## A tiny bit of history

Spinning has been with us since people first became farmers and maybe longer. The first time someone twisted grasses together to make a piece of rope they were spinning.



People spun whatever was available in their local area and still do to some extent. For instance, if you lived in a country where wild cotton grew, you spun cotton.

If you raised animals you spun their hair or fibre. Coarse animal hair such as that from horses, goats and cattle was used to make not only ropes and bridles but industrial belts for machinery.

When we think of spinning, we usually think of knitwear. Yet everything from fine lace underwear to anchor rope, belting for machinery, blankets and carpets are made from spun yarn.

'Belting yarn' made from horse hair is actually still produced in China and some Eastern European countries, although many Western countries now use metal 'yarn' instead.

*Spindles would have been made from whatever was available and that is still an option today as this stick spindle demonstrates.*

## What inspired you to learn to spin?

Many people want to learn to spin because they saw someone demonstrating and were inspired. Others have fibre animals such as sheep or alpacas and want to use their own fibre to create from scratch. Those who already knit, weave or crochet often want to create their own yarn to add interest to an existing hobby.

All of these are great reasons, but the best thing of all is that spinning is such a social hobby. If you want to meet likeminded people, there is nothing better.

There is a worldwide network of Guilds and most countries have their own association of weavers, spinners and dyers which is easy to find online. These welcome all levels including beginners and people meet up regularly and spin together.



*Alpacas are inquisitive animals.*

It is incredibly satisfying to create your own yarns and garments from scratch. It speaks to something deep within us when we make things from the very beginning – starting with an animal and ending up with a sweater. It is not just because people want to be self sufficient that they make their own clothes from start to finish, though.

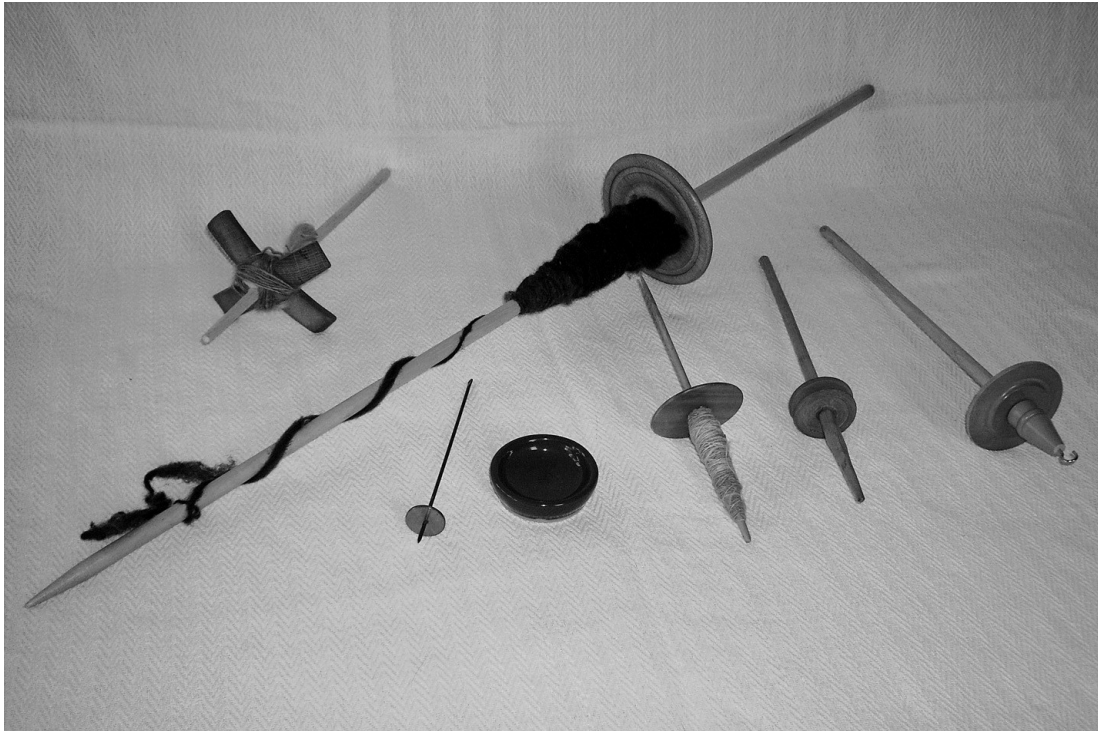
In his book *Through the Eye of a Needle* John-Paul Flintoff talks about the ethical issues present in the textile industry, even for products made in America. One way to ensure at least some of your clothes are as environmentally friendly as possible is to make them yourself with yarn spun from local fibre that can be traced from start to finish.

## **Hand spindles vs. spinning wheels**

Hand spindles came into being a long time before spinning wheels were invented and go back thousands of years. Spindle whorls are one of the commonest finds on archaeological digs and they are still used in many parts of the world, despite the perception by many of us that spinning wheels are quicker.

Anyone can make a hand spindle and the whorl (or disc that makes it spin) does not necessarily have to be round – it can be made from a square piece of ply wood or even be made from crossed sticks. To make all of your own clothes you need nothing more than a sheep or other source of fibre, five sticks and a lot of time.

With these sticks you can make both a spindle to spin the yarn and a loom and shuttle to weave cloth. There is something very powerful about knowing you have the skills to do it, although most of us would not want to have to!



*From left to right: a Turkish spindle, Navajo, tahkli and support bowl, Akha, Peruvian bottom whorl spindle and high top spindle.*

Hand spindles are a great way to start spinning without having to spend much money. Lots of spinners continue to use a spindle whether or not they get a spinning wheel and there is a whole sub-culture of spindling enthusiasts who love them because they are simple, portable and effective spinning tools in their own right. They can be tucked into a handbag or rucksack and used at times when it would be impossible to take a spinning wheel along.

You can spend quite a lot of money on a spindle and there are even special tools to go along with them. These are entirely unnecessary however and one, reasonably priced 'high top' spindle can be used for everything. Spindlers can keep on spinning whilst wandering about and talking to friends, unlike wheel spinners, who have to stop what they are doing and get up to chat. As spinners often attend spinning groups and gatherings this can be really handy. I usually have a spindle with me and spin at the bus stop, in cafés and craft fairs, whilst camping and visiting friends. It is well accepted socially and seen as interesting rather than rude.

Used correctly, high top spindles in particular are an economical, portable and easy way to make yarn.