

Part 3 Spindles - Video 4

What is a spindle?

A spindle consists of a shaft or stick usually about 15-40cm (6-16in) long which goes through the centre of a disc or whorl. The whorl keeps it spinning for longer and gives it balance. The whorl can also be square or even made from sticks. It can be either at the top or the bottom of the spindle or sometimes even in the middle. The spinner twirls the shaft and this spins the fibre into yarn. The newly spun yarn is then wound onto the spindle by hand.

The larger the circumference of the whorl, the longer and slower the spindle spins. This helps the learning process by preventing the spindle from unwinding again without you noticing. Although it is good to have a whorl with a large circumference, the spindle must also not be too heavy or it will be hard to use. It will get even heavier once it is full of yarn and the biggest drawback of a heavy spindle is that the yarn breaks more often.

Three types of spindle

There are three kinds of spindle to consider as a beginner and all serve well in the longer term too. These are the high top spindle (my personal favourite), the bottom whorl spindle and the Turkish spindle. I would recommend buying a high top spindle, with a whorl about 7.5cm (3in) across and a shaft about 20-30cm (8-12in) long. It is good to have a shaft at least 15cm (6in) long - there will otherwise not be enough room for your hand to spin the spindle when there is yarn on it. There are more detailed instructions for high top spindles later. A good weight for a spindle is 20-40g (1-2oz) – a bit more if it is a Turkish spindle.

High top spindles



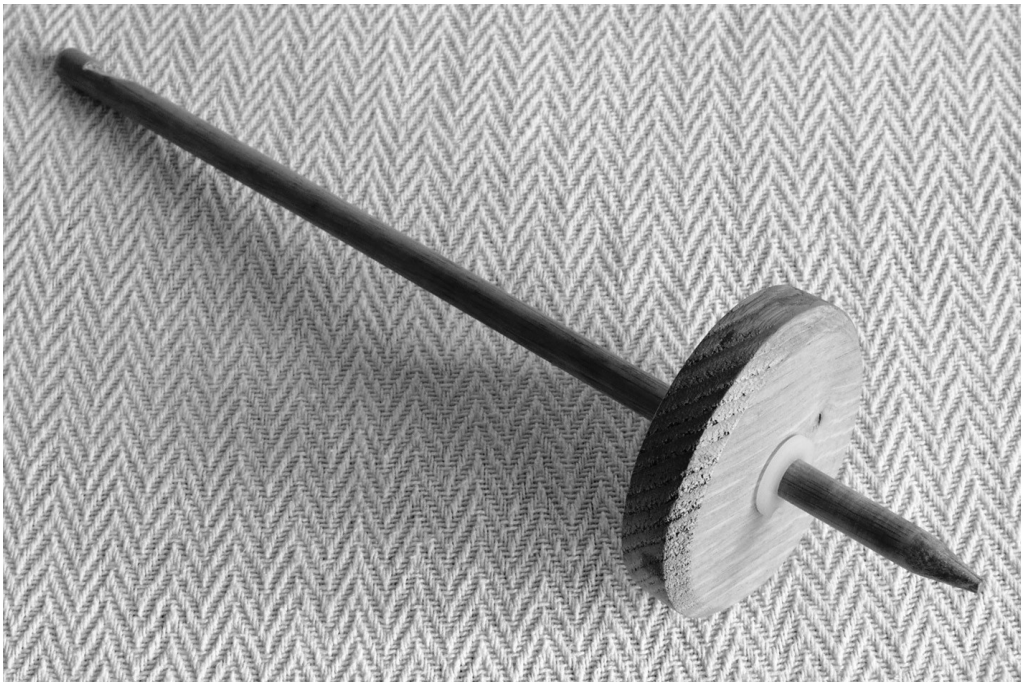
High tops are one of the easiest and most productive spindles to use. A high top spindle means you can 'roll' the spindle against your thigh and can 'kick' it by holding it between your feet and drawing one foot back against the other. This gives more speed and you can spin longer lengths of yarn at a time before winding it onto the spindle.

This will not make a lot of sense right now but will be explained later. For now, it is enough to know that thigh rolling and kicking make spindling easier and faster. Using these techniques it is possible to produce almost as much yarn on a spindle as you can on a spinning wheel, which is why high top spindles have become more popular than bottom whorl spindles in many countries.

High top spindle – note the yarn hook at the top.

Bottom whorl spindles

Most people find bottom whorl spindles slower than high tops. It takes longer to wind the yarn onto the spindle and it is not possible to 'kick' the spindle, a technique that really speeds things up. You can actually use the other high speed technique, 'thigh rolling' on a bottom whorl spindle as long as the yarn is spiralled around the shaft when it is wound onto the spindle. It is harder, though, and some people struggle to wind the yarn on in this way.

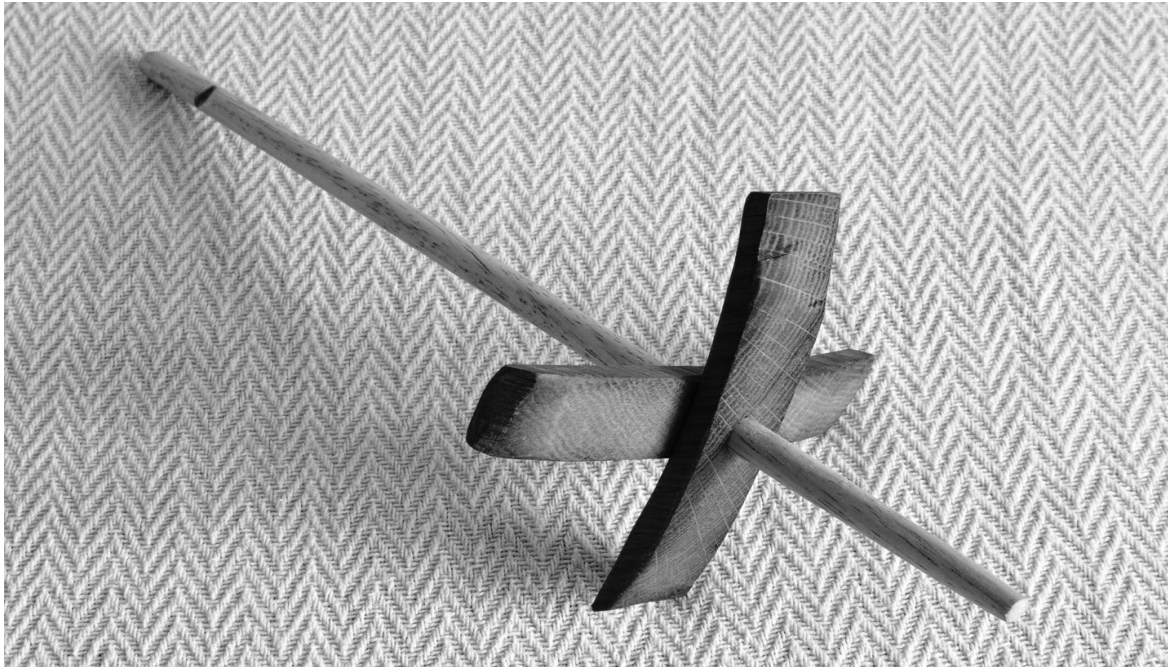


Bottom whorl spindle – the yarn notch is top left of the photo.

If you are already using a bottom whorl spindle this may be useful information. If not, ignore it and learn on a high top.

Turkish spindles

Turkish spindles are a different version of the bottom whorl spindle. Instead of a round disc (or whorl) they have two flat pieces of wood in a cross shape. These have a hole in the middle and the shaft of the spindle goes through this hole. One advantage is that they spin more slowly and keep going for longer and as a result they are relatively easy to learn on.



Turkish spindle – the yarn is wound around the cross pieces after it is spun. The yarn notch is top left of the picture.

The yarn is wound around the cross pieces in a diagonal fashion or in a two-up-one-down formation. In theory the cross pieces can then be pulled out leaving a ball of yarn. I say in theory because the yarn may become tangled if the cross pieces don't come out easily so at first it may be better to wind the yarn off by hand in the usual way.

Other kinds of spindles

These are not really for a beginner and are best ignored when starting out. You can actually do pretty much any type of spinning on one of the three spindles described above. Some people like to have different spindles just for fun, and collect them or use them for different purposes, but one is all you really need.