

Part 8 How to ply on a spinning wheel - Video 15

Is it essential to ply?

Many spinners always ply their yarn but singles yarn has a pleasing appearance and is especially good if you are spinning a multi-coloured roving as it keeps the colours separate; although there are some tricks you can use when plying to help keep the colours separate if you do want to ply multi-coloured yarn.

When you are learning, yarn tends to be overtwisted in some places and undertwisted in others so plying is probably a good idea. Sometimes people worry that singles yarn will make their knitting slant on the bias (or diagonal).

However, unless it is really over-spun it rarely does and then only when doing plain stocking stitch knitting. Any kind of stitch pattern such as moss stitch or lace reverses the direction of the yarn so the twist is neutralised. Crochet and weaving also do this so singles yarn is fine for them.

If the yarn is to be used as singles it is best to spin it from fibre that has a staple length of at least 7.5cm (3in), otherwise it may pull apart.

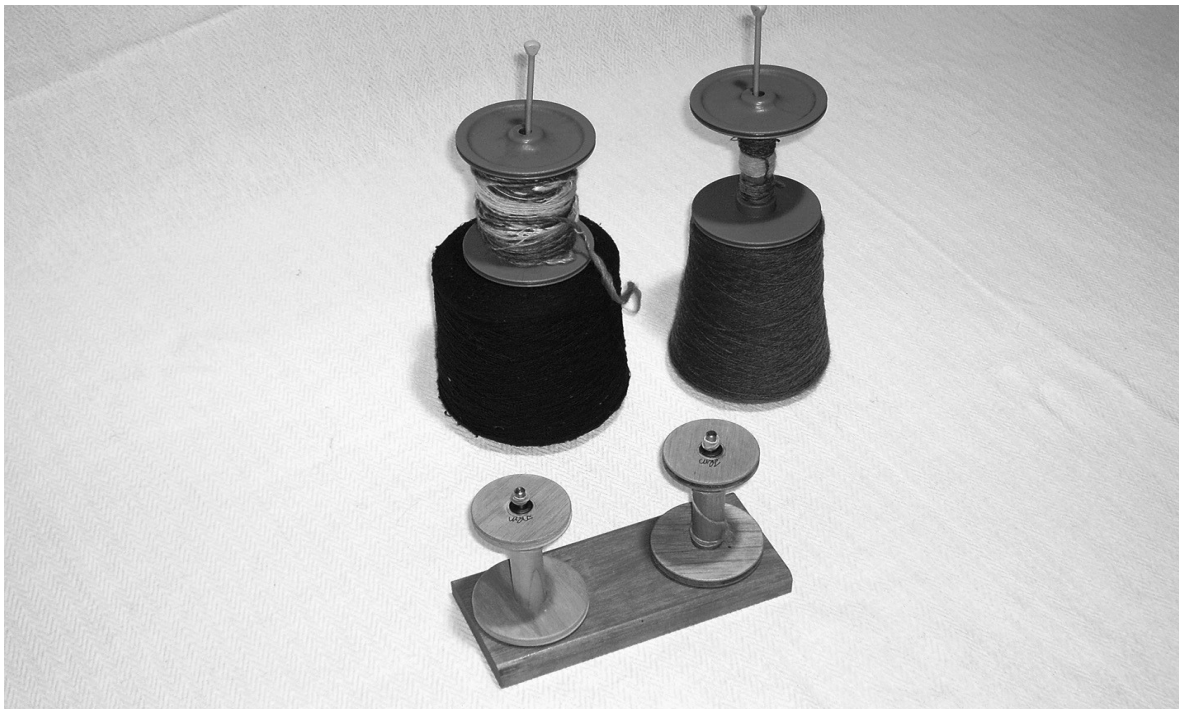
Make or buy a 'lazy kate' to hold the bobbins

Some wheels have a lazy kate actually on the spinning wheel and if so it will probably look like metal rods sticking upwards. Others have a free-standing one that usually comes with the wheel. If you have bought a second-hand wheel and do not have a lazy kate, either buy or make one.

One way is to push two knitting needles through a shoe box to hold the bobbins – you can see an example of this in the picture on the next page. An even easier way is to stand cones of yarn on the floor, one either side of you. Put a knitting needle through the top of the cone into the hollow centre and put the bobbin onto the knitting needle. This works best with fairly large cones as they are less likely to fall over.



A lazy kate made from a shoe box and knitting needles.



Improvised lazy kate made from cones of yarn and knitting needles (top) and an Ashford upright lazy kate (bottom).

Put a new bobbin on the spinning wheel

To ply using a spinning wheel, first put a third, empty bobbin onto the spinning wheel and put the two full bobbins onto the lazy kate. Now thread the two ends of the yarn from the full bobbins through the spinning wheel orifice in the opposite direction to usual – i.e. from the orifice going towards the bobbin on the wheel.

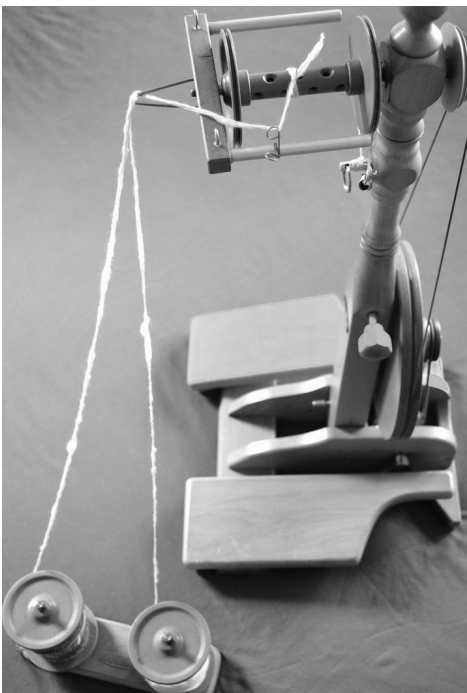


Tie these ends directly onto the bobbin. If you use this method a leader is not necessary for plying. Do not attempt to tie the ends onto any singles yarn that is already on the bobbin.

Because you are going to work in the opposite direction, the singles yarn will unravel as you feed the plied yarn onto the bobbin, resulting in a tangled mess.

Putting a bobbin on the spinning wheel, or removing the full one, is easy.

If there is any singles yarn on the bobbin, tie the new yarn over it so that the end is trapped and this will prevent it from unravelling.



Plying is generally easier to learn than spinning, but you can get into a bit of a muddle to start with, so take your time and be prepared to stop. The first singles yarn you produce is likely to be quite thick and twisted so it may be necessary to wind some of it onto the bobbin by hand.

When plying, the wheel needs to turn in the opposite direction, so if you went clockwise when spinning the singles yarn, go anticlockwise when plying.

Singles yarns in position on lazy kate; the ends of the yarns are threaded through the orifice from front to back and tied around the bobbin core ready for plying.

The yarn should not slip through your fingers. Control the twist, build up twist and run that twist back with your fingers. This creates a more even yarn and prevents the spinning wheel from running away with you. Do not let go of the yarn, or the twist will go all the way back to the bobbins and tangle them together.

Under-plyed is more likely than over-plyed

Because plying is easier than spinning, it is tempting to ply too quickly and not give the twist time to run into the yarn. That is why under-plying is common on both spinning wheels and spindles. If the plyed yarn is very kinky and seems too twisted it is more likely that you have under-plyed than over-plyed.

The amount of ply it takes to balance yarn depends upon the amount of twist that was put into the yarn as it was spun in the first place. The exception is a yarn with three or more plies because then there are three - or more - singles yarns taking up the same space as two in the yarn so it needs less twist.

Take a sample

This is not essential. If it seems daunting, ply the yarn without sampling to start with. Just ply it until it looks nice and round and ignore the fact that it may look all kinky, this will go when it is washed. You can always come back to this section and try making a sample later.

The easiest way to make sure yarn is plyed properly is to take a freshly spun sample whilst you are spinning the singles. *This only works with freshly spun yarn.* The twist does not double back properly once the yarn has rested so you cannot tell if a yarn is balanced by doing this test later.

Pull off a length of the singles yarn and allow it to double back on itself. It will naturally ply until it is balanced. Hang this on the wheel or keep it with your hand spindle. When plying, simply insert twist until it looks about the same. Count the number of treadles or twirls of the spindle it takes to get the yarn to look the same.

Then continue to count the same number each time you ply a length of yarn. For example, treadle seven times each time a length of yarn is fed onto the bobbin, or twirl the spindle and count to seven before winding on. Stop and compare it with the sample every so often as it may be necessary to add an extra treadle or two now and then.

How to fix over- or under-plyed yarn

Assume the yarn is under-plyed and try the following first. Put the bobbin of plyed yarn back on the lazy kate and run it back through the spinning wheel again going in the same direction as when it was plyed for the first time. If the yarn is wound into a ball and/or you are using a spindle, simply drop the yarn on the floor beside you.

Test a bit as you go and if it is a bit better, you are on the right track. If it seems worse, try going in the opposite direction as it may be over-plyed. Then run the whole bobbin of yarn through the wheel again either adding more twist or taking some out. You can do this with under- or overtwisted singles yarn too. Remember you will not get it perfect as the yarn will still be a bit kinky until it has been washed.

Tips for plying on a spinning wheel

- Remember to go in the opposite direction to the way you went when spinning the singles yarn.
- When plying with two bobbins on a lazy kate that can hold three or more bobbins, leave a gap between them – i.e. do not use the centre slot.
- If using a free-standing upright lazy kate (i.e. the bobbins stand on end), prop something under the side nearest to you so that it is slightly tilted. A pen or pencil works quite well. This helps the yarn to flow off the bobbins without catching on the bobbin ends.
- Take your time until you get the hang of it and stop often.
- Do not let the twist travel beyond your fingers or the strands will tangle on the lazy kate.
- Help any lumpy/very thick yarn by winding it on by hand; it is twice as thick when plyed.
- If plying more than two strands, use two lazy kates and put one on either side of the wheel.