

Part 9 Using a niddy noddy and washing the yarn - Video 16

It is best to wind the yarn into a hank and wash it once it has been spun. This relaxes the fibres and the yarn may actually become slightly thicker once it has been washed. Knitting or crocheting with unwashed yarn could mean you use too small a needle size resulting in a dense fabric with little drape.

Some spinners make samples of yarn when planning a project and these should really be washed to ensure they are the correct thickness. However although people talk about sampling and planning of projects a lot, the majority of spinners simply buy fibre that they like, spin it and then think what to make with it! That is fine – this is a hobby so do what you enjoy.

Wind the yarn into a hank/skein

This can be done around a large book or a picture frame, but a purpose made niddy noddy works best of all and is inexpensive to buy. A niddy noddy is a special kind of skein winder that consists of two horizontal end pieces at right angles to each other, separated by an upright shaft. The yarn is wound around the niddy noddy in a zig zag fashion resulting in a much longer and neater skein. Making one is not as easy as it looks, because the two ends need to be tapered just right so that the yarn is easy to slide off once you are finished but does not slide off of its own accord.

Using a niddy noddy

There is no need to remove the yarn from the spinning wheel or spindle before winding it into a skein. Leave the full bobbin on the wheel but slacken the tension right off. A hand spindle can be put on the floor and left to roll around as the yarn unwinds. Trying to contain it is more trouble than it is worth.

1. Hold the centre shaft of the niddy noddy in one hand. Grip the end of the yarn in your hand along with it.
2. Use the other hand to guide the yarn and tilt the niddy noddy every which way to help you wind it over each horizontal end in turn. If it will not work, tilt it the one way that seems completely wrong and it is often right!

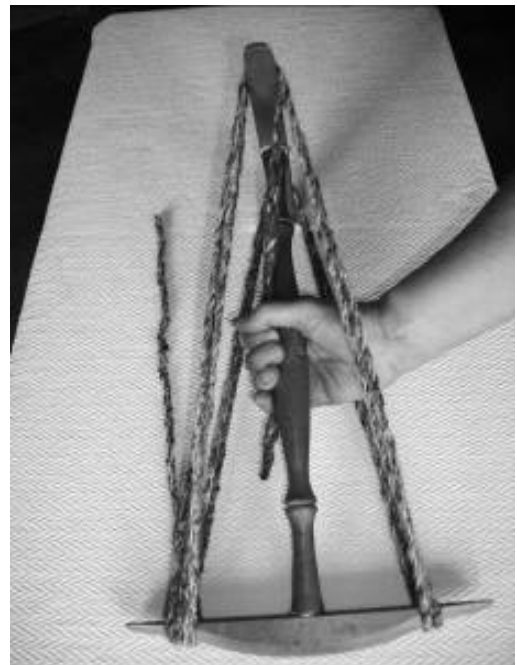


3. The yarn goes up over one side of the top arm, down and round the bottom then back up to the top of the first one but over the *other* side of it. Then it goes back down to the other side of the bottom one.
4. Once you figure it out, follow the yarn that is already there but take care not to cross over and go around the wrong side of the arm. Keep hold of the end as it is hard to find if you lose it. When all the yarn is wound onto the niddy niddy, detach it from the bobbin or spindle but keep hold of both ends - do not take the yarn off the niddy niddy yet.

Winding yarn onto a niddy niddy. Hold the end with the hand.

5. Now tie the ends together. Take the yarn back to a point where they cross over and tie them in a single knot to start with.
6. Then do a figure of eight tie around the skein with one of the ends. To do a figure of eight tie, work with one end only. Pass it under the skein of yarn but only half way and then bring it up through the middle of the hank. Continue to go round the skein but with the yarn now going over the top rather than underneath it.

Wound yarn ready to tie. The hand is still gripping the first end.



Go round the back of the skein and under it again up through the middle in the same place as before and bring it back to the front. Tie the two ends together but make sure the tie is loose with room for the yarn to expand. An over hand knot works well for this but use any knot if you do not know how to do one of those.

7. Break off three lengths of left over singles yarn and use these to put three further loose figure of eight ties in the yarn on the other three sides of the niddy noddy. Using singles yarn makes it easy to tell which tie has the two ends in it.
8. Slide the yarn off one end of the niddy noddy to remove the hank.

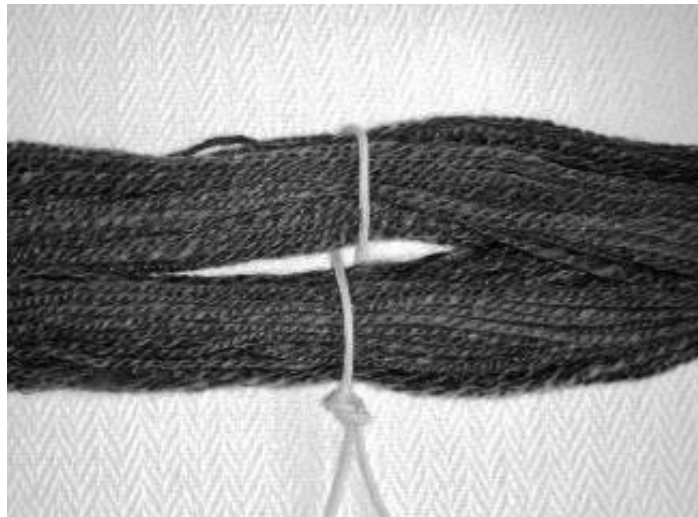


Figure of eight tie on a hank of yarn.

How to wash the yarn

Opinions vary on how to wash handspun yarn. I like to give it the hottest wash it will ever have before it becomes a garment because the yarn will usually shrink a little and I would rather it did that beforehand.



For the same reason I do not block or stretch yarn. There are people who do not wash yarn before using it and those who swear by blocking. As with everything in this course or any book, see what works for you.

To hot wash yarn, drop it into water as hot as your hand can stand. Add some detergent to the water before putting the yarn in. Any liquid detergent, shampoo or washing up liquid will do. Do not move it around or change the temperature of the water suddenly or it may felt.

Once the water has cooled, rinse but match the temperature of the rinse water to the cooled water out of which you just took the yarn. Fabric or hair conditioner can be added to the final rinse if desired.

Squeeze the yarn dry in a towel or put it in a pillow case, tie the top and give it a light spin in the washing machine. Hang it up to dry but do not block it.

The one exception is when yarn is being spun for a show or competition. You may want to block it in that case either by hanging a towel through the hank or by putting it back onto the niddy noddy to dry. Remember that wood may stain damp, pale coloured yarn, though.