



Needle Felting

Make wonderful felting creations at home. All you need is a set of felting needles and wool!

Materials:

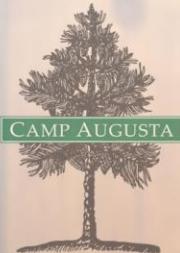
Felting needles
Wool (undyed and dyed)
Protective foam

The Activity:

Needle felting is an exciting way to freely create sculptural characters with natural wool. Needle felting can be a highly intuitive process. However, with a little instruction in some basic techniques, students can make creative characters much easier and with better results. Everything we want to needle felt is going to be made up of several basic shapes. The aim when creating these shapes is to make the wool as dense as possible. When an object is dense, there are many more fibers inside the shape to "felt into" as we add layers of wispy wool, or tack in other objects, such as ears and legs.

Step By Step:

- Keep your eyes down when using the felting needles. Always pay attention to where you are poking.
- When they are taking a pause or leaving the table put the felting needle up right in the foam board or put the cap back on the needle.
- Needle can easily be broken or bent. To insure the safest outcome, always poke the wool straight up and down. The best method is to keep the needle vertical and not to press down too hard. The needles need to only go through two thirds of the wool. Needles are more likely to break if they are used on an angle or if the camper stabs into the wool harshly.
- Also explain to campers how the felting needles works- the needles have ridges that connect to the wool and fuses their fibers together. Almost as if it has teeth, which pull the wool, knotting it together.
- Facilitators can remind campers to lift their piece up every now and then. If this is not done the piece will attach to the foam board- it can be pulled off but is not ideal.
- If the camper is making an animal or something that has legs or smaller parts to attach, the best method to create each piece separately and needle point the pieces together once each part is completed.
- For a larger project, have campers use white wool as their core and wrap the outer layer in the colors or their choosing. White wool is typically less expensive.
- Have the campers start the felting process by thinking about what they want to make. What is their vision of what they would like to invent.



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Creating Basic Shapes:

Balls and Ovals – for bodies and heads

There are 2 methods for creating a nice dense ball:

-Tie a knot: First get yourself a piece of core wool (preferably in rope form) and tie a knot in it. Carefully tighten the knot (do it too tight and the wool will rip). Feel your knot. Does it feel nice and dense? Is it the size you want? Make it bigger by simply tying another knot on top of the first one. You'll have two sides of core wool sticking out the sides of the knot. Take hold of one side and wrap it around the knot, then needle felt it to hold it in place. Do the same thing with the other side. This is your opportunity to shape this ball into an oval if desired. Ovals are a basic shape for the body of an animal or person.

-Wrap around a skewer: A great way to make a dense ball is to wrap core wool around a skewer. Wrap repeatedly, round and round, over the same place on the skewer. The most important thing to remember when wrapping wool in this way is to not twist it as it will get wrapped. Twisting is the natural tendency, so it must be addressed. Twisted wool will simply not felt very well. Treat the wool as if it's a flat ribbon while wrapping. When it's the size you want, slide it off the skewer and poke it with the felting needle. As you poke the needle in and out, rotate the ball in order to continue shaping it into the exact shape you want.

Straight round piece – for arms and legs (and elephant trunks, tree branches, octopus tentacles, snakes, etc)

-Wrap around a skewer: Start with a long thin piece of core wool. Hold one end of the piece on the end of the skewer with one finger. Now start wrapping the wool piece around and around the skewer, being very careful to not twist the wool as you do so! When wrapping, always treat the wool as if it's a flat ribbon. Wrap the skewer to the length you want the piece, and then double back the other direction, wrapping evenly. You can go back and forth until your straight piece is the thickness you want it.

-twiddling wool between hands: Sometimes you want an extra thin long piece. With this method, you lay in your palm an extra thin piece of wool roving. Get one hand a little wet or damp, then simply rub your hands together fast, twiddling the wool as you do so.

Flat rectangle, half circles, triangles, etc.

Almost any shape can be created simply by "drawing it" in the wool with felting needles. Lay out a thin and even piece of core wool on the felting pad. Using your felting pen loaded with 2 needles, "draw" the shape in the wool. Now bring in the fringy edges beyond the shape and tack them in place with the needles. If you're making ears for a creature, you might draw 2 triangular shapes and bring in 2 sides, leaving one side fringy. The fringe at the edge of these ears will be used to attach them onto the head of your creature.

What to Make?

Make a barrette

Felt directly onto a square for a wall hanging or to sew a little purse

Felt a bangle bracelet or ring

Felt a tubular layered object then cut with scissors and string into beads

Create a creature. Campers can add on eyes using a hot glue gun

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SAFETY

Remind campers through the clinic about eyes down. Campers will be talking during the activity and will want to look up at others. Explain that this is great but to remember to have eyes down or place the needle in the foam to talk.

Considerations

-This is a relaxing clinic it is a great time to talk to the campers about what they are making and how they are going to achieve their design. Ask the campers what would happen if they kept felting the same part for a while or what would happen if they did not felt it much.
-Facilitators need to remember that the needles are sharp and consider that when the clinic is running. The facilitator must be watching at all times

ADVANCED: Types of Needles

Gauge Triangle – very fine-for surface finishing work

40 Gauge Triangle – fine-for surface finishing work

38 Gauge Star – less surface area than standard, with an extra corner of barbs, for quicker felting-for shaping a piece and attaching pieces together

38 Gauge Triangle – standard-for shaping a piece, for shaping a piece and attaching pieces together

36 Gauge Triangle – medium-for shaping a piece, pushes chunks of wool

36 Gauge Crown Tip – one barb on each corner set 1/8" from the tip, for shallow surface work

- coarse

Reverse needle – pulls the wool out instead of pushing it in. This needle is good for blending colors or inserting special hair (like mohair) into a felted piece

Needle Felting Term Glossary:

Blending: Mixing fibers of different colors or different types together.

Carders: Paddle brushes for separating wool fibers, cleaning the fiber or blending different types of colors of wool for spinning or making felt. Carders have fine wires set in leather or synthetic rubber cloth attached to a wooden base..

Combed tops/Wool Tops: Commercially prepared fibers, combed into long loose ropes.

Felting Needle: A long needle with barbs on the end. Used for hand, machine and industrial felting. The barbs on the needle hook on the fibers and interlock them with each other.

Fleece: Unprocessed wool shorn from a sheep.

Fulling: The process after the felt has matted and shrunk. It is rubbed on a rough surface, thrown gently and even slammed on the work surface to force the fibers to intertwine, shrink and become firmer.

Merino: A breed of sheep producing fine wool that is best for making clothing from when it is felted.

They are bred mainly in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

Micron: The measurement of fiber thickness. The lower the number- the finer the fiber.

Nuno Felt: The name given to a fabric made with wool laminated to silk. The wool is laid on to the fabric and then rolled in the usual way. The fibers of the wool penetrate the silk and when the wool shrinks it gathers the silk forming beautiful decorative patterns.

