

Cooler weather means that I have developed an urge to get my hands in the wool bags again. I don't think much about spinning, felting, or knitting during the summer, but once fall arrives, I find that I have a renewed interest in working with this particular product of the farm. We shear sheep in March, and most of the wool goes to a cooperative in Ohio, but I keep what I want for hand processing. Last spring, due to plenty from previous years, I kept no new wool. But, there are several large sacks in storage--some dyed wool, some in sheep's white, gray, or black. I washed all of it in the summer after shearing, so I need not start "from scratch." I have already accomplished a good bit of the labor.

For my first undertaking involving wool this fall, I skipped over some other processes, too. This is because of a pair of ugly mittens. I made them several years ago, mittens of handmade felt, dyed green, embroidered with flowers and leaves. They were with us at the Farmers' Market for a couple of years. I had other, much prettier mittens at the same time, and I did not feel any shame in selling them. This pair, though, was troubling. Every now and then, some customer, usually a woman, would come along and attempt to purchase the mittens. I always succeeded in talking her into a different pair. I guess I was afraid that somewhere down the line, perhaps even after wearing the mittens for a winter or two, she would come to agree with my assessment of them as uninspired, run of the mill, or just plain ugly.

Last night, I took those mittens out of storage. I looked them over again. I had not changed my opinion. They were still very unattractive. So, I used my little embroidery scissors to rip out all of the wool embroidery. The white flowers, the yellow flowers, the green leaves--all gone. I could still see where I had sewn the motif, but I knew that a new session in the dye pot and a little hand rubbing with soap would take care of that.

I needed a color that would cover the blah green of the mittens. I settled on a primary blue, and I put plenty of dye in the kettle, as I wasn't sure how much would be needed to obliterate the green.

The mittens turned out very well. They are now drying, suspended on empty maple syrup bottles on the warm reservoir area of

the cook stove. They are a deep, almost midnight blue. I think they look good even without any embroidery. But, when they are dry, I will use wool yarn to sew a new motif on them, too. And, perhaps I won't be shy about selling them or giving them away. Or, I might wear them myself.

After the mittens came from the dye pot, I realized that I had overestimated the amount of dye I'd need to cover the green. There was still a very blue liquid in the kettle. So, I dyed two pairs of wool socks. Someone will enjoy the glow of blue in their footwear this winter.

While the mittens were changing color, I used my electric drum carder to make three batts of natural white wool. I layered them on a bamboo shade and pressed them down with some weight. Tomorrow, I can mix up the soap and warm water solution I use for felting, sprinkle the carded wool well, roll up the bamboo shade, and make a piece of felt. That will be the next pair of mittens in my supply. Perhaps redoing the green mittens will help me avoid making another mistake in color and motif, at least for a while. And, in any case, I will no longer have to look at those unattractive mittens every time I open that drawer.