

# Scouring Raw Fiber

## Instructions

1. Test your water to see if it is hard. Yes, this is important. You can happily wash your wool without this step but then there is no guarantee it will be clean which is our goal. It is actually quite fun to get out your test kit. Put on your favorite mad scientist cap and try it. Science is good.
2. So now you've tested! Congratulations. You are aware of your water conditions. If your water is hard, you will have to use a softening agent like Calgon. Calgon not only "takes you away" but also softens your water.
3. How much softening agent should I add? You can find out by testing water samples that have softening agents added to them. This is the most accurate way. It will involve some math on your part. If that is too scary for you, you could always throw in what you like and see what happens. Try small samples of wool when using the second technique.
4. How much soap? This will vary on the soap you use, the amount of water, and the amount of fleece you will be washing at one time. We use about a small handful of Orvus paste to a 5 gallon industrial round bucket of water.
5. You will have to prepare the wool for washing before you make your scouring liquor. To get your fiber ready for the wash, break it into manageable portions and if desired, you can place the locks in mesh bags to retain the lock structure.
6. Phew, you made it through the calculation stage and are ready to start. The ideal temperature of your water should be about 120 °F. (Yes, please actually take the temp or set your water heater at 120 °F.) This is the ideal temperature that will clean your fiber and leave it damage free.
7. Put on some Blue gloves (the heat resistant kind) and let's get washing! You've drawn your water at the correct temperature range, added the soap and if needed, the water softening agent. Place your prepared wool in the liquid and gently push it into the water. We are overly gentle with our fibers and sometimes require a second wash because of it. Some people successfully slush their fibers around to make sure that the fibers have all been exposed to the scouring liquor. We are a little more hesitant. Be brave and do what you will but be careful not to over agitate. Let's not felt our wonderful fiber friends at this point. Their future may be felted material but until then we will treat our fibers gently.

8. How long should your fibers sit in the scouring liquor? Five minutes should be sufficient. Remember, this is a chemical process and happens pretty quickly. If you let your fibers soak for a long time and the water starts to cool, the liquor will start to set on the fibers again. Not good.
  
9. Put your newly drenched wool in an old colander or set it away from the water somehow so that it can drain while you dump the dirty water out. Yuck. Did you see all that dirt? Glad it isn't on the fleece any more. You can do what we do at this point and wuzz the water out in the clothes washing machine on the spin cycle. (Note this is the spin cycle without the rinse.) This removes the majority of the dripping water and makes the rest of the washing less messy. You could also try and gently squeeze some of that water out. Remember, gently.
  
10. While your washing machine is wuzzing your fleece for you, start the next scouring liquor bath for your fiber or if your fiber is clean, go to step 11 and start rinsing your fleece. If it is pretty dirty or your fleece contains a lot of lanolin or was tightly packed, you may need a second wash. If you aren't sure, try rinsing it. If the rinse water is very dirty, you may want to rewash.
  
11. To rinse your fleece, simply fill your bucket, tub, etc with about the same amount of water but at the slightly lower temperature of 115 °F. This is all a quick process so your fleece should not have cooled off too much yet. Place your fiber in the water and push it down in similar manner. Repeat the gentle motions you used to move your fibers in the scouring bath. Is the water very dirty? Repeat the wash. Almost clear, congrats! You are good to go. Bring those fibers to your washing machine and wuzz out the water again.

Your wool is clean. Just lay it out to dry on a clean sheet, or if you have one, a mesh platform, in a dry room but not in direct sunlight. Admire your work. You've washed your first fleece!