



The Icelandic sheep produces a premium fleece. The fleece is dual coated, with a fine, soft undercoat called thel and a longer, coarser outer coat called tog. The tog fiber with a spinning count of 56-60 and a micron count of 27-30, grows to a length of 6-8" in six months. It is lustrous, strong, water- and wear-resistant, and sheds off the rain and weather. Thel is the soft downy undercoat, with a spinning count of 64-70 and a micron count of 19-22, growing to a length of 2-4". The thel provides the loft for the outer coat and insulation for the sheep. Tog grows from the primary hair follicles and the thel from the secondary follicles. Tog is a true wool, and is not a kemp or guard hair. The combination of the two fibers on the sheep gives superb protection from the cold and wet.

Icelandic fleeces are open and low in lanolin. The weight loss when washed is significantly less than many other breeds.

The average adult yearly fleece total weighs 4-7 lbs. Producers often shear their Icelandics twice a year. This is due, in part, to the fact that Icelandics have a natural wool break in late winter for the rams generally, and in spring for the pregnant or lactating ewes. Shearing at or around the time of the natural break is recommended to remove the "old" coat before the "new" coat grows in. The sheep are sheared again in the fall to harvest the fleeces before the animals go on hay for the winter. These fall-shorn fleeces are very soft and clean and can bring a premium price per pound.

The two coats can be separated by hand for special projects, or they may be processed together. The traditional lopi is a lightly spun blend of tog and thel. Thel is very soft and downy, with an irregular crimp and can be used for baby garments, and for the fine shawls in the style

of the Wedding Shawl. The tog is similar to mohair; wavy or corkscrewed rather than crimped and is wonderful in worsted spinning.

The versatility of the wool, the ease of spinning and the wide variation of tones and colors are a true delight to handspinners, and put Icelandic wool into the exotic or premium category. It is also known as one of the best fleeces for felting, which is fast gaining popularity in the craft community.

The Icelandic Fleece - a Fibre for all Reasons

by Beth Abbott

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What types of	yarns can be spun from a fleece with fibres which	vary from 3" to 1
I chose the	Icelandic Fleece as a topic for my in-depth study	because the first North

Traditionally, the Icelandic sheep provided for almost all of the Icelanders' needs for meat and wool. The sheep sheds its fleece and shearing takes place about the time shedding begins. In early spring, this sheep, quite isolated for centuries from crossbreeding, has remained much as it was when first brought to Iceland. The sheep are kept close to the farm buildings during the winter and spring months, but in early summer they are turned out to graze. I used the Canadian Icelandic fleece for much of my experimenting but did get some fleece from other sources. I prefer to wash the fleece before spinning as this makes separation of the two coats easier. Traditionally, the two coats of the Icelandic fleece were traditionally spun and used separately, I think. The tog hairs, if kept in lock formation) can be prepared and spun using worsted or semi-worsted methods. Today in Iceland all the yarn spun commercially is made from the combined coats of the fleece. I have found that to spin an even diameter lopi-style yarn it is necessary to prepare the fleece carefully. A standard two-ply knitting worsted weight yarn is also possible from the Icelandic fleece. The felt made from the Icelandic fleece ranged from very firm to quite soft but in all cases worked well. The Icelandic study grew into a much more involved and interesting project than I originally anticipated. The Icelandic fleece offers the Canadian spinner many opportunities to spin a range of fibre types. I made several samples using these separated yarns in traditional projects as well as some projects. I experimented with the "glit" inlay weaving technique used in the wonderfully elaborate women's traditional dress. Rug samples in Krokbragd, a weft faced Scandinavian weave, were thick and strong, and, although I did not have time to make more, indeed, the Icelandic fleece was an interesting fibre to study and the samples inspired a wide range of projects.