

Magpie WoodWorks Spindle Guide

This handout is not intended to teach you everything about spinning, but to give you some tips on spinning with “maggie”™ spindles. Instructions on spinning can be found in several publications. Familiarize yourself with terms such as drafting, drafting triangle or zone, joins, and Z and S twist before you begin spinning.

Choosing a Spindle

Spindle Type: We offer top whorl, mid whorl, and bottom whorl spindles. Selection of a spindle type is often a matter of preference rather than function. All spindles can be used for spinning singles or for plying. Top and mid whorl spindles are usually twirled on your thigh, so they go faster. Top whorls are great for plying for this reason. Bottom whorl spindles must be twirled using your fingers, so they tend to go slower. We recommend mid whorl spindles for beginning spindlers because they are our most stable and longest spinning.



Weight: Each of our spindles is weighed so that if you have a preference, you can choose a spindle of a certain weight. Lightweight spindles weigh about 35 grams (1.25 ounces) or less; heavy spindles weigh about 40 to 70 grams (1.4 to 2.5 ounces). In general, finer yarns (fingering, baby, lace) are spun on lightweight spindles and thick yarns (sport, worsted, bulky) are spun on heavier spindles. While it is possible to spin a finer yarn on a heavy spindle, the fiber will tend to pull out of your hands, causing frustration and a lot of joins! Fiber length and diameter also are factors to consider when choosing a weight of spindle. Fine fibers and short fibers typically are spun into finer yarns and take a light spindle. Long fibers and medium to coarse fibers are better spun on a heavier spindle.

Aesthetics: After whorl position and weight are considered, the final decision usually comes down to wood preference, how the spindle feels in your hand and if it “speaks” to you. Spindles have a way of finding the right owner.

Fiber Source

Quality of Fiber: As with any other endeavor garbage in means garbage out. When learning how to use a hand spindle, start with a well prepared, non-sticky, clean fiber. It is much more difficult to pick vegetation out of the fiber or tug on it while drafting when using a hand spindle. We recommend starting with medium length wool fiber. Fine, slick fibers such as alpaca or silk are harder for a beginner learning to spin.



Fiber Preparation: Prepared fiber, in the form of roving or top, should be attenuated before spinning. This process fluffs up and decreases the bulk of the preparation, making it easier to spin. A thick wad of fiber will not draft easily and you will get very frustrated trying to spin from a dense piece of roving or top. Keep in mind the thickness of the yarn you want to end up with. Twist the fibers in your fingers to see how thick or thin a yarn you can get from an attenuated piece of fiber. It may be necessary to separate the roving or top lengthwise into several thinner sections to attain the right amount of fiber bulk for the intended yarn. If necessary, attenuate these thinner lengths to loosen up the fibers. You can spin on a spindle with locks of flicked fiber rather than roving or top, but you will have to make many joins, which can be tedious for a beginner.



To attenuate the fiber, pull off a section of roving or top about 1/2 to 1 yard long. Grasp the fiber with both hands, keeping them about as far apart as the length of a fiber (usually 3-5 inches). Gently tug the fiber between your hands 3-4 times, then move your hands down another fiber length and repeat. Do not pull too hard or the fibers will begin to pull apart. Practice will tell you when you have pulled too much. As you work along the length of the section, you will notice the fibers begin to fluff out.

Starting to Spin

Our spindles are meant to be suspended. However, when you begin spinning with a spindle, it might be easier if you rest the tip of the spindle on a table rather than suspending it. The support of the table will let you concentrate on what’s happening with the fiber rather than worrying about the spindle dropping completely out of your hands. It takes some practice to keep the tip on the table, but if you start off this way you soon will be suspending the spindle with no problem.

You can use the prepared fiber to begin spinning your yarn, or you can tie on a length of yarn (called a leader) and then twist your unspun fiber onto it. The leader should be tied securely to the shaft of the spindle about two inches from the whorl—above the whorl for a bottom whorl spindle and below the whorl for mid and top whorl spindles. For a bottom whorl spindle, tightly wrap the leader several times around the shaft where you tied on and then spiral the leader up the shaft, slipping it under the hook at the top. For mid and top whorl spindles, the leader does not need to be wrapped or spiraled on the shaft. Simply place the leader into the notch on the whorl and then slip it directly into the hook. The leader should extend at least 8" from the tip of the spindle or the twist will enter the leader too fast and the spindle will stop spinning and reverse direction. Having a leader with a little length gives your hand time to get from the shaft to the fiber source before the twist enters the fiber. Fluff out the end of the leader yarn so you can twist it together with your unspun fiber. Sometimes it's easier to finger spin an inch or two of your fiber and tie it onto the leader.



To attach fiber directly to the spindle, snag some fiber on the hook, give the spindle a few twists with your fingers and spin an inch or two of yarn to make sure the fiber is securely attached. Twirl the spindle slowly a few times more with your fingers and spin out about 8" of yarn before spinning the spindle faster. As you spin glance at the spindle occasionally to make sure it hasn't stopped or reversed directions.



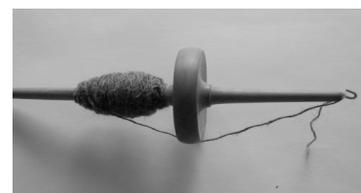
Winding On

After spinning a length of yarn, usually about 1 to 1-1/2 yards, it's time to wind the yarn onto the shaft. The yarn wound onto the shaft is called a "cop." Wind the yarn onto the shaft in the same direction (clockwise or counterclockwise) that you twirled the spindle. The first few wraps should be tight and compact to prevent the cop from slipping off the shaft. The yarn should be wrapped almost perpendicular to the shaft, instead of moving up and down the shaft at a sharp angle. Extend the length of the cop only after you have several layers of yarn built up. When lengthening the cop, do it in small increments. The cop can be shaped like a cone, with the widest part against the whorl, or as an oblong ball with a fat middle.

When you start with a yarn leader, your yarn is already attached to the shaft. Slip the yarn out from under the hook and wind the yarn onto the shaft. If you started with fiber, you must remove the yarn from the hook and tie it onto the shaft before winding on.

A cone shaped cop is usually used on a bottom whorl spindle and is built above the whorl. Build up yarn at the base of the whorl and work upward a few wraps at a time to form a cone. After winding on, spiral the yarn around the shaft a few times as you approach the hook. Slip the yarn under the hook and you are ready to spin again. Remember to leave at least 8" above the hook as a leader before you resume spinning.

The cop can be made into a cone or a ball on top and mid whorl spindles. Tie on the yarn about an inch or two below the whorl. Wrap the yarn tightly and compactly several times around the shaft. For a cone, wrap more yarn at the base of the whorl and less as you expand the cop down the shaft. For a ball, the beginning of your cop should be thick and short. Expand the ball by wrapping only one or two wraps above and below and build up yarn in the middle.



Winding Off

The spindle will tell you it's full by spinning more slowly, stopping and reversing direction. The weight of the yarn on the shaft affects how long the spindle will spin. When it slows down, it's time to stop and wind off.

There are several ways to wind off. You can pull the cop off of the shaft and wind it onto a nostepinde (or other ball winder) or you can hold the whorl of the spindle between your legs to secure it and wind the yarn directly from the tip of the spindle to a ball winder. A lazy kate made for spindles can also be used. A simple lazy kate can be made by placing the spindle horizontally into notches or holes cut into a cardboard box shorter than the length of the spindle. The spindle should rotate easily as you wind the yarn off of the shaft.



When you wind off onto a nostepinde you can make a center pull ball from which you can ply directly. If you do not make a center pull ball, you will need two or more balls of yarn to make a plied yarn.

