

{ Needle Felting Basics }

by Elizabeth Carls ☽

Safety first, safety last, and safety always! Needle felting needles are very sharp and have tiny barbs all along their shafts. Please use extreme caution and be mindful not to poke yourself.



Materials you will need:

Fabric or a pre-felted item you wish to embellish with needle felting .

Needle felting needles in a variety of gauges.

Foam block to protect work surface. Polystyrene works best. A sponge or firm pillow will work in a pinch.

Unspun fibers such as wool roving or batts, silk , or mohair locks.

Bits of yarn (optional)

Knitting needle, tapestry needle, pencil or tweezers.

Spray bottle filled with warm water and a few drops of wool wash (optional)

A scissors (optional)

Embroidery supplies (optional)

Beads (optional)

Painting with Fiber – With needle felting you can add surface designs and embellish any number of fabrics and projects. The process is very much like painting with fiber.

How it Works – When the loose fibers are stabbed with the felting needle the barbs on the needle grab and catch tiny bits of fiber and tangle these bits together. When the fibers are stabbed repeatedly these tiny tangles eventually lock the fibers into the fabric. The key is not to stab deeply, but to stab frequently.

Suitable Fibers – You can use any of the natural fibers I have listed above. You can also use pieces of yarn. A few caveats: Any natural fiber will work—plant fibers and animal fibers. But animal fibers are better. Wool works best. I would recommend you steer clear of synthetic fibers. Toothier fibers will felt more quickly. Smoother, silkier fibers will take longer to lock in place; be patient with them.

Suitable Fabrics – You can use needle felting to embellish your felted knits. You can needle felt into other fabrics as well. Heavier fabrics work best. I recommend tapestries, canvas, or

upholstery fabrics. But feel free to experiment; there are no hard fast rules.

Suitable Projects - Again, you can use needle felting to make any felted knit project something special. You could also embellish a vintage tapestry or upholstery fabric and then sew them into pillow covers. You could needle felt on your favorite canvas grocery or project bag. Really the possibilities are endless and limited only by your imagination.

Note on Needle Gauge – The higher the number the smaller the needle gauge, and the finer the needle. A courser needle (32-gauge) will produce faster results but will leave visible puncture marks. A finer gauge needle (40-gauge) will be slower going, but will produce a smoother finish. A 36-gauge needle is a good general purpose needle. I recommend starting with a larger needle and then finishing with a smaller needle.

To Begin – Gather your fibers, your needles, and other supplies. Lay your fabric or pre-felted item on top of your foam block. Using your fibers or bits of yarn, lay out your design and give it a few gentle stabs. Evaluate. At this point

you can still pull the fibers apart and make adjustments to your design.

Once you are satisfied with your layout, begin to repeatedly stab your fibers in place on your fabric.

Needle felting can be done dry, or damp. If you choose to work with damp fibers, lightly mist your design from time to time while you work.

Remember the idea is not to kill it, but to finesse it; you don't have to stab deeply, but you will be stabbing repeatedly.

Pay attention and keep your eyes on your work Needle felting needles are mean little buggers. And you don't want to stab yourself.

I recommend using a knitting needle, pencil or a tweezers, rather than your fingers to hold your design in place while you work.

To Finish – You're done when you are satisfied with the look of your design and the fibers are sufficiently attached to your fabric or pre-felted item.

Lightly mist your needle felting with water and rub gently with your finger tips. This gives a subtle, but nice finish

to your work. This step is optional, and not recommended if you are using silk as your fiber.

Lift your fabric off the foam block. You may want to carefully trim the fibers that show on the reverse side.

Things to Try –

Try a variety of fabrics, and a variety of fibers.

Try separating the fibers to achieve a wispy cobweb like effect.

Try blending colors by working two or more colors together.

Layer one color fiber on top of another color.

While this tutorial covers basic needle felting used for surface design, needle felting techniques can also be used to create three dimensional works.

Try further embellishment after needle felting by adding embroidery, stitching over the top of your needle felted designs, or adding beads to your designs.

Remember to experiment and have fun.



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