

fiber forum 2015

Bimonthly e-Newsletter Summer 2014 Issue 12

www.sefiberforum.org/

Chair Notes - Summer 2014

I'm betting that you'd like to know more about the Fiber Forum 2015 workshops. I'm highlighting a few of the workshops. To see a full listing of Classes for SFFA 2015 as well as bios of the Instructors please go to our Website at:- <http://sefiberforum.org/>

Learn more about Doctorate in Double Knitting with Jolie Elder, No Wax Batik with Ray Pierotti and East Meets West with Kay Faulkner. So don't make any hasty decisions!

2015 Conference Chair: Suzi Gough (sgough@bellsouth.net)

- 1. White on White Colored Bright:** Felt and Dye - Participants in this workshop will work with various wools and fibers to create a full size shawl in natural whites the first day, spend the second day dyeing their project and the final half day adding any desired surface design (stitched) and doing finish work. This workshop sharpens skills in nuno felting with silks, gauzes and other fibers to a variety of wool fleeces; teaches students about the ways in which different fibers take dyes differently and allows them to finish with a beautiful, full size shawl.



Vicki Bennett lives most of the year in Asheville, NC where she teaches feltmaking and works in her mountain garden. She enjoys creating and teaching both nuno or laminated felting in the form of wearable art or interior design applications and 3-dimensional vessel felting. She exhibits and sells her work at the Florida Craftsmen Gallery in St. Petersburg FL and the Sam Reynolds Gallery in Asheville.



- 2. Successful Garment Design and Patterning for Felts and Handwovens** - Do your beautiful handwovens and felts lose something in the translation from fabric to garment? This workshop is designed to take you from concept, to design, to a pattern and muslin fitted to you. You will learn what looks good on you, good design for handmade fabrics and how to translate that information into a pattern. Construction techniques unique to handmade felts and handwovens will be discussed and demonstrated. This class is designed to create a successful concept and translate it to an appropriate pattern. The only actual sewing to be done will be developing the muslin. Lots of examples of garments to be provided.

Joan Berner has been in love with fiber since she learned to sew at age 7. Since graduating from the Haywood Community College Professional Crafts Program - Fiber, she has developed a unique line of felted and handwoven garments. She always comes back to garments because they are enjoyed by the wearer as well as anyone who sees the wearer.

- 3. Flax Plant to Linen Cloth** - Students will learn 18th century methods of processing the flax plant to linen cloth by using the actual tools: flax brake, scutching board, and hackles. Flax terms, growing the plant, dressing a distaff, and spinning the fiber will be covered. If spinning is your emphasis, bring your wheel or spindle. We will experiment with natural dyes on linen and you will have the opportunity to experience weaving with linen on a loom. This class will be of interest to historians as well as fiber artists.

Cassie Dickson has been spinning, weaving and natural dyeing for over 30 years. She is a member of the Southern Highland Craft Guild and teaches many places including the John C. Campbell Folk School, the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching and the Western Carolina University Mountain Heritage Center.



Flax fiber to linen yarn: Part 2

By Vickie Almaroad

Well you have finally gotten fiber out of those weedy looking plants that you worried about a big part of the summer. You survived the stinky retting, mashing your fingers in the flax brake, scratching your hands on the hackles, now you want linen yarn.

Unfortunately, you are not there yet and I know what you're thinking, "I wonder if eBay might have linen yarn for sale?" Remember, this is a quest, a yen for knowledge. Now you are saying, "Cut the crap, and get on with it!"

Before I "get on with it", I want to say that there are many better spinners out there than me. What is in this article is how I spin flax fiber. Someone out there is much better, so please read about my efforts as my account of gleaning knowledge of an old fiber and techniques needed to produce linen from scratch. I do not spin perfect linen, and I am nearly sure I never will.

Because flax fiber is long, spinners have come up with different ways of controlling the fiber while they spin. Line flax is like long hair, and if you have that type of hair then you know that it can be difficult to manage. I use two types of flax fiber when I spin; Flax Roving and Line Fiber. Both work well, so it depends on the location where you spin, how you spin, and the cost of what you spin.

The cost of what you spin is easy if you grow your own flax. If not, many people find the cost involved in buying flax roving or line prohibiting. This makes home grown my choice.

Roving is flax fiber that has been cut into sections to make it easier to work . It is spun much like other long staple fibers and it can be taken anywhere a spinning wheel can go.

Line flax requires a distaff which takes up room, and if you are spinning somewhere in public you will be answering interesting questions. Start with the one about Sleeping Beauty first; it is always asked.

I spin my flax wet. Wetting the thumb and first fingers of my left hand, I lightly draw them along the fiber as it twists. You can spin dry, but I have found that some of the small hairs on the dry spun yarn may find a way to twist onto the neighboring yarn on the bobbin and cause a problem.





Flax roving comes in a continuous length. Pulling a section off the roving length, I separate that section into smaller lengths. I have better control of the size of my finished yarn. I do have to stop spinning and add on more fiber quite a bit, but the size of the yarn is more uniform. In spinning flax, the twist must be controlled; if you relax your fingers, the twist will run into your unspun fiber and can become a knot almost instantly. I spin my flax firmly, and have to watch for too much twist therefore, keep your hands moving the fiber into the twist and onto the bobbin! Over twisted linen is a pain to work with and difficult to finish

Line flax can be spun from the lap. I've seen old spinners use a piece of thin material like lawn linen or fine cotton to wrap a length of line flax. The fabric is spread on a surface and the length of line flax is placed on one side of the material then gently rolled to the other end, usually two or three times. A length of fiber 3 or 4 inches is left out at one end which the spinner draws from as he spins. The trick is, that the spinner must stop and adjust the cloth covering as the amount of line flax gets smaller to keep it in order. It will work, but the cloth has to be watched and adjusted.

The most common way to spin line flax is the use of a distaff which come in all sizes and shapes, from straight sticks with a nob on the end, tree forks, to birdcage shapes. Some distaffs look like combs. All of them have the same purpose: to keep the flax fibers in order so that they can be spun without too much knotting or loss of fiber. The object is to have thin, strong, lump-free yarn. Line flax can be spun very thin, and if spun well, is very strong. Think of all those Egyptians you saw in art history class, where linen was transparent!

To **dress** a distaff: start with a section of your line flax. Use no more than you can handle comfortably. Give your section a shake to loosen any bark or chaff that might still be in the fiber. If the line flax is out of order, don't be afraid to hackle it again to straighten fibers.



The line flax has to be layered to dress the distaff; so, using a long ribbon which is doubled, tie the middle of the ribbon around the fiber about three or four inches from the top of one end of the section. Then tie the two ends of the ribbon around your waist, loosely knotting it at your back.

Here's the hard part! Using a cleared flat surface (I use my dining room table, well covered), place the knotted end at the edge of your surface with the loose end of the line flax away from you. Very carefully begin to work a thin layer of fiber onto the surface in a fan shape. Remember, the top of the fan shape is at your waist and the wider part of the shape is on the table away from you. By this time you will have discovered that a chair would be nice to sit in to save your back, so plan ahead!

When you have the first layer finished, reverse the direction of the fiber and place the second layer on top of the first. Continue until all of the fiber in your section is used. Spreading thin layers on to each other will make it easier to pull the fiber into your fingers.

Untie the ribbon from your waist. At one edge of the fan shape of fibers place the distaff **top end next** to the knot in the ribbon. Wrap the edge of the fiber to the distaff and gently roll it to the other side of the fan shape, patting the fiber in place if it sticks out. Now tie the ribbon to the top of the distaff and crisscross the ribbon around the dressed distaff and tie the ends in a knot or bow. (bowline, haft hitch, rolling hitch, etc.)





You Are Ready to Spin!

Spinning from a distaff takes some practice. Begin by teasing a few fibers from the bottom of the distaff and pull them toward the leader on your bobbin. Holding the ends of the fiber on the leader, let it run down to begin a line of yarn. Continue feeding to the bobbin and pulling from the distaff. Getting the hand coordination takes a little time, but you will begin to feel when to add more fiber or when to slow down pulling from the distaff. You will be surprised at how much fiber there is to spin when you first use a distaff. Turn your distaff from time to time to keep the supply of fiber even. The fiber will pull more freely. The only drawback I find using the distaff is that you have to stop and dress it again, but that line of linen yarn is beautiful.

A few hard won words of caution:

If you decide to ply your single linen yarn before scouring, keep the yarn under tension. You could have a knotted mess on your hands if you let the yarn run out too far on the bobbins.

You must scour your linen yarn. This process involves two steps:

Setting the twist and cleaning the linen.

The simplest method to scour; is to boil the skeins several hours in water, or water with a small amount of mild soap. Scouring softens and somewhat shrinks linen yarn. Scour your yarn before you weave with it. Waiting until after the weaving to scour the cloth produces a cloth that remains **open** and does not meld together. There are many good recipes for scouring linen yarn, please do your research.

I scour my yarn and then set the twist. After putting my yarn into skeins, I scour it and then set the twist by putting it while wet on my blocker, a Christmas present from my husband. When dry, it is wind onto spools and is ready for anything I want to use it for.



Flax fiber to linen yarn: Part 2 continued

If you have read the two parts of this article, you may be saying “why bother”. Yes you can buy linen yarn, and I have and will continue to do so. But I do this growing, processing, spinning, and weaving homespun linen yarn because of the history and beauty of linen. To take something so simple and make sails that took boats all over the ancient world. Linen made so thin and fine, that only kings could wear it. Linen wall paper 300 years old that is still in use today. But mostly, because I am a seeker of fiber knowledge - all weavers are. If you pour over an old weaving draft, or tear out inches of weaving because of a mistake of one shuttle throw or miss-step of a treadle, you know why I do this process from flax seed to linen cloth.

Linen holds magic.

I hope you enjoyed this article, thank you for allowing me to write about my passion for linen.

Vickie Almaroad

Southeast Fiber Forum Association

Bi-Annual Conference

April 16 - 19, 2015

Registration begins:

October 1 2014 for members

October 15, 2014 for non-members

**website: www.sefiberforum.org
information and download forms**

Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts

556 Parkway, Gatlinburg, TN 37738

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865-436-5860

Contact Arrowmont directly

later in 2014 for room reservations

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Editor's Note:

I apologize for the missing of numerous issues of the SFFA Newsletter. My professional side has had me working more than expected.

As we are getting closer to the 2015 forum at Arrowmont, I would like to request articles from you members sharing some aspects concerning the ‘growing’, ‘harvesting’, processing, spinning, and using of various plant and animal fibers. Along the way, possibly others may get the ‘bug’ to expand their world of fiber. A page or two is all that you need to think about. I can help edit if you wish. Images can be used also.

Announce your upcoming events for 2014 and 2015 by sending me the information and it will be posted on the Upcoming Events column. Look there for events in your area.

-Walt Turpening, editor (walt.turpening@att.net)