

## Tips for Needle Felting



The information below includes tips for needle felting foam, needle holders, and needles & roving and are notes from my own personal experience with needle felting.

*The #1 Rule for needle felting is to have fun with it!*

### Foam

High density foam is super important when needle felting. It should be at least 2" thick. I use pieces that are 8" x 10" and 2 ½" thick. It's dark gray in color and is very firm. Being very firm helps create your piece. If your foam is spongy it will mush (don't you love the technical terms?) and your needle felted piece will take longer to work.

As you are creating, remember to move your roving on your foam – don't leave it in one spot! You will find if you do that the roving will become a permanent

part of the foam or the foam will be imbedded in your roving – either is NOT GOOD.

Needle a bit, turn the piece over or move it – you'll have great results this way.

Eventually the foam will wear out. Don't throw it out – not all of it anyway. As I said, I work on an 8" x 10" piece, but I park my needles on a 5" x 5" piece of foam. Using an electric knife, I cut down a worn out piece for this purpose. I will cut the rest of the piece into cubes. I use these pieces as armature and erasers (my technical terms).

Having a place to park your needles is great. You know where your needles are and they aren't parked on your working piece of foam. If you are working with one set of needles and another set is parked on your working foam you will notice that the parked set "wobble" while you are felting – this can bend or break that set of needles.

If you have created a bear and you are going to attach the second leg, putting an armature block between the legs is like having another hand to hold the leg in place and make attaching it easier. If you are felting onto a sleeve or pant leg, a long armature piece is a must. Whether you are flat felting or sculptural felting – foam is a must!

If you have created something on your foam using black roving, you don't want that blending in with your next color. That's where the "eraser" comes in handy. Take one of the pieces you cut from your worn out foam and "rub" it on your working foam surface. You can do a circular pattern or back and forth – it removes the roving that is left on your foam so your colors don't mingle.

**Mosey 'n Me**

Frank & Judy Bielec

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### Needle Holders

There are many needle holders on the market. My choice is the needle holders by CTR. They manufacture three sizes. They make sizes in #3, #6, and #10. Shown here are the #3 and #6.

As you have guessed, #3 means it holds 3 needles, #6 holds 6 needles, etc. You will notice one holder has 2 needles. There are times when it is good to have 2 needles side by side. You could also have the #3 holder with 1 needle in it.

The holders are aluminum so they do have a bit of weight, which in my opinion helps when needling. They are anodized (so the aluminum doesn't turn your hand black) and are ergonomically designed (so your hand doesn't tire while felting).

The reason I have as many needle holders as I do is the fact that I don't want to have to stop and change the number of needles I have in a holder. If they are all loaded with the number of needles I want, I can spend my time felting. The holders are a "one time investment" and well worth it. If you bend or break a needle, the holder unscrews for replacement – very simple.

### Needles

Needles come in an assortment of sizes and shapes. When you first start working on your piece, you will generally use a 36T or 38T. The number denotes diameter and the T stands for triangular.

The bottom portion of the needle is where the barbs are. Each side has a barb facing down and one facing up. There are six barbs plus the tip on each needle. The needles are very sharp, so be careful!

Frank calls the #6 my weapon of choice – I figure the more needles the faster the felting, but I also felt large things. You may only need the #3 holder.

If you are an aggressive felter you will find your piece will have pock marks. Use a lighter touch. Remember, the only part of the needle doing the work is where the barbs are. Also, the larger the diameter the needle has, the larger the hole. For finishing you can use a #40T, 42T, or 40S. Being smaller in diameter, these needles will "erase" the holes left by the 36 or 38. The "S" stands for Star which is four sided (more barbs than the T) that are concave.

As you work with the needles you will develop your own touch with them. One of the key things to remember is to always be aware of where your fingers are and not have the needles in the same space at the same time. Having said this, I still stab myself every now and then.

Whether you are using one needle or six, have the needles come out of the roving in the same direction they went in. You can go straight up and down (or at any angle) – don't go in with one direction and out another, you will bend or break your needles.

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### Roving

Felting needles may be sharp, but the roving is actually the dangerous part of needle felting. Dangerous may not be the correct wording – detrimental to the budget is more accurate! With so many wonderful colors and different wools they are hard to resist!

If you are creating something small you can use dyed roving for your project. If your piece is larger, begin with core roving. Core or wool batting is roving that has been cleaned and is ready to be spun or dyed. It is less expensive than dyed roving, which is the reason to use it as the base for your piece and then layer your colored roving for your detail and finishing.

Some rovings will felt better than others. The more “wire or kink” there is to the roving, the better it will felt. If the roving is “stringy” you can do two different things with it.

First option is to use two slicker brushes (like used on dogs or cats) and card the roving. Take a small amount of the roving and comb it back and forth. You can also blend colors this way.

The second method is to steam the roving. Use a vegetable steamer and steam the roving for 10-15 minutes. You can let it cool in the steamer or you can drape it to “dry” being careful not to burn yourself or handle the hot roving too much. Steaming will put the kink back in the roving (like humidity will do to hair).

Even though core, wool batting and dyed roving has been cleaned you will still find pieces of debris in the roving. For the inner core, you don’t necessarily have to “pick” the debris out (although I do). I would suggest doing so for the finished surface. First instinct is to use your felting needle to pick the bits out – but use a regular needle for this purpose. Generally, if you use your felting needle you will bend it. If you have bent a needle, use it as your pick.

Experiment and have fun with your felting! The only limits are your own imagination.