



Needle felting Basics

Needle felting is a quick and easy way to add embellishment to plain felted knitting or wool felt. From simple lines like to shapes and more complex designs, needle felting is a great way to add a little more interest to plain felting.

What needle felting does is fuse another layer of fiber (be it wool roving, wool yarn, or another piece of felt) onto the base fiber or felted fabric.

To begin needle felting you'll need to gather a few supplies, all of which should be available at your local craft store:

- a needle felting brush or piece of foam, which allows the needles to go through the fiber and beyond without damaging the needles or the surface below
- a needle felting tool, either a single needle or a tool, which has multiple needles inside a plastic sleeve
- wool roving in various colors, or wool yarn or cut out pieces of felt
- a felted swatch to practice on or your piece of felted knitting

Once you have all your supplies together, you need to decide how you would like the finished needle felting embellishment to look. You can make it as simple as adding stripes, flowers, or add dots, shapes or any design you like.

One easy way to needle felt more complex designs is to use a cookie cutter of the size and shape you want your finished design to be as a guide for placing the wool.

No matter the design you've chosen, you want to work in smallish sections. Tear or cut a piece of roving and lay it in place to begin your design. Erring on the side of less roving is a fine idea, since you can always add more.

If you're using yarn as your needle felting material, start with one strand. For a felted shape, simply put it in place where you'd like it to be and you're ready to begin needle felting.

Remember to always place your base fabric on the needle felting brush or foam before you position the fiber where you want it to go.

Now you're ready to actually start needle felting.

Though it's pretty obvious, it's worth mentioning that needle felting needles are extremely sharp and can do a lot of damage to you and/or your tabletop if not used properly. That's why you should always work with a brush or piece of foam under your work, and you can take the added measure of covering the table if you like as well.

To protect your fingers, keep them out of the way of the needles at all times, and always make sure you lock your needle felting tool if you're going to store it or leave it unattended.



The best approach for needle felting is a straight up and down motion with the needle. Try to go in as straight as possible; this makes it less likely you'll break the needle.

Start at one end of your line or shape and work your way around. If needle felting a large shape or using the cookie cutter method, start by needle felting around the outside of the shape and work your way in.

A big question many beginning needle felters have is: when is it done? The answer will depend on the shape you're working with and the look you're going for.

The longer and more you puncture the fibers with the needle felting tool, the more fused the base fabric and your design will become. If you were to pull your fabric up off the brush or foam piece, you'd be able to see the fibers of the roving or yarn coming through the back side of the felted fabric.

That's a good sign that fusion is taking place; once you have a consistent amount of fiber peeking through the back is a good way to judge whether your needle felting work is done. But really doneness is a matter of personal preference; keep going until you think it's time to stop.

If you're working a big pattern or across a large piece of felted fabric, your whole project may not fit on the brush or foam at the same time. No problem, just work in sections, moving the piece as you need to so the section you're working on is toward the center of your brush or foam's working area (getting close to the edges is a dangerous proposition for your needles, work surface and fingers).

Because this is an art form, it's up to you to decide when your project has had enough needle felting. Once you start needle felting embellishment on a project it can be difficult to stop. You'll be tempted to add a few basic shapes, stripes, polka dots and cut-out shapes (hopefully not all on the same project) just because you can.

Once you decide you're finished, though, you'll need to do a bit of cleanup work. Trim any fiber that runs over the edge of your piece, and go back over those edges to make sure they're firmly fused to the background fabric.

You may have other errant strands that didn't quite felt as well as the others that you can either go back over or trim away from the work as well. The final phase is all about making the work look crisp and, well, finished.

And once you've started needle felting it's likely you'll want to find all sorts of ways to use this technique. Have fun and let your imagination run wild!

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