

Support Spindle Spinning

Sadelle Anne Wiltshire

A **support spindle** gets its name because it is set on a table, or better - in a small cup, bowl or depression to spin. Support spindles come in many shapes and sizes. the "Navajo" style spindle is a large hip-high support spindle that many Native American tribes used for spinning thick, bulky yarns. A small, lightweight support spindle is best used for spinning short fine fibers, especially cotton, and can also be used for spinning animal down fibers such as Angora rabbit wool, dog wool, camel down, cashmere and quiviut. Start off with a supply of carded cotton, available from many fiber suppliers.

The spinning technique for the support spindle is quite easy for beginners to learn. First, let's practice twirling the spindle:

Resting the spindle in a small cup or depression, gently grasp the spindle shaft 1-2 inches below the top with your thumb and middle finger.

Give the spindle a clockwise twirl and then encircle the shaft with your thumb and middle finger to cradle the spindle while it continues to spin (and to prevent it from falling over). Practice twirling and cradling until you can keep the spindle twirling for about 10 seconds or more.

Now, tie on a fine, plied "leader yarn" of about 6-7 inches close to the base of the spindle whorl. Wind a few rounds (clockwise) at the base to anchor the lead yarn and then spiral the remaining yarn towards the tip, leaving an extra inch or so off of the tip. (Figure 1)



fig. 1

Hold the remaining end of yarn in your opposite hand, and overlap the end with some of the unspun cotton. You may want to predraft the cotton a bit for ease of spinning. Give the spindle a twirl and cradle the shaft with the twirling hand. (Figure 2)

As the spindle twirls, it will be increasing the amount of twist in the yarn extending past the tip. Notice that the twist will start to travel up into the unspun fiber. Your job is simply to control the twist by drawing your fiber-holding hand back and letting SOME of the unspun fiber twist into yarn. If you are familiar with the long draw method of spinning, you will keep moving the fiber supply further away, as the twist moves up, keeping your hand moving just ahead of the twist. (Figure 3)

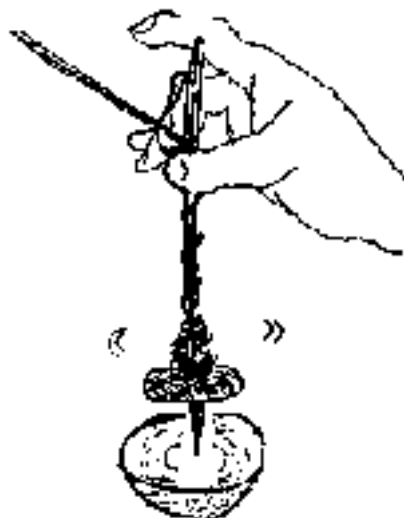


fig. 2

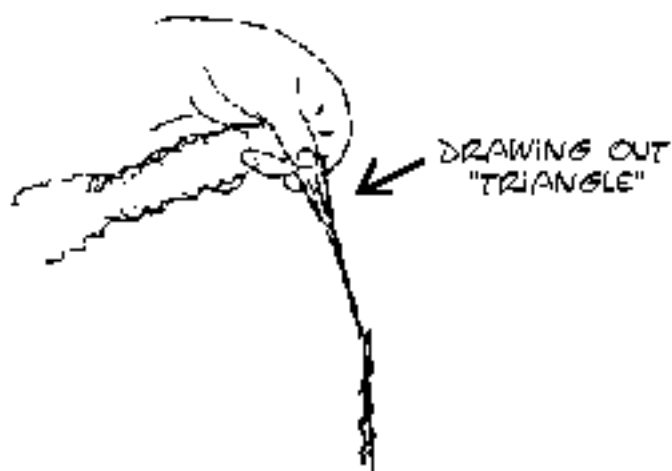


fig. 3

It is best to angle the yarn and connecting fiber off at a 30-45 degree angle from the tip of the spindle. Move your hand back just ahead of the twist, but not so fast that the fiber comes apart. As you become more comfortable with this technique, you will notice a small triangle of fiber extending from your hand, leading to the yarn. Watch this triangle as you spin: if the twist extends too far up into the triangle (drafting zone) and grabs too much fiber, simply stop twirling the spindle by clasping the shaft between your fingers, and untwist the tangled area with your fingers, then extend the fiber hand further back to equalize the twist and yarn. By keeping the triangle of fiber/drafting

zone a consistent size, you will get a consistent thickness in your yarn.

Once you have drawn out enough yarn (and before your arm gets tired from extending too far), give the spindle and extra twirl to strengthen the yarn and make sure that there are no under-twisted spots. Now unwind the spindle slowly (to remove the spiraling yarn) until the yarn is now coming from the base of the spindle, (Figure 4) and twirl the spindle clockwise again with the yarn at a right angle to wind the yarn onto the spindle. To keep the spindle weighted properly, wind the yarn in an cone from the base out. With a few inches of newly spun yarn remaining, spiral the yarn back up to the tip and leave an inch or so off the tip to continue spinning.

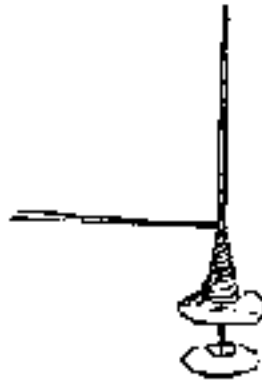


fig 4.

Now let's put all the movements together:

Spiral the leader yarn or end yarn on spindle up and off the tip..

Hold spindle upright in bowl... overlap end of yarn with fiber.....

Twirl spindle, cradle..... draw fiber up and away from tip, allowing twist to follow up.....

Twist, cradle..... continue to just short of an arm's length...

Stop, angle spindle back and unwind to base of shaft....

Twist at right angle to wind on....

Spiral end up and off ... and continue spinning.

That's it!

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Sadelle A. Wiltshire

Pumpkinspun Wools and Fiber Designs

155 Main St. 2nd Floor, Bennington, VT 05201

802-442-4921

<http://www.pumpkinspun.com>

info@pumpkinspun.com