

Wool yarn, that favorite of knitters, is durable, warm, and never out of fashion.

Wool You Be Mine

by Maddy Cranley

As the hearts and flowers of Valentine's Day begin to make an appearance and we realize that Spring is still a month or two away, a little romance is more than welcome. As knitters, we can take heart in knowing that our favorite source of knitting material, the woolly sheep, not only provides us with a wonderful fiber to knit but also with some whimsical do's and don'ts in the romance department.

Remember a mother's warning about the wolves in sheep's clothing? Even though they always turned out to be the fun guys. Were these Casanovas the proverbial "black sheep" of their families? Although, if the truth be known, it was only because the fleece of these "black" sheep could not be successfully dyed that contributed to their status as outcasts and had nothing to do with courtship skills. We were advised that it would be much better to flatter a steadfast "dyed-in-the-wool" character with the long, amorous glance of a "sheep's eye". And what ever you do, don't act like a "bunch of sheep" - plodding mindlessly along with the latest trends perhaps wearing a mini skirt too short, appearing to be "mutton dressed up as lamb" and attracting the wrong sort of attention.

Knitters have enjoyed a love affair with wool fiber for centuries as it has woven its way in and out of the history of world cultures. Inscribed seals in garments from Babylonia indicate that wool trading was in full swing in 4000 BC. Romans prized their sheep and its "golden fleece" by washing, oiling, and combing their flocks several times a year to ensure a lustrous wool. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain borrowed against tax income from sheep revenues to finance the voyage of Christopher Columbus to the Americas. In 18th century England, nobles were required to kneel on a woolsack, while proclaiming their allegiance to the crown as a reminder that the power of the nation was dependent on the successful production of wool.

We don't need a history lesson to tell us that we love this fiber so. Just as much as wool forms a protective coating against heat and cold for lambs and sheep, we enjoy the same benefits when wearing a wool sweater. The surface structure of wool fiber allows for air to be trapped on the surface and since air is a poor conductor of heat, warmth is not allowed to escape. Wool is not only a good insulator, it is durable, lightweight and comfortable. It's ability to absorb moisture very slowly, contributes to wearing comfort as it does not cool the body by allowing moisture to evaporate from the fabric. It can absorb up to thirty percent of its weight in moisture without feeling damp to the touch. Wool also absorbs dye with abandon giving us the opportunity to knit with yarn in unlimited color ranges.

Wool may be the perfect fiber but we are not always the perfect hosts. Wool sweaters, when properly treated, remain in our wardrobes for years providing many opportunities for the inevitable spills and snags. Wool garments should be rewarded for their longevity with special care when washing, drying, and storing. Wash with a wool soap and allow to dry flat. Do not hang sweaters on hangers and empty pockets before placing in storage in order prevent bulges and sags. Tuck in a moth repellent or cedar blocks among your woollen garments.

Wool will give you hours of knitting pleasure, keep you warm and comfortable. New fibers, fancy interlopers may come and go but wool is true blue, tried and true. Our love of wool is here to stay.
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Maddy Cranley is a professional knitwear designer, who has created exclusive designs for knitting and craft magazines, authored and published three books on the subject of creating felt garments and projects from hand knitting, and produces an ever-growing line of maddy laine hand knitting patterns. For additional information, see <http://www.maddycraft.com>