

WOOL

Dream • Investigate • Discover

Properties

Since wool is derived from a natural source there are certain things that hold true for it, but others that may vary between breeds. Below are some *overall traits* wool shares across most breeds. As always, never take what you read for truth until you give yourself the opportunity to investigate it like the fiber detective you are! Since wool is so readily available to us and has such variations from type to type you can find amply substituting with in wool a great place to start your adventure!

- ✦ insulating (great for warmth and noise reduction! seriously!)
- ✦ takes dye well
- ✦ affordable
- ✦ easy care
- ✦ longevity
- ✦ breathable
- ✦ absorbs moisture
- ✦ many, many more!



Naturally amazing

Left in its original state, with lanolin still very much a part of it, wool can be great working up on your needles in addition to being amazing as a final knitted product. Lanolin gives a waxy feel to the wool and adds water repellent traits as well antibacterial properties. Despite repelling water, wool can insulate you from moisture, and is able to absorb almost 25% of its weight! In an undyed state it is still beautiful and gives distinct stitch definition. Cabled sweaters and traditional Aran sweaters can really show off the knitting patterns from natural coloured yarns. Simply substituting a dark colour for a light colour wool can have incredible final results. Superwash and acrylic blends of wool maintain many of the properties of wool, whilst adding easy care as a benefit. Superwash is a conditioning treatment that smooths the fiber scales allowing knitters to avoid having to hand wash and dry. It does have a tendency to stretch out a bit, but that is easily fixed with another wash and dry.



Before You Switch from Wool...

Take time to look over the pattern you are considering substitution for and make a few observations

- Is this knit for the purpose of warmth?
- Is the overall look rugged and natural? More refined?
- Are the stitches or pattern clearly defined at a tight or sturdy gauge?
- Is it outerwear or will it be close to the skin?
- Does the knitting look thick and heavy? Does it look thick but lofty and light?

Oftentimes thinking through these key ideas will help you as you begin to look at other fibers. You can discover transitioning to a different breed yields different results or a blend may be a great place to start.

A Wonderful Woolly Collection

One way to discover substitution tricks with ease is to expose yourself to a variety of sources. For wool I have a fun and easy activity. Whenever possible “treat” yourself to a woolly education! When visiting your LYS, a fiber event or a farmers market, be on the lookout for wool. Take a moment to read the ball band. Have you heard of this breed before? If not, even without paying a penny, you can learn. **ASK:** what breed is this, where is it from, what qualities the breed is known for, what qualities of the yarn stand out? Get someone to start sharing and the information just pours out and a healthy learning conversation ensues! Give yourself the gift of a few skeins a year. They need not be expensive to be a great representation and learning tool. Experiment with each new breed in a multiple of ways to make a variety of swatches or rather *learning tools*. You can keep these in your swatch book and compare them as you find more and more. There are numerous differences from wool type to type, as well as blend to blend. I recommend Clara Parks [The Knitter’s Book of Wool](#) as a great tool to go alongside this learning activity.



LET'S MAKE A TRADE!

If you decide to substitute a different fiber for wool, here are a few things to consider. These attributes are by no means exhaustive, so use the space beneath to jot down your own observations and responses! Also, you may find exceptions to the things I mention. Keep in mind there are so many options of blends, weights, etc.

The properties below are things I have observed and discovered over the last year focusing on knitting sample bits in these fibers.

LINEN & COTTON

- Sturdy {You will notice most wool yarns will yield and break as you pull them. Not so with linens, or at least not often are you able to break yarn with your bare hands. Consider how the strength of linen makes it different. Cotton behaves as linen: very strong and I always need scissors to cut}
- Luster {Pure wool will have a gentle luster but seldom a "shine". Linen will seem to be bright and oftentimes glossy. This will generally fade, replacing with softness what it loses in shimmer. In most cases, wool hangs on tightly to colour, not just from the first dye, but even over lengths of time. Cotton usually results the same as linen, but in my experience it fades more initially than linen. For all I suggest swatch, wash, dry and notice changes. Repeat once more with the washed swatches for a better assessment of colour-fastness as well as softening.}
- Drape {Wool for my illustration is akin to several kids bundled in their fluffy snow gear with arms linked. Their snowsuits make the spaces between their arms less empty, resulting in a fuller look. Linen in this illustration would be those same kiddos in their swimsuits linking arms. There would be a bit more space between. That fullness goes us a springy, fuller stitch. The emptier gives us a bit more room for the stitch to move and hang without "interruption." Even if you drop down a needle size, linen is by nature going to be more streamlined than the wool and not as "filling" as those adorable kids in winter! Remember though, kids on the beach are still adorable. Just different! The ample room or space linen has gives it opportunity to drape more readily. Cotton drapes more than wool, but differently than cotton I have noticed. It will sometimes stretch and give a bit more than both wool and linen, but I feel its drape is more structured than the linen and of course less than that of wool}
- Insulation {Rather a lack of it in linen and cotton's case... Linen will definitely not keep you as warm as wool, but for warmer weather it works perfectly as you don't want to overheat! I wore linen most days in Hawaii, as it's breathable fibers seemed to wick away perspiration even more so than that of cotton. I find cotton is great for cooler projects, but can oftentimes be heavier per 100 yds than wool, and sometimes linen, so it may feel heavier. That is not a negative observation in the least. The weight and substance of the cotton vs. the linen may actually become a drawing factor in a knit. Can you imagine any reasons why?}
- Care {Linen and cotton soften the longer you wear it, which is great news, as each are usually stiff and sturdy initially. Most often you can toss your 100% cotton and linen right in to the washer (and sometimes in to the dryer) and the result will be a gentler, softer garment. Imagine washing and drying our 100% wool sweater. I don't have to imagine...I have a few shrunken and/or felted items from helpful family members doing laundry! You can also toss cotton and linen garments around on the beach without fear of sand embedding itself!}

CASHMERE

- Sturdy {Not always the case! As it is an animal fiber, like wool (unlike cotton and linen which are plants), you want to treat it as the luxury fiber it is. Do not substitute cashmere in a garment meant for heavy wear and tear as the little Kashmir goat will only produce 4 to 6 ounces of cashmere each year!}
- Luster {While cashmere is not shiny it can be brilliant. In much the same way as wool, it receives colour readily. And as cashmere is a bit downy or lofty, even when finely spun, it gives a gorgeous halo around the colour making it appear oftentimes fuller and soft.}
- Drape {Cashmere is by nature lightweight. It shapes itself quite nicely and true to form around whatever it is to drape upon. For example, lie a swatch of wool fabric over your hand, wrist and arm. Notice how wool will take the shape of your arm. Try the same with cashmere. The contour becomes at once a bit more defined, while maintaining a soft overall look. If we were to use the children dressed in wooly clothes or beach attire, we would be very surprised! Those kids in winter would have a gentle wrap knit in cashmere and they would wear the same wrap to the ocean shore! Which brings us to our next point...}
- Insulation {Cashmere is quite the chameleon of fiber! It responds quite frankly to the air around us! Cashmere's insulating properties change with the amount of humidity in the air! That ability to adapt and adjust make it comfortable in all climates, even warm ones and I know this firsthand. The same two well loved cashmere cardigan wraps I wore constantly in the mountains of Hawaii. I wore them at the water's edge on Kauai and now wear here them in the Eastern United States. Combining the last point with this one, cashmere is lightweight and warm technically speaking due to crimp of the fiber. Even if spun very fine the yarn retains the loft of the fibers which makes it warm without weight, so those kids in the snow? They have the warmth of the snowsuit in the fullness of what amounts to be a sundress on the beach...}
- Care {This is a fine point to consider when substituting cashmere: care is a bit more involved. Do not toss your finished garment around as you would previous fibers mentioned as it may snag or catch and repair takes a bit more care than with cotton just pulling it back in to shape. As it is so soft, cashmere is quite often worn against the skin. It will pick up body oils and scent over time. You can not toss it in to the washer and dryer and expect to see it in the same shape and form as it went in. Gentle care and oftentimes *professional care* is recommended.}

SILK

- Sturdy {Silk has an incredible range and its sturdiness is widely varied. Considering it comes from a wee silk moth you would think it the most fragile of fibers. Quite often silk fibers are blended with other fibers to give added strength to it. The first time I bought silk and asked about it's durability the LYS owner smiled and remarked "One doesn't buy silk for durability."}
- Luster and Drape {Originally developed and refined for king and queens, silk has a heritage of being a fiber to notice, largely in part to how gorgeous it looks! Silk's luster and drape are unique and incredible, effortlessly falling and swaying, lots of beautiful easy movement from it. It holds dye fast and brilliantly, striking reds and purples pop and shine in startling glory. The shine of the silk fiber itself is apparent even after the dye has set, oftentimes appearing much deeper and brighter than fibers dyed in the same way.}
- Insulation {Interestingly this bit of luxury yarn that starts as a single strand from a cocoon is quite amazing and versatile. Like wool and cashmere it can definitely keep you warm, with high thresholds of moisture absorbency (also odor absorbency!). It can keep you warm when you need it, but it is also comfortable to wear in summer. As it feels great against the skin it is a great layering tool for added warmth!}
- Care {Again, silk, like cashmere, is a luxury fiber. Just as you want to gently take care of your pure wool, so would you respond to silk. Professional care is always the most often recommended, but silk can also be effectively cared for at home. Care is so varied though you will want to refer to each ball band for manufacturers suggestions.}

Nylon

- Sturdy {Did you know that nylon was first created as an alternative to silk!? And what they hoped to create as a durable and affordable substitute sure hit its mark! Where silk would eventually fade and weather in repeated exposure to sunlight, nylon was largely unaffected. Despite being soft and lightweight, nylon was strong, resilient and resisted pilling over time and wear.}
- Luster {Nylon is very lustrous, but can also be subdued when dyed. It is known for its colorfastness so if you are looking for the softening look over time that natural fibers tend to have, you probably won't get that from nylon. It has a shine to it that appeals to many knitters that does not dull over time.}
- Drape {Think of silk stockings that women would wear and try hard not to have them catch and run. Nylon stockings gave that same soft drape, but with a bit more integrity to form. It draped well *and* held its shape. Since it is so light and soft it can be created to softly mimic cashmere, or plied a bit differently can resemble cotton cording. Since it is light however, what you would feel in say 100 yard of wool at 50 grams may be 200 yards at the same weight. Oftentimes we forget that when we put on a sweater, part of the appeal is feeling the sweater on us. Just something else to consider when substituting.}
- Insulation {Nylon is known for shedding and drying quite quickly. There are incredible man-made blends that could fall under this category that have great wicking properties. If I am knitting a garment solely based on warmth, I would not substitute nylon for wool.}
- Care {There are lots of great attributes of nylon, but let us not treat it like Superman without a kryptonite. Nylon will in fact melt. So consult carefully the unique ball band recommendations for dryer and ironing. It has great elasticity and memory, again think if those nylon tights or stockings! But keep it "cool" with the care. Generally speaking a toss in to the washer and dryer on the coolest settings and it should be fine! It also won't attract moths or critters, so no need to store it in fear of those little pests, but don't tempt the mice! Another great property of nylon very similar to wool is its anti-fungal trait.}

What about YOU?? What have you discovered? Share with Me! SHOW & TELL on Instagram: @MSkiKnits Give me quick updates on Twitter MSkiKnits . You can find me on Ravelry under the same name!

Have important discoveries you want to share with fellow 6 Bits Storybooks listeners? Email me! hellomelissa@6bitsstorybooks.com and of course visit the 6 Bits website: www.6bitsstorybooks.com