

# Wovember. An Interesting Way to Raise Wool Awareness

Teresa Cabellos, Online Guild

Wovember was born in 2011 by Drs Kate Davies and Felicity Ford (Felix), as a response to their frustration about the use of the words 'wool' and 'woollen', on garments that actually contain little or no wool. It started as a blog campaign. Over the years #wovember has become a collective effort that takes place during the whole month of November on social media (especially on Instagram), with more and more wool artisans, shepherds and wool producers becoming involved.

Following a list with prompts for each day of the month, you are encouraged to post pictures featuring the use of wool.

Why is it important for me to participate in #wovember? Coming from a country that once saw a strong wool industry, which now is sadly almost completely forgotten, #wovember is an incredible opportunity to spread the word and advocate for the use of 100% local wools.

Each year the prompts change, so you can continue to find inspiration in the world of wool that surrounds you. Reading through what other people publish and how they interpret the word of the day is a continuous source of knowledge. It always amazes me how much there is still to learn from the inspiring and creative images and writing of other participants!

Writing a post each day was a challenge; I tried to prepare in advance for most days, reading as much as I could about a specific subject. However, for some posts I did not have a clear idea of what I wanted to say, so when I woke up on those mornings, I just started writing and letting my ideas flow. It felt a bit like a 'writer's exercise'; the more I wrote, the more inspiration and ideas came to my mind!

I was encouraged to write this article by Cath Snape, an online friend and fellow member of the OLG, who loved the thought I put into my posts and was sure others would be interested. Here are a couple of my #wovember2022 posts. I hope they inspire you to participate in this coming #wovember2023!

## Day 9 – Community

Several years ago, I went to a knitting event, and I met a young girl who was spindle spinning, so we immediately got to talking. After a while, I said something about how weird was it that without knowing each other we talked like good friends just after few minutes; she looked at me directly and said, very seriously, 'Well, everyone that loves wool and sheep are nice people'. I don't know if that is true, I just know that from that love of wool comes a strong sense of community. Outside my family, in the last few years I have sent and received more parcels of gifts to and from people I personally don't know than to my friends at home!

One of those is @ysarasfarben; we got to chat through our common interest in natural dyes and we ended up interchanging parcels full of natural dyes.

Among other things, I sent her some cochineal from @canaturex and that brings me to another idea regarding the wool community...

When I think about the 'wool community', it immediately comes to my mind the image of a network of fungi, with their underground mycelium extending infinitely and connecting so



Cochineal dye from Canaturex



Mohair and bamboo, dyed with cochineal and oak leaves



Wheel of colours – sent to fellow knitter in a fibre swap



Turkish spindle



Handmade tools received from a Turkish friend, in exchange for knitted socks

Photos: Teresa Cabellos

many different areas. That's why being interested in natural wool is an excellent way of contributing to the sustainability of more communities than you can imagine.

The world of natural dyes is one of these communities. @canaturex is a family based business that cultivates and commercialises cochineal, an insect that produces red dyes. But @canaturex is not just a business, it's the strength of one man, Lorenzo Pérez, who, through sheer determination (and uncountable obstacles), has brought back to value a material that was once a fundamental piece in the economy of the Canary Islands.

Through his brand name @canaturex, the cochineal from the Canary Islands is, in my knowledge, the first natural dye in the world to enjoy such an important distinction as the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO).

This achievement sends waves through a network of communities connected by our love of natural materials, from the local communities of Canary Islands to wool artisans from all around the world and to the hands of my 'wool friend' @ysarasfarben.

And so, we wool lovers and natural dyers can have in our hands a natural resource, with an assurance of quality and sustainability.

## Day 16 – Spin

Spinning is the simple act of drawing out fibres and twisting them together to form a yarn. This process dates back to pre-history.

Before woven fabric there was yarn! The earliest finds depicting some types of 'yarn' are related to bone sculptures. The Gravettian 'Venus' Figurines depict women wearing string skirts and other string adornments and date back to c.20,000BCE.

Spun fibres were first made by hand and with sticks. The first example of spindle whorls I have found documented is from the north Chinese Middle to Late Neolithic, c.3000-6000 years ago, and this way of spinning extended for most of the history of humankind.

There is some controversy regarding the first appearance of spinning wheels. Some experts believe that they originated in India between 500CE and 1000CE Other experts indicate that it was invented in the Islamic world by 1030CE and spread to China by 1090.

By the 13th century, spinning wheels are documented in Europe and were a standard piece of equipment in many homes, where the production of fabric was a cottage industry.

There are many different types of spinning wheels, including the Great Wheel (or walking wheel), which was probably the first type of wheel, where the yarn was spun using one hand to turn the wheel and the other one to draft the fibre. There are great resources online where you can see a great wheel spinning: <https://youtu.be/Ooh1RCfiHHI>



Castle spinning wheel

Other types of wheels are the castle wheel (like mine), the Norwegian wheel, the Saxony... so many variations! But, although they may look different, most of them have very similar parts with such cool names as the maidens, the mother of all, the treadle, the footman, the flyer... explaining all of that is more than I can fit in this post, so here are couple of useful links: <https://joyofhandspinning.com/styles-of-the-spinning-wheel> <https://www.lavisch.com/site/the-anatomy-of-a-spinning-wheel>

### How did I start spinning and why do I love it?

I started spinning because I am the kind of person that when I go to a restaurant and really like something my first thought is... mmmmh I wonder if I could make it at home?

So, naturally, when I started knitting and had yarn on my hand, I always wondered if I could make my own yarn! Next logical step... buy a spindle... after I spun the yarn for my first shawl, again I took the next logical step... I bought a spinning wheel!

Why do I love spinning? Well, it has everything! You can spin very controlled yarns, with your fibre of choice (wool, alpaca, silk, nettle, cotton...) and desired characteristics (worsted vs woollen, thick or thin), but you can also experiment and feel free to create the craziest of art yarns.

On top of that, spinning is a very therapeutic activity, it allows you to relax, concentrate on an internal rhythm and enter 'the zone'!

And finally, when I spin, I have a strange feeling of connection with our traditional knowledge. It always makes me think how many hands have made the same movements throughout history – in my mind I like to invent their lives, it's like writing a historical novel with my hands.



Supported spindles



Handmade drop spindle

### Comment by Cath Snape:

I encouraged Teresa to write this article as I have loved reading her posts throughout November. The thought and ideas that she puts in inspires me, especially as she is writing in her second language. I have taken part in Wovember and realise it does help focus and appreciate the wonders we have in our hands. My posts were less poetic and inspirational, but I still enjoyed the process, so as Teresa says, do join in either by posting yourself or reading those from others.

### Beechwood craft #Wovember post on Community

I am so grateful for the crafting community that feeds and nurtures me, for the farming community that feeds and nurtures the animals and crops that provide the fibres I love to spin and weave and knit. For our local community that pulled together in covid. Thank you all and to Wovember that had made me think each day about so many different aspects of wool.

Wovember has been organized by different groups, including @teamwovember (Kate Davies, Felicity Ford (Felix), Tom van Deijnen and Louise Scollay), @daughterofashepherd, @thisbiodynamicfarmland, @pureshellyarn and @ithoughtiknewhow

**About the Author:** Teresa works as a Forensic Scientist for the Spanish Ministry of Justice, but when someone asks her 'what do you do?' she loves to answer that she is a wool explorer! The main objective of her work is to help promote the use of 100% natural wool by:

1. Supporting local wool producers by writing patterns specifically adapted to locally created yarns
2. Preserving wool traditions through the research of traditional wool related techniques
3. Promote indigenous breeds through the development of a long-term project that involves the creation of several blankets made from European native sheep breeds.

You can learn more about Teresa on <https://teresalalana.com> or on her instagram account @teresalalana



Turkish spindle



Historic spindles



Drop spindle



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