

The Fabulous Felt Illusion



Discover the magic of the High Weald with felt in 1 hour

Things you'll need: wool fleece, olive soap, sushi rolling mats or bubble wrap, mist sprayers, thick kitchen cloths, images of landscapes in colour

Get prepared!

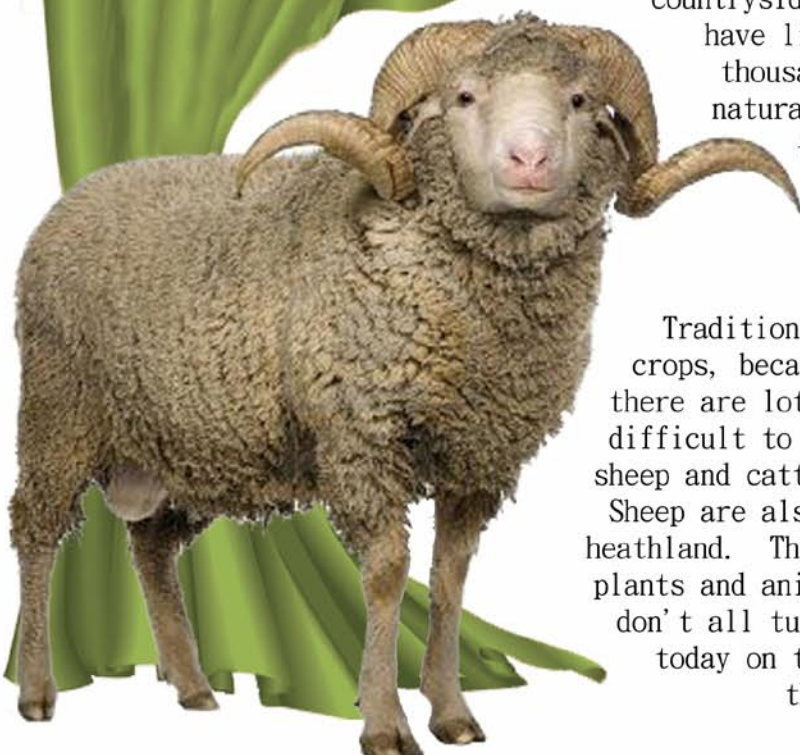
Cut up the fleece into short lengths. It's worth putting it into plastic tubs with lids on if you can. Chip some soap off the block and put into the mist sprayers with some warm water and shake vigorously to make a soapy mix. Lay out for each pupil a kitchen cloth and a sushi mat, and for each table a couple of mist sprayers, a selection of fleece colours and some landscape pictures.



What is the High Weald and what does it have to do with Felt?

The High Weald is a beautiful area of protected countryside (you could show it on a map). People have lived and worked in the High Weald for thousands of years, using resources found naturally in the area. Today we are going to be doing work with **FELT**, which is made from **WOOL**, which comes from **SHEEP**.

Traditionally High Weald farmers have avoided crops, because the soil is quite poor quality and there are lots of steep slopes, which makes the land difficult to farm. They turned to farming animals so sheep and cattle are a common sight in the High Weald. Sheep are also necessary to help protect meadows and heathland. They graze on young trees so that different plants and animals can live in these habitats and they don't all turn into woodland. Sheep are still used today on the heath at Ashdown Forest, right in the middle of the High Weald.





Get your Artists started.....

Use the pictures you have chosen to look at the different components of the landscape. Using your fingers as viewfinders select an area of the landscape and describe to your neighbour what shapes and colours you see. What is in the foreground? What is in the background?

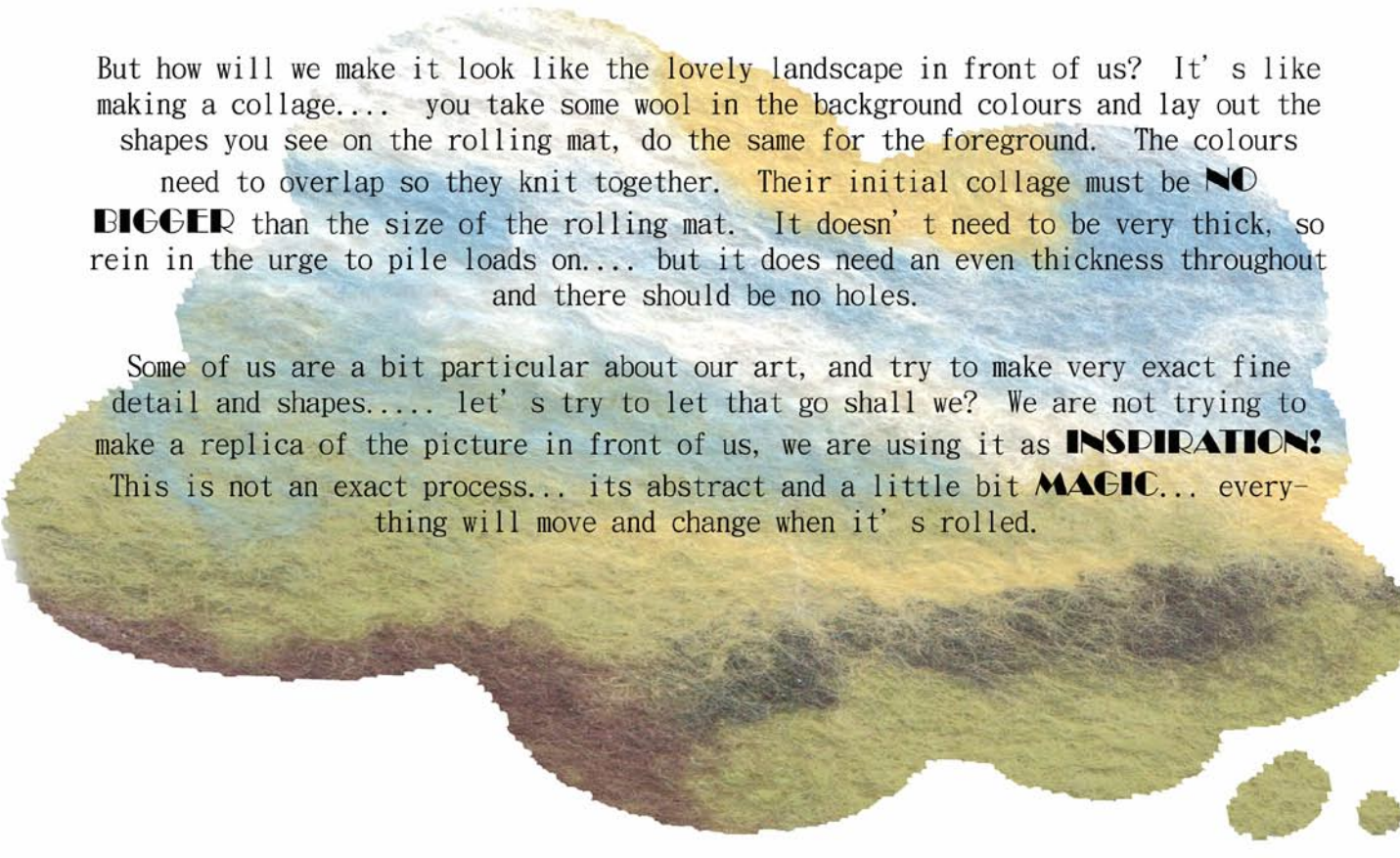


Introducing the felting fibres.....

Once you've touched the stuff, it's clear why it helps to keep it in boxes with lids on until you are ready to use it! It's wonderfully soft and tactile and a bit irresistible. We will be using high grade Merino wool, which is the fleece sheared from the sheep, washed and dyed. It's the same stuff that your mum's best jumper is made of.... and what happens to best jumpers if you put them in the washing machine? They shrink and go thick, rather like, yes you've got it.... FELT. This is because the washing machine WETS and AGITATES the wool, so this is what we need to do.

But how will we make it look like the lovely landscape in front of us? It's like making a collage.... you take some wool in the background colours and lay out the shapes you see on the rolling mat, do the same for the foreground. The colours need to overlap so they knit together. Their initial collage must be **NO BIGGER** than the size of the rolling mat. It doesn't need to be very thick, so rein in the urge to pile loads on.... but it does need an even thickness throughout and there should be no holes.

Some of us are a bit particular about our art, and try to make very exact fine detail and shapes.... let's try to let that go shall we? We are not trying to make a replica of the picture in front of us, we are using it as **INSPIRATION!** This is not an exact process... its abstract and a little bit **MAGIC**... everything will move and change when it's rolled.

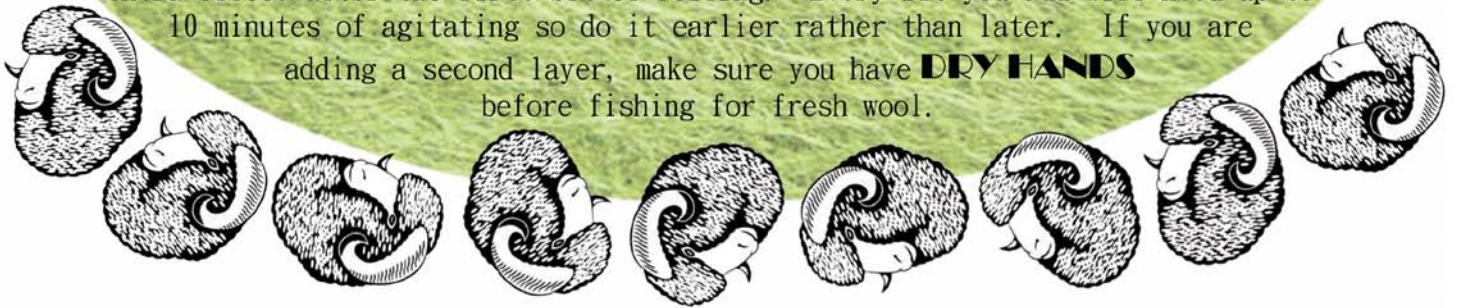




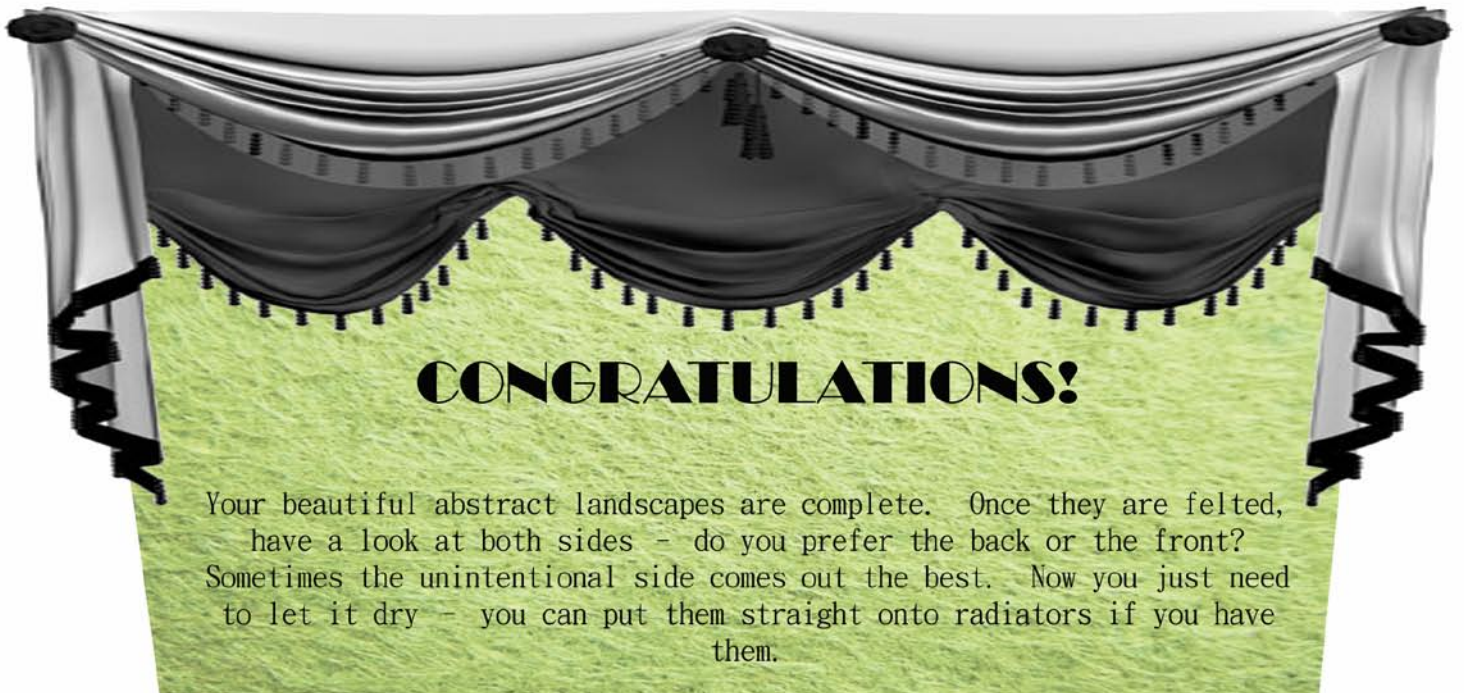
Now for the hard labour....

This is where the water comes in. Since wool felts with water, close the lids on the boxes of unused felt to avoid dripping little hands going back for a bit more! If you don't have lids, make sure there is no touching the dry felt with wet hands.

Roll up your collage in the sushi mat... and roll vigorously between your hands or on the table, over the kitchen cloth. After a minute or two open it up and have a look... it should have started to knit together and shrink. Peel it off the mat and turn it 90° and carry on rolling. If any bits were hanging out of the mat on the first rolling, make sure they are in the mat when you turn it. The full felting process will take about 10 minutes. If there are holes, or bits you wish you'd added, put in some extra fleece after the first bit of rolling. Every bit you add will need up to 10 minutes of agitating so do it earlier rather than later. If you are adding a second layer, make sure you have **DRY HANDS** before fishing for fresh wool.



Are your arms falling off yet? Well remember that historically you might have made many of your clothes like this, and your hat, saddle, tent or rugs. You would have done it by dyeing the wool with berries and plants, and rubbing it on a rock with animal fat. It must have smelt lovely.



Your beautiful abstract landscapes are complete. Once they are felted, have a look at both sides - do you prefer the back or the front? Sometimes the unintentional side comes out the best. Now you just need to let it dry - you can put them straight onto radiators if you have them.

Accessorise with your felt



Once you have created a flat piece of felt, it can easily be transformed into a bag, pouch, purse, pencil case.....

Things you'll need: your felt, ball of wool, darning needle, felting wool and fasteners (buttons, poppers, elastic)

To make a simple bag, fold your felt in half, then using a darning needle threaded with coloured wool, blanket stitch the two sides together. To make the handle, you can plait some coloured wool, poke a hole at each side of the back to thread it through, and tie it off.

You can also felt a handle by taking a long piece of un-felted wool, wetting it, then rolling it between your fingers until it felts.

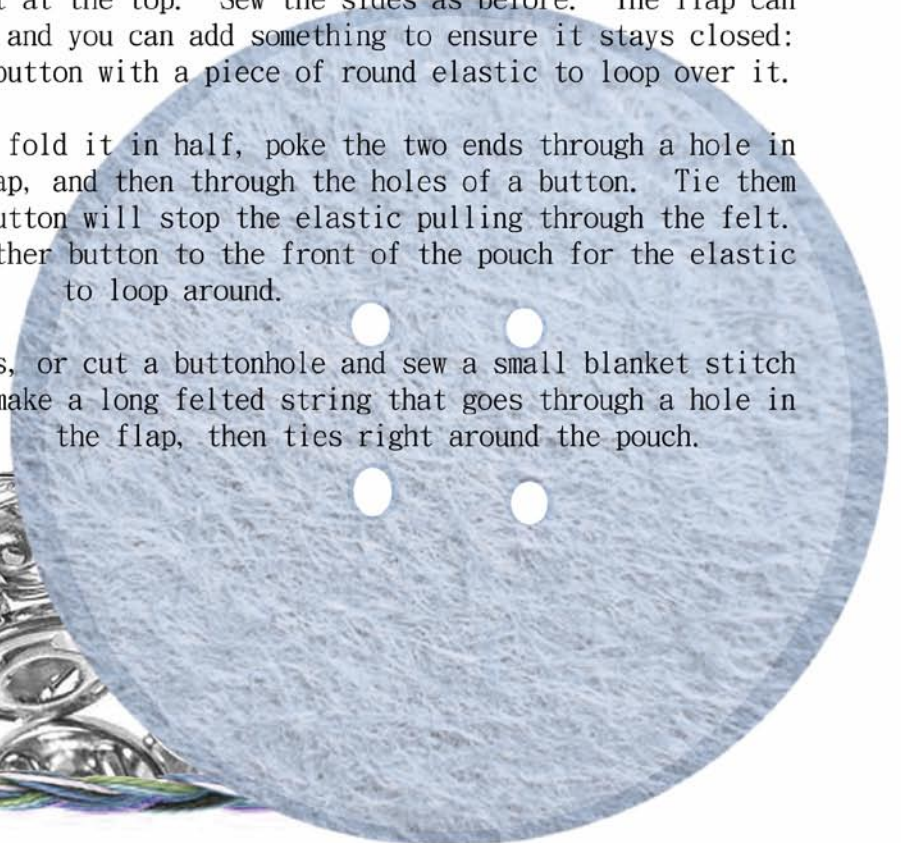


To make a purse, pouch or pencil case, fold your felt almost in half, so that a flap is left sticking out at the top. Sew the sides as before. The flap can then be folded over and you can add something to ensure it stays closed: try a button with a piece of round elastic to loop over it.

Take a length of elastic, fold it in half, poke the two ends through a hole in the front of the flap, and then through the holes of a button. Tie them together. The button will stop the elastic pulling through the felt.

Now sew another button to the front of the pouch for the elastic to loop around.

You can also use poppers, or cut a buttonhole and sew a small blanket stitch around it, or make a long felted string that goes through a hole in the flap, then ties right around the pouch.



Fabric Fusion Felting

This is a basic version of Nuno felting, which allows you to fuse the felt to another piece of fabric.

Things you'll need:

fleece, muslin or silk, bubble wrap, string, synthetic voile, soapy water

Step 1: Lay very fine wool fibres down all facing in the same direction on the bubble wrap. Now do another layer of very fine wool in the opposite direction. You can leave gaps if you want....

Step 2: Place a piece of cotton muslin or silk on top of the fibres. Now add another layer of wool fibres as in step 1.



Step 3. Add some detail or pattern to your wool design and then lay the voile on top. This is a protection layer and shouldn't mesh with the felt. Spray all over with the soapy water and smooth it down with your hands.

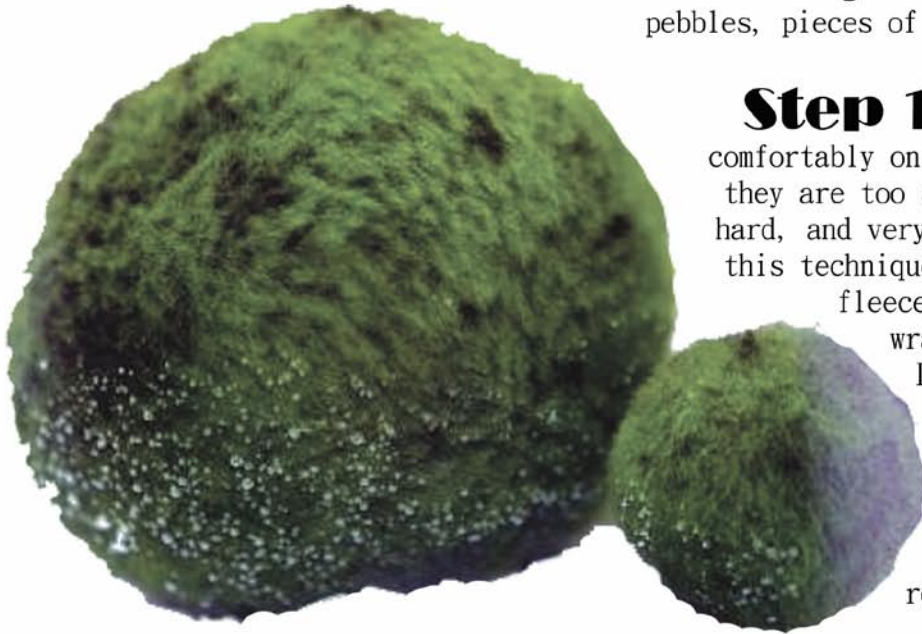
Step 4: Now roll it up (tying the roll with string will help) and roll it back and forth for 5 minutes. Now open it up and check it - make sure the voile isn't felting to the rest and see how far along the process is. Roll it up in the opposite direction (if possible) and continue rolling for another 5 minutes.... Bear in mind that the muslin or silk will go crinkly as the wool shrinks.

Step 5: Now fold up your felt and drop it on the table! Re-fold it differently and do it again several times. This will help the final felting process to complete.

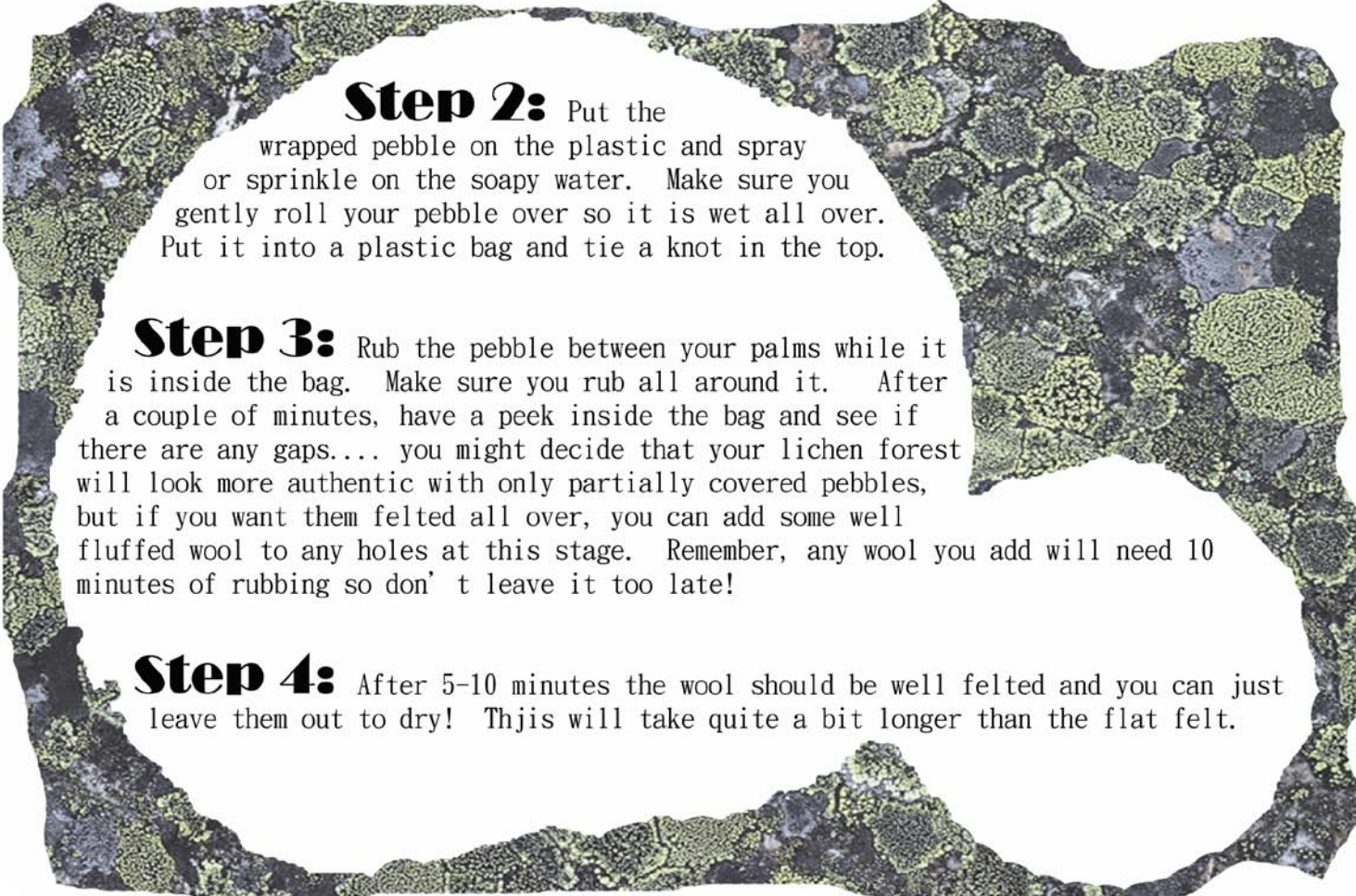
Moss and lichen pebbles in felt

Now it's time to try some 3D felting. Simple shaped 3D items with rounded edges can be felted onto directly. An ideal place to start is to felt a pebble. If you choose moss and lichen colours, you can create your own mossy forest floor!

Things you'll need: felting wool, olive soap and water, pebbles, pieces of plastic and plastic bags.



Step 1: Pick pebbles that fit comfortably on the palm of your hand - if they are too small handling them will be hard, and very large ones are heavy! For this technique, you need to fluff up the fleece as much as possible before wrapping it around your pebble. It is prone to gaps and holes, so take small amounts, fan them out thinly and layer on the pebble. The fleece should overlap or it will pull off the pebble in the rolling process.



Step 2: Put the wrapped pebble on the plastic and spray or sprinkle on the soapy water. Make sure you gently roll your pebble over so it is wet all over. Put it into a plastic bag and tie a knot in the top.

Step 3: Rub the pebble between your palms while it is inside the bag. Make sure you rub all around it. After a couple of minutes, have a peek inside the bag and see if there are any gaps... you might decide that your lichen forest will look more authentic with only partially covered pebbles, but if you want them felted all over, you can add some well fluffed wool to any holes at this stage. Remember, any wool you add will need 10 minutes of rubbing so don't leave it too late!

Step 4: After 5-10 minutes the wool should be well felted and you can just leave them out to dry! This will take quite a bit longer than the flat felt.

Felt Moulding

Your flat felt can also be moulded and hardened to make hanging ornaments...

Things you'll need: Ceramic or silicon cookie moulds (pick shallow designs to start with), large bowl, baking sheet, corn flour, your felt, PVA glue, ribbon (thin enough to be threaded through a darning needle), scissors and an oven set at 220 degrees (check your mould's maximum temperature)

Step 1: Make your own liquid starch... Some shop varieties contain formaldehyde, so better safe than sorry! Simply mix 1 tbsp of corn flour with 1 pint of cold water and you have liquid starch.

Step 2: Cut your felt so it overlaps your silicon mould by at least 1" .

Step 3: Stir the liquid starch in a bowl really well, then soak your felt right in it. Lift it out and squeeze out as much of the liquid as you can.



Step 4: Place the wet felt over the mould and using your fingers, work it into the mould until you can see the design and it is thoroughly pushed onto the mould.

Step 5: Put it on the baking tray and put in the oven. They should take around 20-30 minutes to completely dry out and become stiff.

Step 6: Lay your ornament on top of another piece of felt and trace around it (this will be your backing). Stick the front to the back gluing as close to the ridge of the mould as possible. Once it is dry, cut around it with a pair of sharp scissors.

Step 7: Thread the ribbon on the needle and make a loop through the top of the ornament so you can hang it up. You can continue to decorate your ornaments with marker pens, glitter etc.



Resources

Wool fleece - www.georgeweil.com

(Merino tops are best and come in many colours. It goes further than you think... the supplier can advise you on quantity based on the size of the pieces of felt you want to make)

Olive soap - www.thegreenstoreonline.co.uk, possibly also from chemists

Sushi rolling mats - www.sushisushi.co.uk, or your local Asian supermarket

Mist sprayers - hardware stores or garden centres

Thick kitchen cloths - often found in £1 stores
(These are simply to soak up excess water during the felt-ing process to keep you classroom from turning into a flood, so substitute with any absorbent items... they just need to be a bit bigger than the rolling mats)

Ceramic or Silicon cookie moulds - E-bay or kitchen shops

PVA glue - Kent County Supplies, 0845 270 8811 (most schools have accounts)

Created by Bec Britain and Sharon Mee for the High Weald Heroes Programme
Art Resources for Primary School Teachers ©

