

WEAVE A SPINDLE-SPUN BLANKET ON A RIGID-HEDDLE LOOM? YES, YOU CAN.

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Kim and her family host a Sheep and Wool Camp at their farm each year. The parents and children work simultaneously but separately on fiber-arts projects such as spinning, feltmaking, and weaving, while also learning about life on a farm.



Organizing a Sheep and Wool Camp

BY KIM GOODLING

Have you ever had an experience that just seemed too perfect to be true, one of those moments in time that you wish would never end? Those magical moments happen here at Vermont Grand View Farm, Washington, Vermont, every summer during our Sheep and Wool Camp. Eight children ages seven to eleven and their parents spend an entire week with us, captivated by fiber and the animals that produce it. Camp week began four years ago when Anne Gordon came to me and asked if my children, then fourteen, twelve, and nine, would host a summer farm camp for her two children and their friends. Anne wanted her children to experience rural farm life while learning to work with their hands through spinning and knitting. As the weeks progressed and I began talking with other parents about our proposed camp, they became so excited that they wanted to attend the camp themselves. Our idea of a sheep and wool camp for children and their parents took off.

We create opportunities at our camp for young minds to take risks, explore, and focus on the process rather than the product. In these circumstances, the results are usually stunning. With this in mind, we plan each summer's activities. I try to vary the time so that energetic children have breaks from focused learning and have opportunities to run and explore. The children love chore time and learning about our fiber animals. For each day of the week, we make out a schedule for the parents and children and write out a materials list for the day. This keeps us organized

as the week progresses and gives us a framework to work within.

We have found that most parents and children enjoy working separately from each other, touching base throughout the day. The children take over our huge old dairy barn, while the parents and I work around our dining room table and on our covered porch. As soon as children arrive and have their lunches put away, they do morning chores: filling water buckets and mineral feeders, collecting eggs, and moving sheep to a new pasture. They are instructed in how to work with the animals. While

doing chores, they have time to observe and get to know each animal and its needs. Next, they head to the barn to work on learning new fiber arts skills. During the morning craft time, the children may explore weaving with a tapestry or backstrap loom, learn to spin or knit using handmade handspindles and knitting needles, or practice wet-felting by making hats and balls. Lunch provides time to expend some energy with walks to the creek or strolls with the llama on trails in the woods. In the afternoon, the children plan and create a large group needlefelted mural, which





we will enter at local county fairs and fiber festivals.

As the parents register for camp, I ask about their interests and ability levels. This information helps me decide which projects to choose for their week at camp. I organize the parents' days so that they are learning a new skill in the mornings and working on a large week-long project in the afternoons. Almost every year, we go through the process

of transforming fleece to yarn. Within one week's time we wash, card, dye, and spin a fleece during the morning craft times. I choose an afternoon project that can easily be broken down into individual steps to complete each day.

By the last day of our week, parents and children alike have formed close bonds with one another. I am overwhelmed with the enthusiasm of the week. Melancholy sets in as they all begin to gather their belongings, and there is much talk about next year's camp. Some families have come to camp every year, and now their children have aged out of our seven-to-eleven-year-old guidelines. For the first time, Vermont Grand View Farm will offer a camp for older children this summer as well. ✂

Vermont Grand View Farm, Washington, Vermont, is home to Kim Goodling and her flock of Romney sheep, which provide wool for her yarn business. In addition to teaching fiber art classes, Kim manages the farm's eighteenth-century bed-and-breakfast and home schools her children, Emily, Anna, and Luke. Kim and her husband, Chuck,

invite you to visit their hillside farm at www.grandviewfarmvt.net.

RESOURCES

- Cypher, Carol Huber. *How We Felt: Designs and Techniques from Contemporary Felt Artists*. Loveland, Colorado: Interweave, 2007.
- Dharma Trading, www.dharmatrading.com, for natural dye supplies or silk scarves and totes for dyeing.
- Falick, Melanie. *Kids Knitting: Projects for Kids of All Ages*. New York: Artisan, 2003.
- Fournier, Nola, and Jane Fournier. *In Sheep's Clothing: A Handspinner's Guide to Wool*. Loveland, Colorado: Interweave, 1995.
- Glasbrook, Kirsten. *Tapestry Weaving*. London: Search Press, 2002.
- Harrisville Designs, www.harrisvilledesigns.com, for backstrap looms, tapestry looms, yarn, and dyed roving.
- The Mannings Handweaving School and Supply, www.the-mannings.com, for natural dye supplies.
- Vickery, Anne Einset. *The Art of Feltmaking: Basic Techniques for Making Jewelry, Miniatures, Dolls, Buttons, Wearables, Puppets, Masks, and Fine Art Pieces*. New York: Watson-Guptill, 1997.

Hosting your own week

If you're thinking about opening your farm to host a similar week of activities, here are some ideas to get you started.

Project Ideas for Children

- Backstrap weaving
- Collecting flowers and plants for natural dyes
- Wet-felting beads for jewelry
- Felting hats around small playground balls
- Making felt around bars of soap
- Wet-felting masks
- Tapestry weaving
- Making CD handspindles and spinning
- Making knitting needles out of dowel rods
- Knitting penny pockets
- Making braided rug mugs
- Needlefelting three-dimensional figures
- Needlefelting a large mural as a group project

Project Ideas for Parents

- Felting
- Wet-felting tote bags or hats
 - Nuno-felting scarves or tops
- Braiding with roving
- Braiding chair pads

- Braiding mug rugs
- Weaving
- Backstrap weaving
 - Simple loom weaving
 - Weaving placemats or scarves
- Spinning
- Learning how to spin
 - Washing wool
 - Carding and other fiber preparation
 - Spinning with spindles
 - Spinning on a wheel
 - Learning about different breeds of sheep
- Natural dyeing
- Collecting local plants and flowers that are in season
 - Preparing dyebaths and dyeing yarn
 - Exploring natural dye extracts
 - Dyeing with indigo
- Knitting
- Embellishing knitted pillow covers
 - Exploring embellishments
 - Knitting and felting flowers
- Embroidering

Sample Schedule for Children

- 10:00–10:15 a.m. Campers arrive and put lunches away
- 10:15–10:45 a.m. Chore time
- 10:45 a.m.–noon Craft time
- Noon–12:30 p.m. Picnic llama trek
- 12:30–1:00 p.m. Lessons in animal husbandry

- 1:00–2:15 p.m. Group project time
- 2:15–2:30 p.m. Wrap-up

Sample Schedule for Parents

- 10:00–10:15 a.m. Arrival/settling children
- 10:15–10:45 a.m. Instructional time/ coffee
- 10:45 a.m.–noon Crafting/putting new knowledge to work
- Noon–12:30 p.m. Lunch
- 12:30–2:30 p.m. Project time

First Day of Camp

- Teach campers how to approach and enjoy the animals
- Speak with soft voices
 - Walk with slow movements
 - Stand still and allow the animals to come to you
 - Hold out your hand so they can smell you
- Plan a scavenger hunt that incorporates all the different areas of your farm

Things to Bring to Camp

- Bag lunch with drink
- Mud boots
- Sunscreen lotion and insect repellent
- Sunglasses
- Raincoats, jackets, and clothing for the current weather