

June Yohn Spins Beauty From Unusual Gifts

BY LOU ANN GOOD

PALMYRA — For Christmas, June Yohn, Palmyra, received several boxes of raw mohair and a fleece. June shrugged and said, "Other people get normal things, but me...." Her voice trails off before she adds, "I'm different."

She isn't complaining though. The gift is exactly what she wanted. From start to finish, June likes to do things differently and do them right. For her knitting and weaving business, that means raising purebred English Angora rabbits, gathering their wool during grooming sessions, cleaning, dyeing, spinning and knitting or weaving the homespun wool.

June has boxes of her meticulously knitted hats, scarfs and vests that demonstrate her perfectionist tendencies of creating only the best. The soft, silky touch of the Angora rabbit wool exudes a feeling of luxury. June said, "I try to promote quality so that hand spun can be worn in contemporary fashions."

In developing contemporary fashions, June often experiments

in dyeing wools and combining several textures of the spun wool to create varied effects. The creativity of trying different techniques like mohair spun over a wool core and plied with sewing thread for stability fascinates her.

June dislikes using both chemical and natural dyes because they require toxic mineral salts. Then there's the problem of disposal. What do you do with toxic waste? June solves the problem by using artificially colored powdered drink for dye.

To develop her spinning, weaving and knitting skills, June said, "I learned by talking to people who do it, by making mistakes and by reading—but I had to scrounge to find reading information since it isn't readily available."

Rather than purchase processed wool, June prefers to buy quality fleeces and process them herself. She confided, "Other people say that isn't the way to do it. That I should find the one aspect I'm best at and then stick to it." June ran her fingers through the various textured yarn and said, "But I do everything because I love doing

it."

June stresses that to get a rabbit's wool, the animal is not killed as many believe. Instead, hair is plucked from the rabbit. Although the rabbit may protest with a high-pitched shrill scream the first time it is groomed, June points out that if the hair is not plucked from the rabbit, the rabbit may strangle itself by trying to do it. She said, "Shedding happens naturally four times a year. If a rabbit's hair becomes too long, the rabbit ingests it and wool blocks may have fatal results."

To groom rabbits, June places it on her lap and brushes the loose hair, being careful to remove matted hair. June prefers caring for the rabbits better than any other aspect of her business. She brags that she has a clean rabbit operation and a good vet. "But more than that, you need to learn to trust your own instincts since wrong treatments like antibiotics can kill rabbits." June promotes using herbs to treat sick rabbits. When she sells a rabbit, she always includes instructions in caring for the rabbit, food packets and her telephone number.

After gathering the wool, it must be washed in detergent and water by simmering at 120-140 degrees for one-half hour. The fleece or wool is not always the same color and sometimes for variety June spins a fine thread of lighter color with darker wool or vice versa.

June admits that not many people bother with the time consuming tasks of carding, dyeing and spinning wool. She laments the fact that it seems to be a dying art. "If someone doesn't do it, those skills will be lost forever."

"I have tons of ideas, but I don't have the time to put them together," explained this energetic full-time career woman and mother of two sons, Brian, 17 and Kevin, 14. June credits her husband William for his support in helping care for the rabbits and encouraging her to use her talents.

June's mother was an avid knitter who passed on her love to her daughter. "I've knitted and crocheted since I was a little kid," June said. Ten years ago, a spinning course kindled June's interest in wools. She bought a spindle that remains her favorite although she has added three others to her collection.

June is a member of the Barefoot Treadlers Guild and has shared her expertise with numerous groups and schools.

With each ready-to-wear garment that June knits, she includes a printed card detailing care instructions. She points out that Angora rabbit wool is actually eight times warmer than sheep wool.

In the past, June has participated in the sheep to shawl contest at the state Farm Show. This year, she has had to limit her activities since she returned to full-time bookkeeping. Nevertheless, June will not miss the pleasure of some Farm Show competition; she has entered a hand-woven, hand-spun coverlet. It's a cream-colored coverlet in three panels. The center features a fringed blue and gray design.

Besides privately selling her completed projects, June displays them at craft shows and at a shop called A Cricket on the Hearth, 119 W. Main Street in Palmyra.

She admits, "It's not making much money and I'm not mass producing anything, but I'm having a lot of fun doing it."

And that is why June Yohn continues to spin beauty from unusual gifts of raw mohair, angora and wool.



Although June's hand knitted Angora sweaters are soft and light, she said, "Angora rabbit wool is eight times warmer than sheep wool."



When June Yohn weaves blankets, she gathers the wool from her Angora rabbits or from a sheep skin. "I like to do everything from start to finish," she said.



Give June a box of raw mohair or a sheep skin and she'll soon be spinning it into strands of yarn to be used in her knitting projects.



This beautiful Angora rabbit sits quietly while June grooms it.

Ida's Notebook

Ida Risser



There is a flock of wild geese that have made our meadow their home this winter. They mingle with our large white geese that lately have taken to swimming downstream a mile or so to another farm. Then, when they return, the neighbor's geese come too. I've been feeding ours corn to encourage them to stay at home.

When I put up the new calendars, I noticed that they come from different companies than last year. It is nice to have an assortment. The one on the kitchen door holds our appointments and the one beside the freezer keeps track of the food that I put in it. This past year there were almost 300 quarts of fruit and vegetables beside the usual amount of canned fruit.

Somehow I manage to always save a few old calendars as the pictures are so pretty. People who col-

lect calendars appreciate the old ones that were made of cardboard and had a pocket at the bottom. It seems that there is a market somewhere for everything — even old wooden spools now that the thread is put on plastic ones.

Over the holidays a boy from the nearby development brought me a container of the best cookies I've ever eaten. He is a young fellow who wants to help in my garden but I have never accepted his offer. Maybe next year I will.

When I visited our five Amish neighbors over Christmas, I gave them my assortment of cookies and they gave me white and brown loaves of homemade bread. That is something that I really appreciated. We also shared a few toys that our children outgrew but there is still a chestful for the grandchildren when they come to visit.