

Spinning An Interest Into A Career

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seemed the natural next step. A Lancaster class taught Debbie weaving basics, and continuing seminars help her fine-tune techniques.

"Most people who spin and weave have several different sizes and types of wheels and looms," she adds, explaining the differences in these "tools" of craftsmanship.

Largest of her three looms is of Swedish pine, and weaves a 44-inch width, for such items as blankets, throws, shawls and yardages. The 27-inch is useful for scarves and smaller items, while a tabletop loom helps in designing samples. And, her five different spinning wheels help her fashion the specialty yarns that give hand-spun woolens their heirloom quality.

Dyeing The Yarns

For a distinctive personal touch, Debbie dyes many of her yarns.

She favors a "rainbow" dyeing technique, in which complimenting colors of dye are randomly applied to yarn or raw, washed fleece. Solid color lots are also dyed, though they pose more of a challenge in obtaining a uniform color.

The dye pot she uses allows Debbie to color about two pounds of wool per lot, enough for a medium-sized sweater. Heat from steaming or simmering in a water bath, along with the use of "leveling agents," sets the color in the fleece or yarns.

"But even using setting materials, colors will eventually fade a bit with washing over the years," this wool fibre expert says.

Debbie sometimes uses natural materials from her herb garden and the Meadow Vale pastures and hills for the dye process. Walnut, for instance, makes a long-lasting, lovely brown shade. Pokeberry, goldenrod, yew bushes

and strawberries all color wool in soft, attractive shades. Cochineal, a Mexican beetle, is a natural dye available through suppliers that yields red and pink shades.

"Lichens make a purple dye, and indigo, which is grown in the South, gives a beautiful blue," Debbie explains. "I've been told that any plant will yield a dye of some sort - but not every shade is desirable. You just have to experiment a lot."

Fibers other than those from the family's flock sometimes find their way into Debbie's work, as she experiments with textures and techniques. Hair from her pet Angora rabbit can be spun in with roving, and she has used fibers from llama, alpacas (similar to but smaller than a llama), mohair, camel, and silk.

Some of Debbie's most cherished items have been designed for her 18-month-old daughter, Hayley. The soft fibers of angora

and alpaca blended with wools lend themselves to delicate, warm, baby garments.

Design, and creative use of lovely colors, now challenges Debbie. One day she hopes to be "juried," an official recognition of a craftsperson specializing in a particular area. To become juried, a craftsperson must pass stringent requirements, including submitting sample pieces for judging by a recognized committee of peers.

Weaving Tartans

She leans toward specializing in weaving Scottish tartan, the sometimes bold and dramatic plaids, unique to the many clans, or families, of Scotland. Perhaps it is her part-Scottish ancestry — her great grandmother who spun was a Ramsay — or maybe just her sheer love of bright, warm color, that intrigues Debbie about these historic weaving patterns.

"I just love the colors," she says, stroking a tartan blanket of warm red accented with contrasts of blue and yellow. "And a tartan is really a history, a family tree."

One of Debbie's goals is to visit Scotland to research the official registry of Scottish tartans. Few weavers today work in authentic tartans, which must be reproduced to exact colors and threads per inch. The royal British family, explains Debbie, has a registered

tartan, which may not be reproduced for other than its official use.

"Supposedly, to be considered authentic, the yarns, must even be hand spun and hand dyed," she relates, voicing concern over what could become a lost art. "One village in Scotland reportedly has the few older weavers still weaving tartan. And most of them are of retirement age."

A more immediate goal, though, is firming up details for the small shop and mail-order business that has evolved from growing customer demand for the fleeces and yarns, and for Debbie's handwoven and knit creations. Periodic shows, including a large one in May, and magazine advertising during the fall aimed at fleece buyers, are part of their creative marketing.

Meadow Vale Farm and Fibre's merchandise includes fleeces, roving, and yarns from the Glass' flock, sweater kits with Debbie's own-dyed yarns, woven blankets, throws and scarves, and knitted items. Imported Shetland wool, and Australian Merino-crossed roving, in a variety of colors also are stocked.

For additional information, Debbie Glass may be contacted at R2, Airville, PA, 17302, or by calling 717/862-3101.

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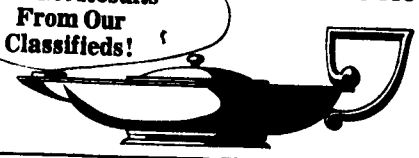
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