



The Herrvik Yarn Story

I'm standing in my "wool-room", sorting wool. There is no heating, but I don't freeze - the work warms me, body and soul.

We started keeping sheep some 14 years ago. We had pastures that had been neglected all too long, becoming overgrown with shrubs and trees, and sheep are efficient landscape custodians. Almost from the start we realized that organic farming was right for us. We wanted to work as much as possible with nature, not against it. Our farm is best suited for growing forage and tending pastures, with its small fields and meadows. Our organic production has been certified by an independent organization for several years.



Soon, however, the sheep's wool started to interest me and an old dream came to life. The dream was that I wanted to weave beautiful plaids! To make beautiful plaids I needed beautiful yarn - so for the last 10 years our sheep breeding has focused on wool quality. Other important breeding criteria have been lambskin and meat quality. And of course keeping the flock healthy and happy! Combining all these traits is no easy task, but I'm satisfied that I have come a long way!

The mating season is in November, and I use 3-4 purebred rams on the 30-40 ewes that I have. The year after, each ewe is mated with a different ram. This way I get a great variation in lambs and young ewes to select from, and can choose those with the best combination of traits.

Most of our sheep have names and I plan to name our different yarns after some of them - perhaps even adding a picture of the "source" sheep!



I spend a lot of time with my sheep and know them well, priding myself with knowing their ancestry several generations back. I can sometimes even tell who-is-who just by looking at the shorn wool!

Shearing takes place twice a year, in September/October and in early March. The autumn wool is

the best, after the grazing season, although the darker sheep have been bleached by the sun. When I want really dark brown or black shades I have to use spring wool.

Between spring shearing and lambing in April I am busy sorting the wool. Wool from purebred sheep is often easy to sort since the quality tends to be even. Many times I only need to discard a little, keeping most of the fleece. The wool on the legs is quite often second-rate and is sorted away together with the belly wool at shearing.

The fleece from a cross-bred sheep can have 4-5 different colours and qualities, and sorting takes time. But it is rewarding! It's a fantastic feeling to sort wool. Many senses are activated, not only sight and touch - your ears and nose are also involved. Lambs, ewes and rams have different smells to their wool!

When I have sorted the wool I have at least four different qualities and up to 10 different colours of first-rate wool as well as several sacks of shorter wool suitable for making carded wool.



For the time being I see it as an advantage to have this variation, but I might need to rationalize and cut down on the number of colours in the future. The different wool qualities give completely different yarns, so these will probably stay. From lambswool and the finest sheepswool I get yarns for knitting and weaving, while coarser and shinier wool makes embroidery yarns. The coarsest wool is used to make yarn for weaving carpets. This yarn is two- or three-thread and can be compared to cattle hair yarn.

My multicoloured, artistic, yarns are spun of wool from sheep of different colours or shades. I usually combine three colours/shades such as natural white, dark grey and dark brown, or natural white and two different grey shades. The colour variation in our sheep is reflected in these unusual yarns!

A novelty is the yarn made of one thread wool yarn and one thread flax (linen) yarn, twisted together. This yarn is very beautiful, the flax adding an extra lustre. When I plant-dye this yarn the wool and the flax absorb the colours differently so you get fantastic effects!

The question now is - what's next? It might be a wool-and-silk yarn. This is a dream I have, but an expensive one, of course ...

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Shepherd