

1201-5

On Location with Carol Cypher: Handfelted Complex Cane Beads



Materials:

3 oz Merino wool in many colors (8 colors in this example).

Notions: My favorite new “turbo felting board” (optional \$30 purchase); hot water; soap; towel larger than felting surface; skewers*; sharp, thin-bladed knife; cutting board

Allow 2 or 3 hours for cane making and another 1 or 2 to fully felt (no pun intended) or *full* the wool into dense, firm beads. They will dry in a couple days but you can string them while still damp.

Concentric circle canes:

1. Make a patch of wool:

Create a thin layer of wool covering an area of about 7" x 8". If using combed top, pull wisps from the end and overlap them slightly, with all fibers parallel. If using a batt, lift a thin film of fiber.

Perpendicularly place a second layer on top of the first.

2. Wind the wool onto a skewer:

Place the skewer along the 7" edge, allowing 2 inches of the skewer to extend beyond the wool. You'll use this bare end of the skewer as an axle, to **wind** the wool onto the rest of the skewer.

With your hand, simply brush the tips of the fiber up and over the skewer. Rotate the skewer tip between thumb and index finger. The grain of the skewer will catch some fiber. Pressing on the tabletop, continue rotating the skewer until all the fiber winds firmly onto the skewer, like a scary cotton swab.

NOTE Gently cradle the wool-covered skewer in one hand while rotating the skewer so that the wool winds tight and firm. Tight canes felt faster and with less distortion.

3. Add another layer of color onto the wool coated skewer:

Repeat steps 1 and 2. Using another color. Placing the wool-covered skewer on the patch's edge, roll it up in this new color.

4. Add another layer of color, and another, if desired.

Make a few canes. Remove the skewer from each completed cane.

Spiral canes:

1. Prepare a layer of wool fiber as in Step 1 above. Before winding the wool onto a skewer, prepare a layer of another color and place it on the first one.

2. Wind the wool slowly and tightly, as in Step 2 above.

Make one or more spiral canes. Remove the skewer from the completed canes.

Wrap up two or more canes together: Later, these simpler bundles will be bundled and wrapped together, making the complex cane.

NOTE: It is helpful to secure the bundle of canes by wrapping it with thread before wrapping it in wool.

If the canes are allowed to slide along each other, even a tiny amount, they will not felt together. When you slice the log into beads, some designs might pop out of the background. While this could be interesting, it is all about intention.

Prepare a patch of wool as you did in Step 1, except larger, about 8" x 10" or more, meant to reach around a bundle of canes.

Roll the bundle up in the patch of wool.

Wrap and roll additional bundles of canes.

Bundle and wrap up together all the canes and bundled canes made so far:

Prepare a patch of wool as you did in Step 1, except large enough to reach around this bundle.

Roll everything up in the patch of wool.

Felt the complex cane:

Place the wool log on the Turbo Felting Board, rubber floor mat, ribbed shelf liner or other felting surface. Saturate it with 1 1/2 cups hot water with 10 drops of soap stirred in.

With soapy hands, roll the wool back and forth along the length of the mat, ever so gently.

NOTE: Sometimes the wool on the surface is disturbed or roughed up by your hands in the early stage. Soapy hands help eliminate this. An alternative is to wear those thin, clear plastic disposable gloves that come in hair color or permanent wave packages and are used by fast-food handlers. Lacking these, slip your hands into 2 baggies.

During the first few minutes, the surface will felt into a delicate skin. This delicate skin then grows baggy and almost scary. Continue to roll gently, through the fear, permitting the skin to slowly tighten and shrink to fit. Continue to felt the wool, applying more pressure as the felt compresses and solidifies under your pressure.

Expect to roll and roll and roll with increasing pressure for about an hour. Enhance the process by frequently reheating the felt by squeezing the cooled water out and dunking into the hottest water you can stand.

Full the complex cane:

Squeeze out most of the water from the felt. Hold one end of the wool cane and **thwack** the other end sharply and aggressively against a table or countertop. Do this several times, alternating between both ends.

Squeeze the wool under hot water several times.

Place the mat on the floor and roll the cane back and forth under the pressure of your foot. Feel free to stand and even bounce on the cane. Roll using the pressure of your weight against the cane.

Rinse in cold water, then hot water, alternating the water temperature six times.

Slice the cane into beads:

Place the cane on a cutting board. Cut* the last inch or two from one end. It may have tapered. Slice off 1/2"-thick beads.

** Press and draw the knife through the cane. Lift the knife and then press and draw the knife through the cane again, to prevent the ripples that can result from a sawing motion.*

Avoid the last inch or two.

The completely felted and fulled beads will wear well if sliced at least a 1/2" thick.

NOTE: If, upon slicing the cane, you find you have not fulled the beads sufficiently, try this: Saturate the slices thoroughly with Future acrylic floor finish. Dribble it directly from the bottle into the felt. Expect each bead to absorb an astonishing amount. The medium can be applied while the beads are still damp; before, during or after stringing; or after the felt has dried. Allow a few days of drying time.

For more information about Carol Cypher visit: www.carolcypher.com