

Making Felt Balls

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

1/2 ounce white or natural wool for each ball

Wool of various colors (about 1/4 ounce for each child)

Hot soap-and-water solution

Towel

When these 100 percent wool balls are finished and thoroughly dry, they bounce! Felt balls are safe indoor toys.

The following instructions can be used to make felt balls for your own projects or with a group of children. If you are working with a large group of children, it is best to work outside. If you must work indoors, it is ideal to have one large sink for each group of three or four children. However, children can work over pans or buckets to avoid dripping soapy water onto the floor or table tops.

If you are making balls only the outside of which will show, use natural, undyed wool, which is less expensive than colored wool, for the inside of the balls. The amounts of wool indicated in the box at left will make 2 1/2-inch-diameter balls.

1. Using the white or natural wool, pull off four handfuls of wool for each layer of a small two-layer batt (photo 1). The layers will be rather thin. Set your two-layer batt aside.
2. Make another 2-layer batt of colored wool for the outside of the ball. Set it aside. If you are outdoors, make sure the two batts will stay dry and not blow away.
3. Make up a hot soap-and-water solution (see page 24). (If you are working with children, make the solution with hot water, but let it cool to warm before using it.)
4. Pick up the remaining pile of white or natural wool and pull it apart into a fluffy mass of fibers.
5. Push the wool together into a loose ball of fiber that fits in one hand and dunk it in the warm, soapy water.
6. Cup your hands around the wool and move them against each other in a circular movement, shaping the wet wool into a ball. Continue this for a minute, wetting the ball again if it gets dry (photo 2).
7. Place the shaped, wet wool ball in the middle of the batt made of white wool and fold the sides up to completely cover the ball with the wool (photo 3). While holding the wool in place with one hand, splash some of the soapy water onto the ball to thoroughly wet the batt onto the ball. Press in on the ball for a couple of minutes.
8. Place the ball on top of the dyed wool batt, and repeat Step 6, wetting the batt onto the ball (photo 4). When all the wool has been matted onto the ball so that you have a more or less smooth surface, you are ready to felt the ball.
9. Begin felting by gently pressing in on the ball. Rotate it in your hands and press in on all areas over and over again (photo 5). Add more soapy water if the wool becomes dry or sticks to your hands when you pull them away from the ball.

10. In the beginning stages, the outside layer, which is thoroughly wet, will be wrinkled. After several minutes of pressing, the wool will shrink to fit the ball. At this point, gently begin to roll the ball between your hands to strengthen the felt. As it becomes stronger, roll it using more pressure. Rub bar soap on your hands and keep rolling the ball. The more you roll it, the more the felt will shrink and the smaller the ball will become. When, after rinsing, the outside layer is smooth and no longer fluffy, the ball is finished.
11. When the outside layer is tightly felted, rinse the ball in clear water, blot it dry in a towel, then roll it to reshape it and let it dry.



A collection of finished felt balls.