

artfelt® Instructions

artfelt® in a nutshell

artfelt® is a new felting technique that combines certain aspects of needle felting, wet felting, and fulling with a new patented paper developed to ease and speed up the felting process. Appropriately named "artfelt® Paper", this paper allows you to felt incredibly simple or complex pieces with nominal space and physical effort. It allows you to create a felted material that can be thick or thin, precise or abstract, and it can all be accomplished with very little experience and in a minimal amount of time.

How does artfelt® work?

There are four basic steps to the artfelt® process which are covered in detail in these instructions. Additional instructions and photos can be found online at www.itsartfelt.com. As a quick overview, the first step is to **design** your project and cut your paper to the appropriate size. The second step is to **create** that design by attaching roving to the paper. The third step is to **felt** the piece, and the fourth step is to **dissolve** the paper.

Supplies

- **artfelt® Paper** - The heart of the artfelt® technique is the artfelt® Paper. You will need this each time you artfelt®. The paper is available in various sizes: scarf and shawl combos (appropriately sized for these projects); sheets that are approximately 5' x 10'; and you can purchase the paper by the yard (approximately 60" wide). If you purchase the paper in a combo, it includes plastic for the felting process.
- **Roving Tops and Pencil Roving** - Schoppel Pure Merino Roving, Schoppel In-Silk Roving, and Schoppel Cashmere Queen Roving is recommended. All of these have been tested extensively with the artfelt® paper and produce great results. Although other animal fiber rovings and tops can be used, the quality of the finished product cannot be guaranteed. As a rule of thumb, the higher quality roving you begin with, the higher quality felt you will create.
- **Barbed needles** - You will also need barbed needles, also known as felting needles. All sizes of these needles work. You can use individual needles or the handles that hold 3 to 7 needles.
- **Tack Board** - You will either need an artfelt® tack board, or a piece of foam or Styrofoam that allows the felting needle to penetrate it. The piece should be at least 1" thick. The artfelt® tack board is recommended, because it is offered in several sizes, is self healing, and leaves no particles in your felted piece. If working on other than a crafting table, protect it from possible puncture marks by placing several folded towels under your board.
- **Plastic** - Plastic is provided with some kits and with the paper combos. If plastic is not provided, you will need a piece slightly larger than the piece you are creating, for the felting process. Recycled grocery bags work well, as do cut up kitchen trash bags for larger pieces. Just about any kind of plastic works.
- **Clothes Dryer** - New or old – your dryer will not be damaged with excess wool fibers, as none will be released.
- **Rubber Bands** - When you place your piece in the dryer to felt, you will need to either rubber band the rolled piece about every 4 to 5 inches, or place it in a pair of trouser hose.
- **Trouser Hose** - See above. Fish net trouser hose (or old fish net stockings) work great.
- **Boiling Water** - An electric kettle works fabulously.
- **Other items that may be necessary** - scissors, measuring tape, permanent markers, kitchen and bath towels, iron, and a spray bottle.

Four Basic Steps: Design, Create, Felt, and Finish

1. Design:

If you have purchased a project specific kit, it will either tell you what size to cut your paper, or it will already be cut to size. If you do not have a kit, you will want to decide what you are going to make in advance. artfelt® Paper can be cut and pieced together to make any size or form. When cutting the artfelt® paper, consider that your piece will shrink anywhere from 5% to 50%, depending on the thickness of the roving and how long your piece is left in the dryer. As knitters knit swatches before working on a large piece, it is suggested that you make yourself a swatch, which we call a practice square. Cut a 10" x 10" piece of paper and

create as you would your final piece. When piece is complete, measure it again. If it now measures 6" x 6", your piece will shrink approximately 40%. Create it accordingly.

Using different types of roving and different techniques to adhere the roving to the paper will make a difference in your end results. Thus, creating a practice square of what you are about to make is always a good use of time.

When piecing together the artfelt® Paper, we suggest that you baste the pieces together either by hand with a needle and thread or with a sewing machine. You can sew the paper into a three dimensional shape (such as a handbag), and then move on to Step 2. Just keep the shrinkage in mind when doing so.

2. Create: Tacking the Roving to the artfelt® Paper

Once you have your paper cut to the size you desire, it is time to attach the roving to it. Begin by laying your tack board on the surface where you will be working; it is going to keep the barbed needle from piercing and damaging the surface while you tack the roving onto the paper. We suggest the material you use to protect your work surface be at least 1" thick. It can be foam, Styrofoam, or even a stack of old terry cloth towels. artfelt® tack boards, made of a special self-healing plastic foam, are available and are recommended. It is also recommended that if you cherish the table you are working on, place a few towels under your tack board to prevent the needle tip from possibly nicking it.

The object of tacking the roving to the paper is to have the barbs on the needle pull tiny tufts of the roving to the other side of the paper. This holds the roving in position while it is felting.

Place the paper on top of your protective cover. *There is no right or wrong side to the paper.* You will now tack the roving onto the paper by using the barbed needle in a quick up and down piercing motion. The barbs on the needle must go through the roving and the paper, pulling a small portion of the roving onto the back side of the paper. This should be a very quick motion, as if you were popping a balloon. Check the back side of your work to make certain you are piercing the barbed needle far enough to bring tufts of roving to the back side. You are only tacking the roving onto the paper to keep it in place during the felting process. Many people, especially those that have needle felted before, tend not only to tack the roving on, but actually begin to felt the piece with the tacking motion. This is not necessary!

How much is enough tacking?

As a rule of thumb, there is no need to tack the roving into the paper more than is necessary to hold it in place. If you can lift your paper up sideways and the roving stays put, then it is tacked down enough.

If you do not have a protective surface as large as the piece on which you will be working, that is not a problem. Simply move the paper you are going to be tacking over the protective surface, or move the surface under the paper portion where you will be tacking it in. When moving the paper or surface, you may have to "peel" the paper from the surface, as the tiny tufts of roving will be slightly tucked into the tacking surface. If your piece is not peeling off easily, you are most likely tacking the roving onto the paper too much.

How do I know how much roving to tack in?

There are many different ways to use the standard roving and the pencil roving in conjunction with the paper. As you design, you will want to think of the paper as your canvas and the roving as your medium. *The one thing you must always keep in mind is that in order for your finished piece to felt together, the layers of roving must always either overlap or crosshatch.* Laying fibers down all in one direction does not allow the fibers to form a strong bond. They may look like they are felted together when they come out of the dryer, but, when the paper is dissolved, your piece can easily fall apart. Crosshatching simply means laying the fibers of each layer in alternate directions (at 90 degree angles to each other). For a better visual, check out our website: www.itsartfelt.com.

- **Creating a Base: Using Standard Roving Alone**

A **base** is simply several layers of roving that will create a piece of felt all by itself. Sometimes your base will be all you want. At other times, you may want to create a design on your base. Simply creating a design on your paper without a base, does not work, as the paper dissolves in the end, and if your designs are not connected, they will not felt together.

To begin, you must learn how to draft the roving. The fibers in the Schoppel standard roving average about 4 to 5 inches in length, so holding the roving with both hands close together and trying to pull it apart will not work. However, by holding the roving about 4" from the end, you can easily pull out small amounts of fiber with the other hand. This process of pulling out the fibers is called drafting. Try using your palm and four fingers to draft out the roving instead of your thumb and index finger. This allows for more (and finer) fibers to be drafted at once.

To create your base, draft fine layers of roving and lay them down on the paper, side by side, all facing one direction, until the entire piece of paper is covered. Repeat this process, but this time put down the layer across (or perpendicular) to the first layer. In other words, crosshatch the layers. Two layers will give you a good base. You can choose to add additional layers (and some project instructions will ask you to do so). When you have all your layers down, tack them into place. Remember, you only need to tack the roving to the paper enough so that it will not fall off the paper. For a base, this is probably one tack for every two inch square.

You now have a base. With this base, you can layer and tack roving on top of it in any direction and in any design, and your piece will hold together after felting.

Using Pencil Roving Alone:

You will only use pencil roving alone if you intend to create a piece where the design element is to be the base. The only benefit of doing this is that both sides will look the same. This is useful when creating scarves.

When working with the pencil roving as your base, you **MUST ALWAYS** make certain that the pencil roving being tacked in overlaps the pencil roving already tacked down. It needs to touch and overlap wherever it needs to be joined. **If it does not overlap, it will felt, but not felt together, thus, your finished piece will fall apart.** The pencil roving can be tacked down in a spiral pattern, or side by side, or in an abstract pattern. **Just make certain that the edge of the pencil roving you are tacking down is laid and tacked on top of the edge of the roving already tacked down.** Since pencil roving is quite fine, there will be more tacking involved than if you were using the standard roving or if you were tacking the pencil roving onto a base. **With pencil roving, you should tack it down as you lay it down.** Just like the standard roving, pencil roving has fibers that are about 4 to 5 inches long. To pull it apart, you must have at least 4" between your hands while pulling. Gently tug and the roving should pull apart.

Helpful Hints:

- When tacking roving down, remember, the paper will be dissolved at the end of the process, so the roving closest to the paper will be your back side.
- To create **negative space** (holes in your work), you will simply want to leave areas on your paper that have no roving whatsoever. **HOWEVER**, the key here is to make certain that all the roving around these blank areas is somehow connected. If not, your piece will come out as several pieces, not one.
- When creating a scarf or a large piece, there is no need to lay the whole piece out. You can work on it from one end the other, rolling the finished end up as you go along. You can also simply let it hang over the table.
- In-Silk roving can be laid much finer than pure Merino roving. Silk and wool are naturally attracted to each other. Therefore, when felted together, the 25% silk in the In-Silk roving acts like a bonding agent. You can actually tack in a very fine layer of the In-silk standard roving on the paper, and even without a second layer or cross hatching, it will felt into a relatively strong piece of material.

Using an Embellisher to tack in the roving

If you own an embellisher, it can be used to tack roving into the paper. It works wonderfully when using pencil roving for stripes. The only drawback to using an embellisher is controlling the amount of tacking and where you are tacking. With practice, however, it can speed up the process tremendously, especially when creating striped scarves or patterns with pencil roving.

You can also use an embellisher to tack yarns to the paper. At least some part of the yarn must be wool (not superwash) in order for the piece to felt together. This is a hit-and-miss technique, so be certain to create a practice square utilizing all the yarns you will use in your final piece.

Felting Fabric with your piece

Any type of fabric can be combined along with the roving. The fabric itself, unless it is an untreated virgin wool, will not felt. It will pucker to keep up with the shrinkage of the roving, creating a very unique "smocked" look. Each fabric will look different when the piece is complete, thus it is very important to create a practice square.

In general, if you start with a very soft fabric, such as a rayon chiffon, you will end up with a very soft fabric. If you start with a stiff fabric such as quilting cotton, you will end up with a stiff fabric. Soft fabrics are great for scarves and cut-and-sew materials. Stiffer fabrics are great for hand bags and pillows.

To use a fabric in your piece, first cut the fabric to the size of the paper. Next, if the fabric has a right side, place the right side DOWN on the paper, so the back side of the fabric is showing. Finally, proceed to tack in your roving, right through the fabric and the paper. Your fabric will pucker wherever you tack in roving, so the more you tack, the smoother your puckering. The less you tack, the larger your puckers will be. Also note, the color of your roving will show through on the fabric side. You can either try to blend it in, or use this as a design element.

When you have finished tacking all your roving to the artfelt® Paper, it is time to felt!

3. Felt

- **Preparations:**

Cut your plastic to be slightly wider and longer than the piece you are felting. If you did not get plastic with your kit or paper, any form of plastic will do. Standard kitchen garbage bags that are cut to the correct shape work very well. For smaller pieces, kitchen plastic wrap also works well. You will also need an old stocking or panty hose and garbage bag ties or rubber bands.

- **Getting Your Piece Wet:**

No matter the size of your project, you will need to **saturate** your piece with water, and then roll it into a log shape with plastic to prevent the layers from felting to each other. Saturating your piece means making it totally wet, through and through, yet not soaking. The temperature of the water should be cold or room temperature. *Do not use hot water, as it may make the paper overly sticky and hard to handle. Although many people think that soap is necessary, it is not. Wet wool, when agitated, felts whether heat or soap is involved or not.*

Ways to get your artfelt® piece wet

Small pieces that fit in your kitchen sink (as our *Say Hello Kits* do), can be laid in the kitchen sink, roving side up, then lightly squirted with the kitchen sink sprayer. Water has a tendency to want to ball up on the roving at first, but then it will begin to absorb it. Once your piece is totally saturated, place your plastic on top of the piece with extra plastic hanging over one end. Lightly press down so that any extra water can either be absorbed, or be pressed out of the piece. Now, on the end where the plastic does NOT overlap, begin to roll the piece into a log shape. Once rolled, be certain the plastic wraps around the entire piece, so no paper or roving is exposed. The purpose of the plastic is to keep the layers of roving and paper from touching while you roll the piece. Once rolled, either place in a trouser sock or place rubber bands on each end and one in the middle.

Medium pieces, or scarves, will obviously not fit in your sink. If you have a tub and don't mind bending over, you can use the same method as for small pieces, but do it in your tub with a hand-held sprayer. Since most of us don't want to bend over, and scarves don't fit well in a tub anyway, the next best thing is to saturate your piece, section by section, in a large pan. This is referred to as the "lasagna pan" method and works extremely well for scarves. You will need a squirt bottle or watering can, a deep dish pan that is at least the width of the scarf, and a towel. Place the towel in the pan and add water until the towel is totally wet, but not soggy. Have your scarf rolled up, and start at one end. Place that end, paper side down, roving side up, on the towel. Either spray additional water on top of the piece, or if you have a small watering can, simply "water" the top until wet. Place one end of the plastic down on the piece and press so that water is absorbed from the bottom as well. Then roll the wet portion of the scarf and

pull outside the pan, allowing the next section to sit in the pan. If you have the long piece of plastic received with the scarf kit or combo, let the excess plastic hang to the already wet side, while you wet the next section. Repeat as above, getting the top wet, laying the plastic down and pressing, and then rolling, section by section, until the piece is entirely wet. Once more, be certain that the entire outside of the roll is covered with plastic. One way to tell if the piece is wet enough is to look at the paper as you roll it. It should be translucent. Although the paper will not dissolve in water, it does become transparent and much weaker, so always keep your piece level with the surface you are working on. Do not pull it when it is wet or try to lift it by the paper. Once rolled, either use rubber bands around each end and about every 3 to 4 inches in between to secure it, or place it in a pair of trouser hose and tie a knot in the end to secure it.

Large pieces, or any pieces for that matter, can be done outside on a deck or driveway. When preparing your piece outside, lay the plastic on a clean surface, then place the piece on top of the plastic, roving side up. Make certain that the plastic is longer on both ends for this method. To wet your piece outside, a watering can works wonders. Sprinkle the piece slowly, so that it has time to absorb some of the water. Once the piece is wet, fold one end piece of plastic over the edge of the piece and begin rolling it up, making certain no paper touches the roving. Roll up the entire piece as you would the small and medium pieces. When rolled, be certain there is no exposed paper, and either rubber band the edges and the middle section well, or place the roll in an old pair of hose, or old stretch pants.

Helpful Hints:

- To avoid a kink when you first start rolling your piece, place a rolled towel (or bubble wrap) at the end where you begin rolling. Be certain it is separated from the paper with plastic. Roll the piece around it and secure it in place.
- The easiest way to get the rolled piece into the hose is to slide your hand inside the hose to the toe. Grab the end of your piece through the hose and pull the hose over the piece. This works better than trying to shove the piece into the hose.
- If you are working with a very large piece, an old sock or trouser hose may not be big enough. Fishnet stockings might be stretchy enough to work in this case, or you can wrap the entire piece in a towel (over the plastic) and use large rubber bands to keep it rolled. In some cases, if your piece is very wide, you will need to fold it in half after rolling it, so it will fit nicely into your dryer. This works OK, but make sure to remove your piece from the dryer about every 10 minutes to unroll it and re-roll it in the opposite direction. This will prevent creases in your finished product.

- **Actual Felting in the Dryer**

When your piece is rolled up and secured, toss it into your dryer. Heat is not necessary, as it is the tumbling action that agitates the wool and felts it. If you wish to use heat, you can, but save on your energy bill and only use medium heat. Take the piece out, for the first time, after it has been in the dryer for about 10 minutes. Unroll it and determine how much it has felted. If it is felted to the degree you would like, you are finished felting and you may move on to the finishing section. If it needs to be felted even more, you will want to reroll the piece (in the opposite direction), put it back in the hose, and toss it back into the dryer for more time.

Please note, your piece will remain wet. Use of the dryer is to agitate, and thus felt the roving, not dry the piece.

The time it takes to felt your piece will depend on several factors, including the speed at which your dryer tumbles, the size of your dryer, the size of your piece, the amount of layers of roving in your piece, and the type of roving you have used. In many cases, larger pieces will felt more quickly than smaller pieces, because they get "thrown around" in the dryer more and are thus agitated more. Usually this felting happens within 15 to 45 minutes. You can place several towels in the dryer, along with the piece, if you like. If you used the "pan" method, this is a good way to dry that towel. If your piece seems to be taking a long time to felt, roll it more loosely. The more friction there is, the faster it will felt. When your piece is felted to your satisfaction, unroll it and remove the plastic. Keep the plastic, if it is still good, so that it can be reused.

How do you know when it is felted enough? The amount a piece is felted depends on the fabric results you want. You can tell a lot by looking at the paper on the back side of your piece. The roving shrinks; the paper does not. This means that the more wrinkled the paper, the more felted the piece. For fine scarves, you'll want the paper to be smoother, which means it has not felted very much. For stronger or thicker pieces, you will want the paper very wrinkled, meaning the piece has felted quite a bit.

4. Finish

Take the felted piece and lay it in the sink, paper side up. Boil water and pour it directly onto the paper. The artfelt® Paper will dissolve immediately. If you have a large piece, you may need to boil several kettles of water in order to completely dissolve the paper. Try to avoid leaving the felted piece sitting in the hot water, as there is a chance that the colors may begin to run. The dyes in the roving are not made to withstand such high temperatures over a period of time. Thus, pouring the water over the paper and letting it drain right into the sink is the best method of removing the artfelt® Paper.

When all the paper is dissolved, it is best to rinse the piece with hot water to make certain that the residue from the dissolved paper is gone. You know all the residue is gone when the water that is squeezed out of your piece runs clear. If it is cloudy, continue to rinse it. Squeeze out the excess water. If the felt feels sticky or slick, there may still be some residue of paper left. Continue to rinse the piece until you do not feel this anymore.

You can either lay your piece flat to dry or iron it dry. If you iron the piece dry, make sure to use an old iron or cover the piece with a towel, in case you left some paper residue in your piece. This will insure that the paper residue does not damage your iron or transfer a residue to the iron. Ironing your finished felt piece helps it to dry more quickly and leaves the fabric with a smoother finish. If you have made a three dimensional piece, you can stretch it over a form to dry. As it dries it will take the shape of the form.

FAQs

My piece is dry and there is a hard spot on it ...

Chances are this is a spot where the paper did not dissolve completely. Many times you will actually see the paper, but even if it isn't visible, there could still be some residue left. Simply pour additional boiling water over that spot and the remaining paper will dissolve.

My felted piece is too large ...

You can further shrink your piece at any time by wetting it and putting it back in the dryer, preferably loose in a tied plastic grocery bag. You can do this at several stages ... when the paper is still attached, after the paper has been dissolved, and even after your piece has dried (if you wet it again). Felt will continue to shrink when water and agitation are combined. Throwing your piece in the washer works in the same way. However, the dryer is your best method, as you have more control regarding when to remove it.

My felted piece is too small ...

If you feel your piece has shrunk too much and is over felted, you can soak it in very hot water for a few minutes, then remove the excess water, stretch it with your hands, and iron it dry. This helps a bit. However, as a rule of thumb, try not to felt your piece too much. You can always make your piece smaller, but not bigger. It is easy to control the amount your piece felts by checking it in your dryer frequently.

My piece has holes I do not want, or ... it has fallen apart in areas ...

You have several options. For holes, it is easiest if you take a small piece of the artfelt® Paper and place it behind the hole. Use the roving of your choice and fill in the hole, making certain that the roving overlaps with the already finished area. Wet down just the new area and about an inch around it. Roll it back up and put it in the dryer as normal. Only the wetted area will continue to felt. You can also simply use the roving and needle felt the holey section. However, needle felting does not produce as smooth a surface as artfelt® does.

What is the best way to control the density of the felt as well as shrinkage?

You can control both density and shrinkage in several ways. The first way is with the thickness of the roving you tack onto the paper. The more roving layered onto the paper, the denser your felt will be. Very light layers, in general, create a finer felt. HOWEVER, if you leave a piece with light layers in the dryer too long, it can potentially shrink up to 50%, and felt into a very dense piece. To see how lightly felted your piece is, look at the back side when pulling it out of the dryer. The roving shrinks; the paper does not. If the paper is barely wrinkled, your piece is very lightly felted. If it is heavily wrinkled, your piece is going to be quite dense. You can also control this with the type of roving you use. In-Silk roving can be tacked in very sparsely then felted heavily (at 50%) and you'll still have a very lightweight material. The best thing to do is to play around with practice squares. They are not only fun, but can be functional as well. They can be turned into eyeglass cases, phone cases, mini-wallets, or whatever!