HOW TO SERIES - MAKING PRE-FELT

If you're planning to make play food, like fruits and vegetables, or even felt flowers, you'll be needing leaves of some sort.

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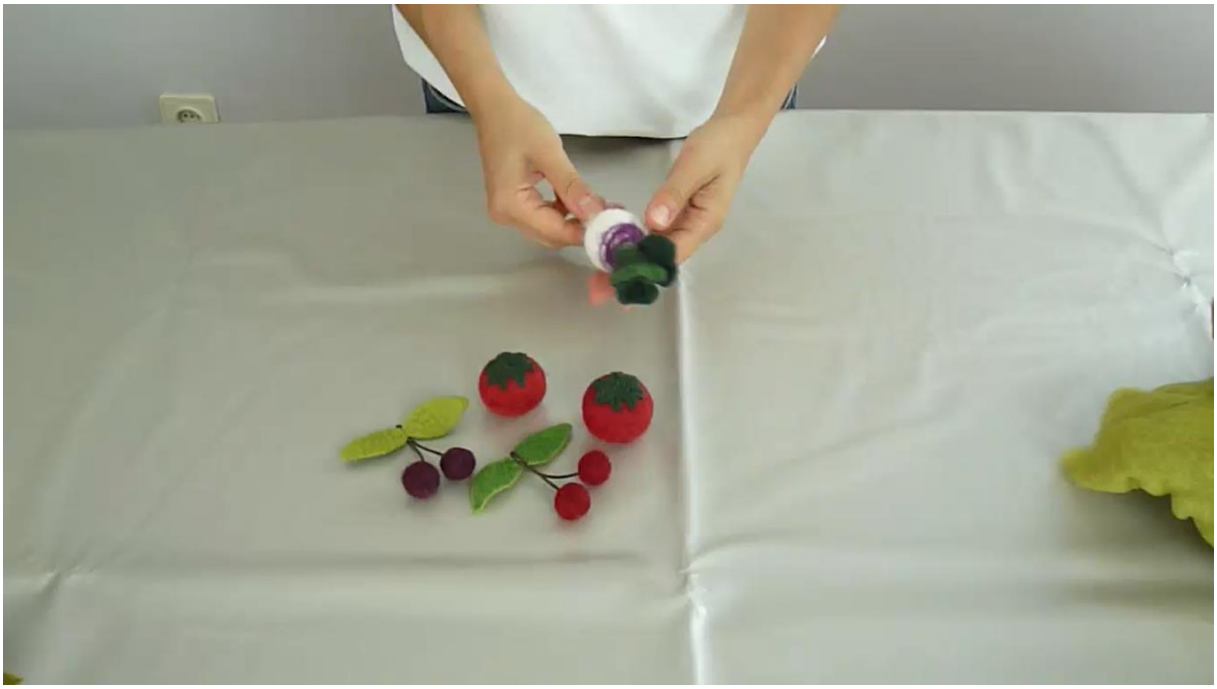
Created for you by Vanda F. Sousa

Going The Dodo Way



To make any kind of leaves, I always have a big supply of sheets of pre-felt in several different green tones.

I make them and store them, so they're ready for my new projects. And that's exactly what I'm going to show you how to do in this tutorial.

Let me start with the color combinations I work with. And I'd also like to show you how thick these pre-felts are. They must be resistant enough, but they can't be too thick, because then you risk that they become hard. And we need a flexible sheet for this effect. So, you'll need this thickness, which is about 2 mm.

These are the pre-felts for the leaves that I usually have in storage. As you can see, these all have two green tones. You can also work with just one color if that's what you prefer.

The cherry leaves are made in two colors as well. But this has only one.

This one has one basic color and then a spot of a different green on it.

And this piece was also made for the leaves of the vegetables.

For these green pre-felts, I always use the fine merino batts from Wollknoll - which is a German online wool supplier. I use these because the price is great, and because they are extremely soft, easy to work with, and high quality. So, I really like them. But Wollknoll only has four green tones, which are these. (As you can see, they match the colors I've just showed you.) And these four colors are the ones I'm going to work with.

Let me just show you how wonderful this wool is. See how easy it is to open? You start peeling the layers, like this. And you get thinner and thinner sheets of wool.

See the thickness of this one? You can use three of these for your pre-felt and it'll have the right thickness for the project.

So, I'm going to make one of these pre-felts as an example. And for the other ones you only have to vary the colors. This is how thick each layer should be. Don't try peeling this into a thinner layer because it'll become too thin. It's still possible but it's risky. It might fall apart. So, there's no point because it's thin enough to felt well.

I'll open that one to show you how this works. When you're working with wool batts, you have to separate the layers. That's actually what a wool batt is: layers of wool. If you don't know the

difference between working with wool batts and wool tops, check my videos "Felting Sheets With Wool Batts" and "Felting Sheets With Wool Roving/Tops".

I like this thickness, but maybe I'd still open this again. And then again, it might be too thin.

Since this green is the darker one, I will open this one up. And we'll get an effect of a light shade. As you can see, it's a thinner layer than the other green I've prepared. And this is the piece I'll be using.

Now that I've prepared the layers, I can cut them in the right size.

I don't want a very big pre-felt, so I'll cut this one in the middle, like this, and flatten it out.

Now I'll add the second layer. Of course, if this one went in this direction, the next one will now be laid vertically.

You can perfectly see the direction of the fibers, but when in doubt, pull the wool like this. If you feel resistance, then this is the direction of the fiber.

If you do this, the layer will tear.

So, now I lay it in the opposite direction to the first one.

And the last layer, again will go in this direction.

As you can see, this one is a lot lighter, which is not bad, because then you'll get only a light shade.

We've got three layers and it's the perfect thickness, I think. So, the first one is vertical, the second is horizontal and the last one is a vertical one again.

Now that the wool is ready, we can start felting. Let's just get the rest of the wool out of the way, so it won't get wet.

Prepare the felting equipment. Cover your table with bubble wrap because of the water, and to get more friction, which helps with the felting.

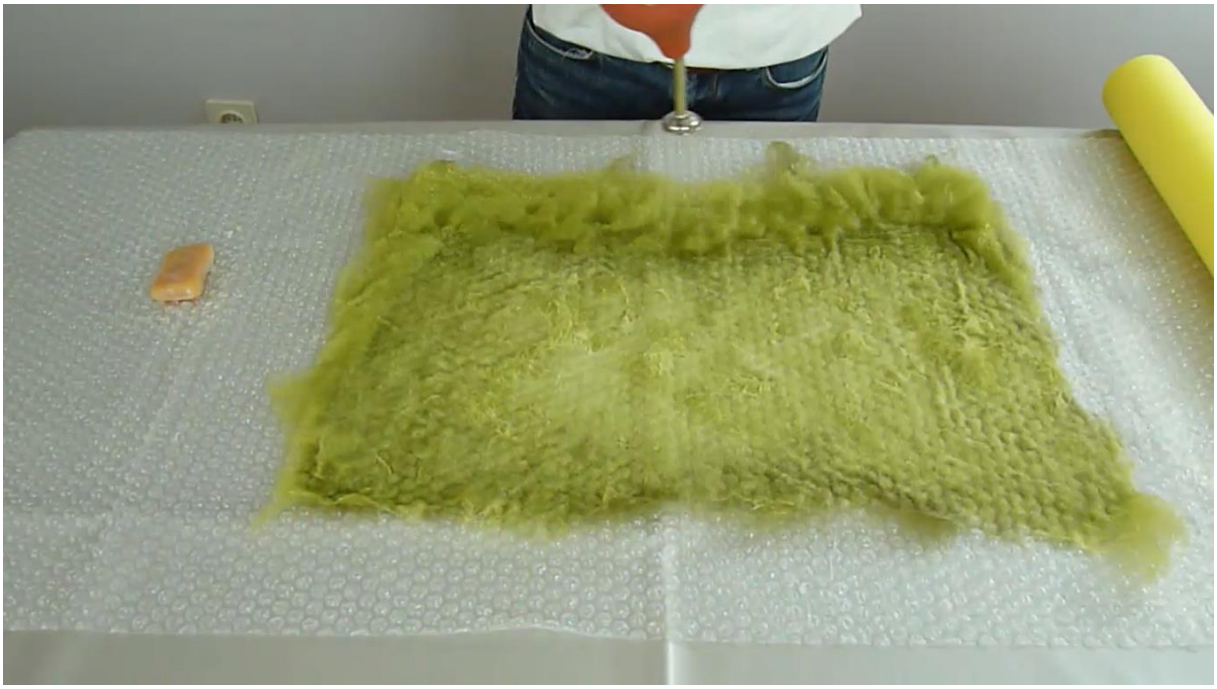
Get one of these. I'll show you why in a minute. This is a pool noodle that I've cut in two pieces. There's this one and a bigger one, which I use for bigger projects.

Get your water. This is cold water, not hot water, because hot water accelerates the felting process. And I don't want that right now. And get a little bar of soap. This is more than enough. I never work with liquid soap. I work with solid soap and this is how I do this. Because this way I have more control over the amount of soap that goes into the wool.

Make sure there's water and soap all over the piece. Now start pressing to get the air out. I can already notice there's not enough water in the wool. It's still too dry.

So, I'll add some more. And add some more soap as well. This is another way you can do it. Make your hands soapy and apply the soap to the wool surface.

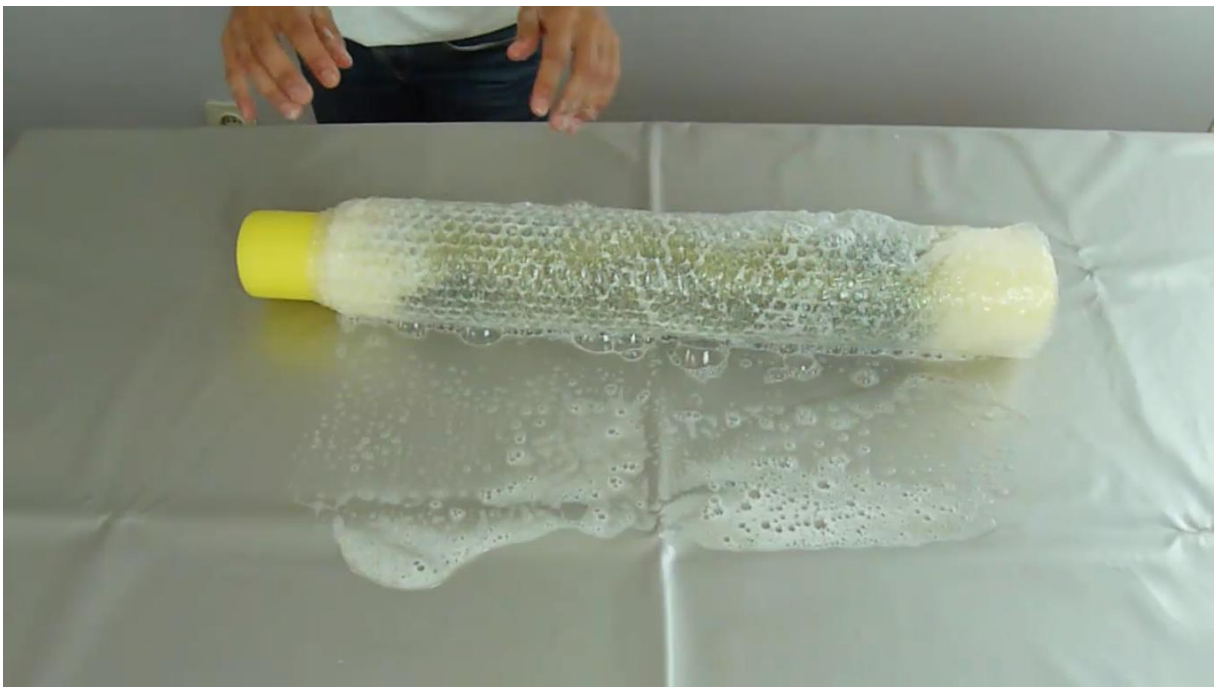
For now, please just press. Do nothing else. And start from the middle and work your way to the edges, so that the excess water goes out. The idea here is to have the whole surface wet, without soaking the wool.



But it is still too dry. I do need some more water. I'd rather take it out later if it's too much. It probably will be too much, but for now I need to add more. The thing is that wool batts tend to absorb more water than wool tops, just because they're fluffier. So, there's more air in the fibers. You might have to exaggerate a bit at the beginning.

Now I'll roll it up to start the rolling method. This is why you need the pool noodle. Roll it up together with the bubble wrap. This will save you some time. Instead of just doing it with your hands, which is what I normally do.

If you're working on a very small piece, there's no point on doing this. But for a bigger piece it's worth it because it makes the process quicker.



And here comes the extra water. I'm going to get a towel to absorb this.

So, place an old towel on the table and roll. Go on rolling for a while and then turn it around. The pressure, together with the friction you get from the bubbles on the plastic, starts the felting process. You can also tie the ends with elastic bands. I don't think I need it in this case because it's so soapy and so light. But it's something you can do to keep the bundle together.

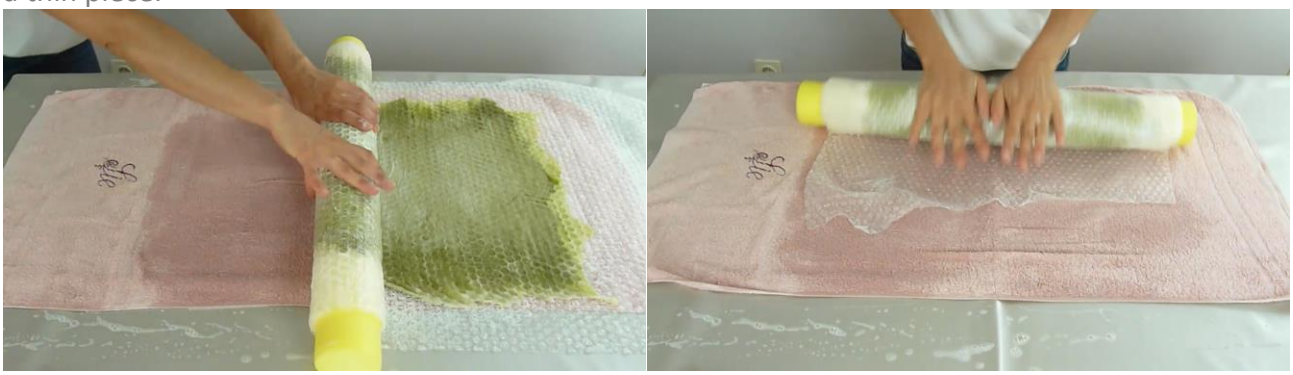
Let’s open the bundle and turn the piece around.

Get rid of any wrinkles that might be on the surface. Do this every time you open it up. Add more soap if you don’t have enough foam.

Now I’ll roll from the other side and repeat.

Now I'll turn it over. Remove the wrinkles.

Turn it over and remove the wrinkles from this side. This is especially important if you're working on a thin piece.



Now we don't have to do this for very long because this is going to be a pre-felt. The wool shouldn't become too hard.

Remove the wrinkles and roll from the other side.

After rolling from the four sides, it already starts to look like a piece of felt.

Now I'll finish it off with my hands. Rub against the bubble wrap for extra friction.

And now you can also knead the piece. You can alternate these fulling methods. But don't forget you want a pre-felt, so pay attention that you don't full too much.

It looks like it’s more or less done.

I’ll flatten it and rub again, especially on the edges, where it’s thinner. That makes them more resistant, so I’ll be able to use them as well. This type of wool produces a very elastic felt. I think you can see that through the image, even if you can’t touch it.

I think that's about it, so I'm going to rinse it.

The wool is still lifting too much. See? It's still too loose, so it's not done yet. I'll felt a bit more.

Again, use any of your preferred methods: rolling, massaging, kneading or even throwing. I'll go on massaging.

So, I've finished the pre-felt and I've rinsed it. This is what it looks like. See how elastic it is?

Now, it’s a very light pre-felt, ok? If I do the pinch test, you can see there are still some loose fibers.

But it’s enough for the leaves because I’ll still felt them afterwards. And I want to be able to shape the felt. But you could make it a bit harder and still call it a pre-felt.

You can see it's as thick as I was planning to make it.

What I also wanted to mention is that this piece is intended for the cherries or for flower leaves. For the kind of leaves I use for the tomatoes and the strawberries, I'll make the pre-felt a bit harder.

Why? Because there won't be so much shaping involved. What I need then is a pre-felt that's a little bit harder, so that it's be possible to cut neatly with the scissors.

After that, I'll just give them a quick massage to round up the edges.

Hope you've enjoyed this short tutorial 😊

Talk soon!

Vanda

P.S.: If you want to learn more about how to felt hats, check out the available tutorials here.