

How to make a felt picture of a Large Blue Butterfly



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Spinning a Yarn

Wool is amazing. Not only is it natural, renewable, biodegradable, and sustainable, but it is also an adaptable craft material. This is one of four worksheets which will help you learn about Somerset's rare and endangered species as well as different wool crafts.

Wet felt uses wool, soap, water, and friction to make felt, a strong and ancient form of fabric. The tiny scales on each wool fibre open when rubbed with soap and hot water, and then shrink and lock together - it's like magic.

The Large Blue Butterfly was declared extinct in the UK in 1979 but was reintroduced in the 1980s. It has a fascinating life cycle, totally dependent on a very specific type of ant, and small populations now survive in pockets in the south of England, including Somerset. It breeds in warm, dry, and agriculturally unimproved grasslands.

You will need:

Wool tops or roving. Wool tops are unspun wool that has been washed and combed so that all the fibres are parallel. For this picture you will need soft green for the background, plus white, blue, and charcoal grey.

Approximately 5 grams of each colour.

Extra handy tools

A rolling pin.
A sushi or reed mat.
Scissors, a pencil and tracing paper.
Cheese grater.
A needle and black thread.
A fork or cocktail stick.

Gentle, unperfumed block of soap.

A piece of bubble wrap, approximately 20cm.

A small hand towel - an old one, not your best. Plus, a spare for drying your hands and mopping up spillages.

A piece of netting or mesh, or an old tea towel.

Materials Resources sheet available at spinning-a-yarn.org

A spray bottle

Tip

no spray bottle? use a clean 1 pint plastic milk bottle, punch holes in the lid for spraying soapy water. Or use a flannel/sponge will do with bowl of water.

Step 1

You will need a clear work surface, one that can cope with water - it's going to get wet!

Onto this, lay out your mat (if you have one) towel and then the bubble wrap, on top. This is what you are going to build your picture onto.

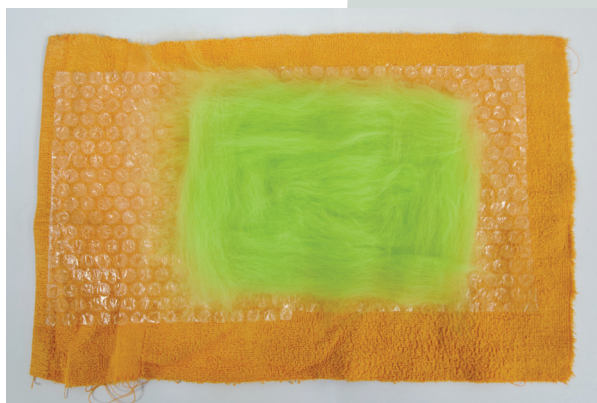
Cut out the butterfly shape template to leave a 'negative' image - you are going to use this as a template. Hold on to the positive shape to see the colours and shapes you need to add later.



Step 2

Base colour - green. Make sure that your wool top is untwisted and unknotted. Pull out fine wisps of wool - keep your hands well apart so that the wisps come away easily. You are working towards a 20cm picture, so lay this first wisp horizontally on what will be the top left corner of the picture.

Then, pull off another wisp, laying it down the same way, overlapping the first piece a little. Repeat, until you have created an even layer of wool no bigger than 20 x 20cm. Repeat this stage, but this time laying the wool vertically.



Step 3

Now, gently place your netting, mesh, or an old tea towel over the top of your layers of wool. This helps to secure your wool as you are moving around, and when you're felting.

Tip move your dry wool away from your workspace - we don't want that wet.

Make up a soapy solution of hand-hot water. We recommend grating your soap (about ½ teaspoon per ½ pint) into warm water, stir until it dissolves.

Now, sprinkle your soap solution, using your spray/milk bottle or cloth - don't add too much at first. Then gently, 'walk your hands' over the netting to see where it dimples and flattens. Those places that don't flatten with a bit of hand pressure are not wet enough. So, add a bit more soapy water until all the wool is wet (don't forget the edges) and 'walk your hands'.

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a Yarn**

Step 4

When you are happy that all the wool is wet, gently peel back the edge of the net - you will need to tease it off so that the fibres don't all pull away.



Step 5

Now, using the template of the Large Blue Butterfly, lay out your 2nd layer of wool (white). Take your time - the wool is very light weight. Repeat Step 3 to secure the white layer with netting and soapy water - make sure you 'walk your hands' every time you add a new colour and water.

Step 6

Continue laying down all the colours in the butterfly, adding water to each colour: charcoal grey, leaving a thin edge of white. Then blue, leaving an edge of grey.

Tip if the coloured layers 'slip' between wettings, use a fork or cocktail stick to move them back into place.



Step 7

Replace the netting, refill, or rewarm your soapy water if necessary. Time for some hard work. Very gently at first, rub the surface of the netting up and down, across the whole picture, to a count of 25.

Step 8

Gently remove the netting again, then turn your picture by 90 degrees. Replace the netting and repeat Step 7 another 3 times. At the end you will have rubbed your picture 100 times, and it will be upright again.

Step 9

Time to see if your wool has begun felting together and if it will pass the 'pinch test'. Pinch your felt between your thumb and index finger - if individual fibres lift away, then it's not felted yet - repeat Step 7 until it passes the pinch test!

Step 10

Time for the 'fulling' process. Wrap your felt, along with all its netting and towel around your rolling pin, dowel or pipe. Roll the collected felt, towel etc up and down 25 times. Then unravel and turn the butterfly picture by 90 degrees. Hopefully, you will notice that the picture has shrunk in one direction - hurrah - this is exactly what you want. So, replace the netting and repeat another 3 times.

Step 11

At the end you will have rolled your picture 100 times, it will be upright again and should have shrunk by approximately 30% or even more.

Step 12

You can 'full' your felt by soaping it up and rubbing between your hands and fingers - as if you are washing yourself. Another great way to 'full' your felt, is to throw it - yes, throw it. If the weather is nice outside, keep throwing it at a garden path or the floor. Otherwise, just throw it at the bubble wrap a few times. This should tighten the fibres down, helping the picture to shrink down a bit more, and help it to become a solid piece of fabric.



Step 13

The final step is to rinse the soap out of your felt in warm water. You should be able to crunch it up like a piece of cloth.

Tip

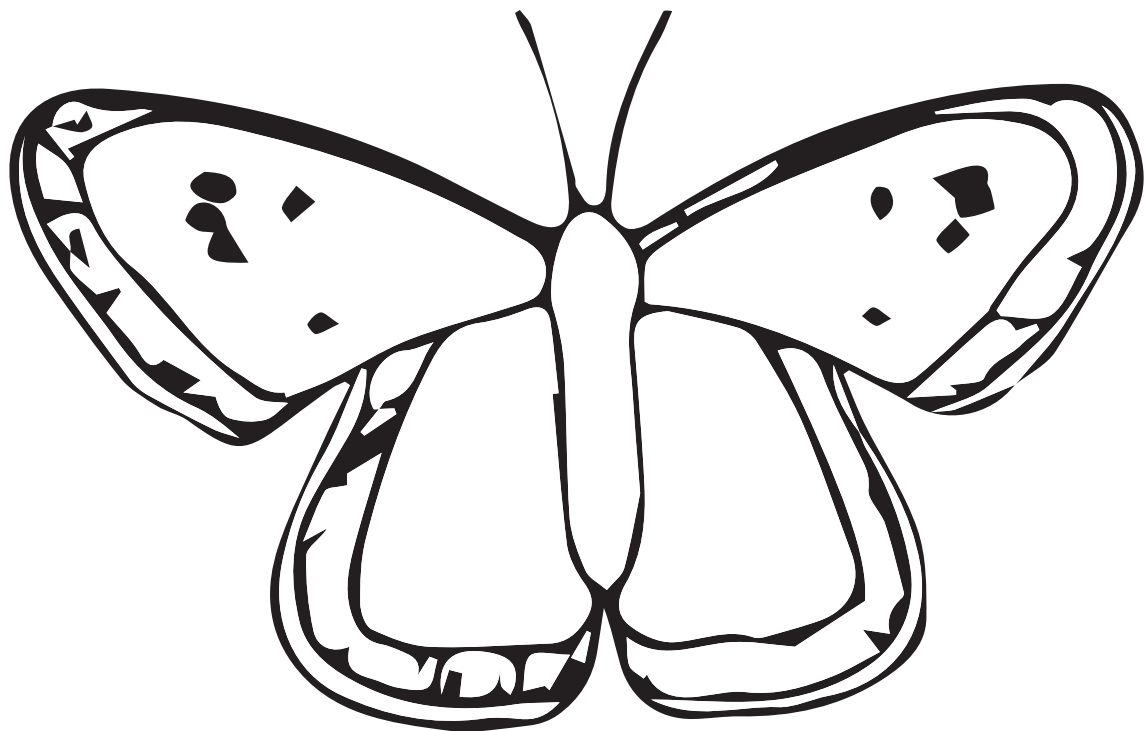
You can use stitch to add antennae and details to the wings.

What next?

Have you caught the punch needle bug? How about making some of our other species of flora and fauna linked to Woodland Ferns like Bluebell flower, stag beetle or Harts-tongue fern. Have a look at our Nature Resources sheet to get more ideas of flora and fauna.

spinning-a-yarn.org

Large Blue Butterfly template



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Take Part Resources created by Lydia Needle and Nina Gronw-Lewis

If you would like your work to be part of an exhibition at the Somerset Rural Life Museum in September, as part of Somerset Art Weeks Festival, please send your completed pieces to: ACEarts, Market Place, Somerton, Somerset TA11 7NB by 31 August 2024.

Max dimensions 20 x 20 cm

DISCLAIMER: Due to the nature of this project, we are unable to return any work after the event. Please note we may not be able to accommodate all the works submitted.

Spinning a Yarn: Telling the Story of Wool in Somerset,

spinning-a-yarn.org #wildforwool #countyofwool