

# In A Spin - by Pat Old

## Handspun Yarn Design and technique

This is a new spinning book with a focus on handspun yarn design. 112 pages in full colour, it has lots of information on spinning wool and other fibres, and also has chapters on “Diz Designed Yarn”, “Fulled and Felted Yarn”, “Enhancing the Stash”, and Pat’s favourite dye methods.

Pat is well known here in New Zealand as an innovative spinner, and we are pleased that she is at last sharing her skills in this book.

To order your copy contact your local Majacraft Dealer.

Pat has provided the following tips to begin your spinning journey.

## Getting Started – First Steps to Spinning

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So you want to learn to spin. You have a wheel, or a friend has a wheel you can try, and you have an ambition to spin enough yarn for a sweater for yourself, or perhaps a child. Maybe you want to create the crazy yarn that you have seen on the internet.

Perhaps you want to pass on your skills to a friend, or an interested young person.

Spinning is not difficult! Like everything, after the initial steps it just takes practice. Addiction might follow...

### 1. **Check your wheel and accessories:**

It will help if you can find an experienced spinner to do this for you. Check that all parts of the wheel are present and moving freely. It may need oiling or it may need a new brake band or drive band. (the band around the big wheel) You will quickly learn later to do this maintenance yourself. Does the big wheel (driving wheel) line up with the whorl on the flyer? You will also need a lazy kate (bobbin rack), a minimum of three bobbins, and a threading hook.



2. **Treadling:** Sit comfortably in front of the wheel and practice treadling. Initially treadle fast, then slow down to treadle at a medium rate, then treadle as slow as you possibly can without the wheel stopping and reversing. Try treadling clock-wise (Z twist) and anti-clockwise (S-twist). You will need to be able to maintain a slow to medium treadle rhythm in one direction for lengthy periods of time, so practice this until you can get the rhythm even and consistent.

3. **Ratios:** Now check the flyer whorl options that are available to you. Place the drive band on the largest diameter option (see photo), treadle at a comfortable rate, and note the speed at which the flyer turns. Now change to the smallest ratio and note the difference. It's like changing gears! Put the drive band back on the largest ratio. Working at this speed will enable you to work slowly while you practice and gain confidence.



4. **The Brake Band:** This goes around the groove on the end of the bobbin and is attached through a spring or rubber band to a peg which can be twisted to increase or decrease the rate of take-up i.e. the rate at which the yarn is drawn through the orifice and onto the bobbin.
5. **Bobbins and Leaders:** Cut a length of 2 ply commercial yarn about two metres long (two yards) and tie the ends together. Loop one end of this around the shaft of a bobbin. Put the bobbin onto the flyer and thread the leader over the hooks and through the orifice. Hook a finger into the loop at the other end of the leader and begin to treadle again clockwise. Set the brake band with just enough tension to enable the leader to be pulled slowly into the orifice, while also allowing it to twist.
6. **Start with commercial yarn:** Tie one end of a ball of commercial yarn onto the leader and begin by practising the drafting action required to spin and draw the yarn onto the bobbin. Alter the tension on the brake band and note the difference that this makes.
7. **Beginning to Spin:** Find some quality fleece or sliver to begin with. Practice fibre should always be the best available, otherwise you will not be at all impressed with your first efforts. "*Just some wool / fleece / old stuff from the back of the stash*" is not good enough for a beginner! Long stapled fleece, prepared well by combing or flick carding, or quality sliver with a long fibre, will be good to start with. Break off a short length of sliver and loosen it a little by gently tugging it lengthwise, or fan your small handful of combed fleece. Tuck some fibre into the loop on the end of the leader, pinch it between the finger and thumb of the right hand (left if you are left handed) while holding the bulk of the fibre lightly in the left hand (right if left-handed) and begin to treadle slowly clock-wise. Slide the leading hand back to allow twist into your fibre, and as the twisted single is drawn into the orifice let more twist happen and slide the leading hand further back. Work very slowly at first while you try to understand what is happening. Do you need more twist? Tighten the tension knob a

little. Less twist? Loosen the tension knob. Big lumps of fibre pulling through? Try spinning with your two hands further apart. Hands should be a similar distance apart to the staple length of fibre being spun. Yarn breaking? It's likely you need more twist.

8. **Establish a Rhythm:** Nothing is easy, but with practice you will soon be able to establish a relaxed rhythm and the yarn will become more even.
9. **Problems?** Don't hesitate. Ask a friend or go to one of the following web sites:

[www.creativefibre.org.nz](http://www.creativefibre.org.nz)

[www.hga.com](http://www.hga.com)

[www.interweave.com](http://www.interweave.com)

There are many spinning groups which meet regularly and members will be happy to mentor you. In New Zealand most groups are affiliated to Creative Fibre and have access to expert tutoring and resources. Easy to follow videos and DVDs can be borrowed from the society and a quick search of the internet will bring up short clips that illustrate specific techniques.