

Making Rolags on the Blending Board

Once you have chosen your fibres with the colours and textures you want to include, its time to get started building rolags. It may be helpful to lay out the fibres in approximately the order you want to use them in, so you can select them easily, or you might like to randomly grab and add them to the board without pre-planning too much, there are no rules in this.

Start your rolag construction by laying fibres onto the the blending board, taking small amounts of fibre and wiping or stroking it over the tines in the direction top to bottom, so they catch and stick. It can be helpful to hold the top of your staples against the board and draft slightly with your other hand as you spread the fibre over the board, this helps it sink into the tines and prevents the layer getting too thick.

You can also place your fibres on at different angles, it's not necessary for all your fibres to be lying straight or parallel to each other, you can let your choice of colour placement dictate the direction of the fibres for you, just keep in mind that you can't add fibres in the bottom to top direction, simply because they won't stick in the tines that way.



To make stripes in your rolag lay the fibre in vertical stripes down the board. You can use this technique to create graduated rolags and yarns, or a rainbow effect.



To make a multicoloured rolag, place the colours randomly rather than in stripes. This picture shows the fibre on the board before it is brushed in. This will produce a multicoloured rolag and a mosaic-like yarn

As you start to fill up the board you can use your brush to blend and press the fibres down into the tines, making room for another layer and blending the colours and textures together as you work your way across with the brush. You shouldn't pack the fibres down really densely, but you can keep building up layers this way, brushing in between, until you are satisfied that you have filled the tines enough (just below the top).



Using a soft brush to press the fibres into the board.



Add another layer of fibre after smoothing down the first layer

A flick carder or brush with tines will card fibres as you blend. Make sure you are brushing with the tines facing the right way to press the fibres in rather than pull them up.



Use a stiff brush, or something like a flick carder, to open up the fibres and create a greater amount of blending. If using a stiff brush remember to work it in a downwards direction, if you brush upwards against the tines you are likely to just pull off your fibres. Use a softer brush to just press the fibres into the board, keeping them more intact and less carded. If there are gaps or holes, fill those with more fibre. The more consistent the thickness of fibres on the board, the more even your rolags will be and the easier it will be to draft and roll them.



If you want to highlight some speciality fibres, such as a lustrous silk, or some sparkly Angelina, you might want to place those onto the board first, as these will end up on the outside of your finished rolags. You may also find it easier to roll and remove the rolags if the first layer of fibre on your board includes a smooth, carded preparation such as roving, or combed top, using this as your first layer is not necessary to creating a good rolag but it does help to create a nice base for the rest of your fibres, which will be rolled up inside when you take them off.

If your goal is to create a **smooth rolag** to spin a relatively even yarn from, you can get some nice results if you use predominantly pre-carded fibres, laying them on in one direction. You can create a beautiful effect by blending your smooth fibres for colour, using the brush to settle the fibres together and soften the edges of each colour, literally blending just as you would with paint.

If you would like to spin a **textured 'art yarn'** you can easily create this by using a mix of fibres and textures in your rolag construction. Add intact locks and uncarded fibres to create texture and variety in your yarn. Adding uncarded locks such as Wensleydale, or Mohair means that as you draft from your rolags, you will get locks coming through that you can spin just as they come, or that you can manipulate a little and lock or tailspin into your yarn, adding some interesting textures. You might add these randomly across the blending board, or at regular intervals. To ensure they stay very intact and minimise the chance of them opening out too much, you could try covering them with a small amount of roving or other fibre before you use a soft brush to press them into the tines.



You can also use other add-ins to create texture in your rolags and yarn, such as sari silk, silk noils, strips of recycled fabric, feathers, tinsel, thread, bits of ribbon, let your imagination guide you. You may find it works best to place these kinds of add-ins in the middle of your layers, starting and ending with a somewhat smoother layer and trapping the add-ins between them. You might also want to work these layers into the board with a soft brush, so you don't risk either damaging them or pulling them out accidentally.

Rolling the Rolag



This board is turned around with the keel placed against the side of the table, to give a good resistance to draft against while rolling

Once you are satisfied that your blending board contains enough fibre (the tines are filled to the top is generally a good guide) its time to start rolling and drafting. Turn your board around so you can start at the bottom, rolling upwards towards the top. You can expect to get at least 4 rolags from your board, depending on how big you roll them and how full the board is.

Gently lift the ends of the fibre from the tines at the bottom of the board. Place one stick on top of the fibre and the other underneath it, trapping the ends between them, then gently start rolling the fibre around the sticks.

Give it one or two turns, then, when you're sure the fibres are well caught, start to draft the fibres by pulling the sticks upwards and angled towards the bottom of the board, you should feel the fibres that you are drafting start to loosen as they begin to thin out, at this point you could stop and continue wrapping, but you

should also be careful not to wrap these drafted fibres too tightly around the stick, this will make drafting from the end of the rolag very difficult when you come to spin it.

Instead, loosen the fibres around the stick somewhat by unrolling it a little, then re-rolling them back around the sticks with less tension this time. Repeat this process, wrapping, drafting, loosening, until you have about a quarter of the fibre rolled up, or your rolag is the size you want it. Pull the rolag free from the board and gently smooth the fibres around the sticks with your hand to tidy up the ends. Then simply pull the entire rolag loose by sliding it off the sticks, this is easiest if you pull out one stick first, and then the other.



If your rolag feels a little dense or too tight you can also open it up a bit more by pulling gently on the ends and stretching out the fibres a little. Bear in mind that the fibres you take from the end of the rolag already contain some twist as you draft them to spin, because they are in a roll form so they come off the rolag with a little twist already, so its fairly important to work on keeping your rolags from getting too tight as you roll them.

Once you have taken off your first rolag, just continue to repeat this same process, untill you have removed all the fibre from the board. If you have a smoother preparation you should find that your fibres will draft off quite easily and evenly, if you have a very textured preparation, there may be some trickier parts where you get gaps or holes as you draft and wrap, keep going , this will just add to your texture as you spin from thicker and thinner parts of your rolags. If your rolags are too difficult to roll and draft easily, next time try adding less fibre to the board.

With a little practice, and your favourite fibres, you will soon find you are creating some amazing rolags that are not only really fun to spin from, but are also incredibly decorative, its tempting to just put them in a bowl and enjoy them just as they are!

