more uses for wool

Wool as Mulch

Mulch is a layer of material added on top of the soil to suppress weeds, prevent erosion, improve fertility and conserve moisture. Mulching acts as an insulator, protecting plant roots from the freeze / thaw of winter and the heat and consequent evaporation of water during summer. Organic mulches can be incorporated into the soil in the Autumn, where they will act as a fertiliser and improve the structure of the soil.

- Mulch can take many hours to put down but save many hours of weeding and watering as well as promoting better plant growth. Ground vegetables like cucumbers will be protected from mould and mildew when they lie on a protective cushion of mulch.
- The high moisture-holding capacity and resistance to rapid breakdown combined with the inherent nutrient make up of wool mean that it is a very good form of mulch. In particular the coarser low grade hill wool is best for mulching due to the properties that allow the sheep to survive in their respective conditions.
- Low grade wool fashioned into felt-like strips placed on the ground around plants is also good for stopping weed growth. These wool mats hold water, fertiliser and herbicides which will then be released slowly into the ground benefitting the plants and reducing the amount of chemicals applied. Wool mulch is therefore good for the environment as well as for the sheep farmer.

Medical Uses

For people with foot problems a boot has been developed that utilises a sheepskin sole and sides made from high density wool. This boot equalises the pressure around the foot helping in temperature regulation and relieving soreness. People who have sores on their toes can be helped by wrapping lambs' wool around the troubled area; this relieves pressure and eases pain.

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Alternative Uses for Your FLEECE





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Alternative Uses For Wool


'Fritillary' a felt picture by Andrea Hunter

There are many alternative uses for the wool produced by the sheep industry. In particular wool from the Hill Breeds can be used for very innovative products due to its properties.

Wool fibre is very resilient and elastic; it can be bent 30,000 times without danger of breaking. It can be stretched by up to one third of its length and it will spring back into shape. The complex cellular nature of wool allows it to absorb moisture but repel water. No man-made material can do all of this!

Pet Beds

Cotton covers filled with wool and cedar chippings provide a comfortable pet bedding with odour and flea control. The beds use 1-3.5 lb of scoured wool or 2-7 lb of raw wool. Coarse wool is favoured as it is less likely to felt with age. This is potentially a very useful cottage industry to provide more revenue to the hill farming communities.

Storm Water Drain Inserts

The inherent properties of wool and in particular coarser Hill Breed wool have encouraged the testing of wool bags to trap pollutants in storm water drains. Wool separates sediments and pollutants like hydrocarbons from the water. Unlike the current man-made filters, wool can be composted after use and the price of wool makes them a very cheap alternative.

All of these uses for wool lend themselves to production by the hill communities that produce wool as there is no requirement for expensive 'high tech' equipment.

Bedding

When wool is used in bedding it creates a microclimate that helps our bodies regulate temperature and humidity ensuring a good night's sleep. Wool fibres have a unique three-dimensional structure that traps air in small pockets. This property provides excellent insulation so temperature changes are slow and the body has time to adjust. Wool can absorb one third of its weight in moisture making it suitable for use in climatic conditions ranging from the tropics to the Antarctic.

Hanging Basket Liners

Traditionally moss would be used as a hanging basket liner but why not use wool? Wool provides drainage, nutrition, insulation, aeration and moisture retention. The natural colour provided by wool from the Hill Breeds looks attractive, is easy to use and does not need scouring. It is readily available at a reasonable price.

Carpet Underlay

With a little treatment wool can be used as a carpet underlay that is flame, stain, and mildew resistant. It is hard wearing and lasts well with no recycling problems after use. The natural insulation properties of wool are an added benefit.

Rug Making

A peg loom

A traditional cottage industry that has nearly died is that of rug making. Wool is washed and then used without carding or other treatments. By pulling the wool into lengths and using a peg loom rugs can easily be produced. Using wool from different breeds enables very attractive designs to be made. Herdwick wool is particularly good in this respect due to the natural colour changes from black, to brown, to grey, as the sheep ages. Peg looms can be made simply from wood ensuring many different sizes of rugs can be produced. Rugs produced in this way are hard wearing and enhance the look of a home.

Oil Absorbent Matting

Natural wool matting can absorb around one third of its weight in liquid. It is used to combat oil spillages at sea, for the cleaning of beaches and wild birds, to mop up spills in industrial areas and small spills in the home. The spillage can be squeezed out and the wool mat re-used.

Environmental Degradation Repair

Work is being undertaken to look at the feasibility of using wool matting impregnated with grass and wild flower seeds to repair the damage caused by erosion. Rolls of wool have the desired seeds added and are pegged out over the damaged area: the wool provides protection, a microclimate for seed germination and finally a fertiliser as the wool degrades naturally. If this technology proves feasible there are many more possible applications, for example, wool rolls could establish the sides of new motorway embankments.