

HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR THE FLAX CHALLENGE WORKSHOP BY PATSY SUE ZAWISTOSKI

BASIC LIST OF EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES THE STUDENTS NEED TO BRING TO CLASS:

- A good working **wheel**, or medium weight, small, fast **spindle**. I recommend **double drive or scotch brake** if you have a choice of wheels
- Hand combs or a large strong dog **comb**
- **Hand cards**
- A **hand towel**
- A simple **apron**
- A snug, non-stretch, buckled **belt**, or tied apron
- A small **cup** for flax dressing (if it can **hang on your spinning** wheel that is best)
- A **distaff**, or makeshift tall pole
- Large **paper**, opened paper bag, newspaper, or used wrapping paper **and tape** to make a cone
- Also bring **oil, screwdriver, and other tools** for your wheel in case they are needed



FIRST, HINTS FOR A DISTAFF:

Historically flax distaffs have been utilitarian, sometimes fancy if someone in the house was a woodworker. Fancy distaffs can be a work of art attached to a spinning wheel or freestanding. But a simple work around

was a hook on the wall from which to hang your fiber. Another was a hole in the side of the chair seat to hold a post that would hold up the fibers.

For the class, make do will be fine. In fact, it may help you decide what kind of distaff you would like to own.

A portable stand allows you to put the distaff anywhere you want. Stands can be made from an adjustable music stand without a book holder; a pole lamp without a bulb; a dress form stand; or a Christmas tree stand with a pole. Some have used a plastic gallon milk jug filled with gravel and a tall broomstick in it. Sometimes a tall pole or garden handle can be fastened to the leg or back of a chair with hook and loop ties, then you can sit on the chair. Depending on your stand, choose a long dowel or pole.

If your spinning wheel has a hole but the distaff is lost, you have several options. You need a long dowel 3 or 4-foot long close to the same size as the hole in the holder attachment, but just a bit smaller so it will fit in the hole. Sometimes a branch will do just fine or you can make a shim to fit in the hole with the dowel so it will stop and stay, instead of sliding through. It could also be several wraps of masking tape or rubber bands, or some large beads glued to the dowel.

Finally, we need something at the top of the “distaff” which will hold the flax. I will bring some rubber bands and plastic forks, which work surprisingly well.

To spindle spin from a distaff, traditionally a short distaff was tucked into a tight wide belt with it leaning inside one elbow while you spun the spindle with your other hand. Usually you would want a medium small, fast spindle for flax, for a fine and tight thread.

In the class, we will dress the distaffs in different styles. One style needs a cone made from large paper, like opened grocery bags or used wrapping paper. You will also need an apron which is used for transferring the fibers from your lap to the cone. We'll rotate the distaffs around so you can try different styles to choose your favorite way to dress the flax before spinning.

HINTS FOR THE HANGING CUP FOR WATER OR FLAX DRESSING:

If you have a small hanging cup bring it, if not I'll show you how to use a simple disposable plastic cup

DON'T STRESS TOO MUCH, BE CREATIVE, AND COME READY TO LEARN HOW TO ENJOY FLAX!