

# Black Sheep Handspinners Guild Newsletter

March 2011

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<http://www.blacksheephandspinnersguild.org>

The Black Sheep meet from 11am-3pm on the second Saturday of the month at the All Saints Church, Route 34b, Lansing.

## President's Message

*Jim Johnson*

This month is member made at the guild, so bring whatever you wish to share and show/sell. Last month we had quite a lengthy business meeting during which we discussed the duties of the official volunteers. Now is the time to step up and express your willingness to become one of them for the next two years. A nominating committee of Ellie May, Sharon Gombas and Cathy Chesnut was appointed so please contact one of them if you are interested or with names of people that you think might be good officers for the next two years. Elections are in May so we do not have a lot of time for electioneering (or arm twisting).

Again the library is on the agenda with questions of its viability and direction. Please be prepared to share your thoughts about its future.

Also, the question was raised about a sheep to shawl team for one or more of the fairs this summer/fall. [Ed note: The Fleece to Shawl team is working on this and has a report for the group, below.]

Happy spinning and see you all Saturday the 12th and if you have not gotten in your membership forms, please remember to bring them or to send them to Sharon Gombas, 177 Salmon Creek Road, Lansing 14882.

## Program for March Meeting

*Susan Sarabasha*

### March is Member Made

By sharing our pleasures we get to know each other a bit better.

Any paid-up member is encouraged to show &/or sell their hand crafts, be it animal or vegetable fibers, dyed items, hand made items such as quilts or wood turning or soaps or jewelry. *Each participating member will be limited to one table.*

## **Fleece to Shawl!**

*Marianne Pelletier*

Marianne, Ruth Allen, and Ellie May got together last weekend to start a fleece to shawl team. We opted to try to see if we could rustle up two teams -- one for the Troy Fair, July 27 (Wednesday) and one for the New York State Fair, Sunday of Labor Day Weekend (not yet announced but this is when they had it last year).

We're looking for good fleeces (gray is best) and for team members. Please contact Marianne at fudger28@yahoo.com if you're interested -- 277-1758.

## **Putting off Chores**

*Wayne Harbert*

I hesitated for a while before submitting this little report, wondering if I really wanted to let my fellow spinners know what a lazy, improvident procrastinator I am. Oh, well. You'd discover that sooner or later anyway. March is very nearly here, and I finally emerged from my hibernation (along with the local skunks and foxes) and dug through the snowdrift that was blocking the door of my greenhouse, planning on starting to get it in order for trays of spring vegetables. Peering in, I rediscovered a chore I'd left unfinished from last fall.

I had planted a stand of Japanese indigo in the summer to use for dyeing, but those intentions were overtaken by events. Marianne harvested a bunch of it in September and actually used it, but Japanese indigo replenishes itself quickly, and the patch was still growing robustly as the frost approached. Not wanting it to go to waste, I cut and bundled it, spread it out on an old sheet on the greenhouse floor, and forgot about it. And here it was, four months later.

So I spent a while stripping the dried leaves from the stems and will (if I get around to it) try rehydrating them. My knowledge of the chemistry of indican doesn't extend to the question of whether drying destroys it, but it's worth a shot. A truly dedicated procrastinator will invest surprising amounts of energy in exploring the limits of what (s)he can get away with. The plants still had seed heads on them when I harvested them, and after I'd removed the leaves, the sheet was full of seeds and chaff. A tidier person would have taken the trouble to winnow or sift them, but I simply rolled the sheet up, seeds and all, and tossed it into a corner. When the warm weather gets here, I'll take it down to the dye garden and give it a shake.

## Adventures in Dyeing

Marianne Pelletier

### Japanese Indigo

When Wayne invited me out to pick indigo leaves, he told me that about 600 (400?) leaves make an ounce and enough to dye wool. Standing in his field, I actually counted leaves up to 200, showing him the bulk. I'm like that. We picked enough for one round of dyeing.

I left the leaves in the workroom a little too long (4 days), but then put myself to work dyeing wool. I had to order Spectralite before the weekend of picking, and had them ready. I used the directions from *A Dyer's Garden* by Rita Buchanan (see pp. 42-43 of that book).

I seeped the leaves over a pot of boiling water, into a tea, simmering them for 2 hours. The smell helped me understand why people tell me to dye outside, and the tea was a light greenish hue, about the color of a polluted river that I grew up near, one that was loaded with moss. After squeezing the leaves, I added baking soda and then poured the fluid back and forth from my gallon glass jar to my (now retired) soup pot. I added the Spectralite to change the color again

Next, having moved the operation out into my workroom to avoid messing up my kitchen and to work with the smelly stuff in a larger, more ventilated room. The problem was that I'd chosen a glass gallon jar for the work, so when I was ready to dye yarn, I was ducking and pulling fiber through a narrow opening. Indigo requires exposure to oxygen to turn blue, so I found myself dipping roving into my jar, pulling it back out, and squeezing it. So, my workroom floor has some indigo on it. Since I did all this shirtless to save my clothes, there are no photos.

I dyed fiber this time. The result was roving that looks rather felted, and I haven't tried to spin it yet. Here's a photo of the results, left to right sort of, with the first dipped on the left and the last dipped on the right.



## Onion Skins

And now for a photo essay of my dyeing with onion skins after I made enough yarn. I didn't want to repeat making lovely almost felted ropes of fiber, and I did keep my shirt on so I could document this for you. The book I used to tell me how to do this was *The Natural Knitter*, by Barbara Albright.

I've been saving onion skins for about 5 years.



The yarn, well tied, gets soaked in my ceramic lobster cooker that has a rusty bottom.



I used all the alum in my kitchen.



Boy, howdy, 8 ounces of onion skin takes up a lot of room.



I lost my favorite cheesecloth to this process.

I read, afterward because I was in a hurry to get going, that all the equipment I used could not be used to cook again. So this big pot will no longer make jelly; my 2 quart saucepan will no longer make soup; and I totally used my next Bed Bath and Beyond coupon to replace the little sauce pot as well.





A few seconds into the process.



30 minutes later.



Finished product!

I've started rebuilding my onion skin collection because I love this color, and found myself rereading an old copy of *Spin-Off* that had an article on dyeing with black walnut husks. I think this is the year that my black walnut makes more walnuts -- they're biennial from what I can see of this tree's behavior. Or the squirrels are efficient every other year. Nonetheless, this summer may find me on the back deck with a Coleman stove cooking up some black walnut tea. And has anyone done dyeing with goldenrod?

## **Upcoming Events**

Marianne thanks Knitters Review for a lot of these entries.

From Eleanor (hartquist@frontiernet.net): The Weavers' Guild of Rochester also has a Weaving and Fiber Arts Center where a variety of courses are offered. Please go to [www.weaversguildofrochester.org/center](http://www.weaversguildofrochester.org/center) and click on the Courses link.

### **Bothwell Spinin and Fibre Festival**

Because you know I have to give you an excuse to fly somewhere. March 4-6, Bothwell, Tasmania, Australia. <http://www.bothwellspinin.com/spinin/>

### **Virginia Classic Llama and Alpaca Show**

March 12-13, Virginia Horse Center, Lexington, VA: <http://www.llamalife.com/classic/>

### **Chicks with Sticks Winter Fiber Adventure and Yarn Tasting**

Sounds like Gloria Steinham would be proud. March 18-20, Millinocket, ME. <http://www.neoc.com/maine-vacation-fall-winter-package-detail.php#chicks>

### **PA Guild of Craftsmen Spring Fine Arts and Crafts Festival**

Keystone Hall, Kutztown University, Kutztown, PA, March 26-27. <http://www.rbcrafts.org/rbg.htm>

### **Chancellor's Sheep and Wool Showcase**

Clermont State Historic Site, Germantown, NY, April 2. Can't you picture this guy walking around in academic garb blessing sheep? Clermont State Historic Site, Germantown, NY

### **Connecticut Sheep Spring Wool & Fiber Festival**

Tolland Agricultural Center, Vernon, CT, April 30. [http://www.ctsheep.com/sheep\\_and\\_wool\\_festival](http://www.ctsheep.com/sheep_and_wool_festival)

### **Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival**

I can't go. My fiber room is full. Howard County Fairgrounds, West Friendship, MD, May 7-8. <http://www.sheepandwool.org/>



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**Christine Johnson**  
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### To place an ad

A check for \$5.00 made to BSHG for an ad to run three times (a year is \$15) should be sent to the current treasurer, Sharon Gombas, 177 Salmon Creek Rd. Lansing, NY 14882. Send the ad to the newsletter editor, Marianne Pelletier, at: [fudger28@yahoo.com](mailto:fudger28@yahoo.com). If you have a question for her or others, you can email us through the links at the top of the newsletter.

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