

# Rural Crafts



## Basic Techniques in A Variety of Crafts



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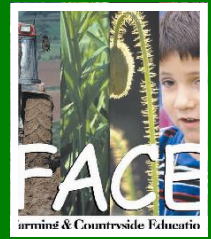
# Rural Crafts



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# Rural Crafts



## Introduction

This booklet is based on ideas presented at a FACE seminar

As a group of farmers and teachers we were introduced to the skills involved in a variety of rural crafts. These skills can be transferred into activities with children on the farm (or in the classroom).

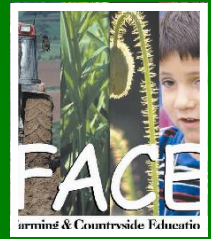
A number of the crafts, such as felt making and rag rugging, foster other skills such as working together, listening to each other and problem solving. As such they offer valuable opportunities for us to get to know each other and for adults to spend time with children learning from each other.

There is something immensely satisfying in producing your own felt brooch or your own corn dolly whilst realising that you are carrying on traditions which have been part of our cultures for generations.



With or without children, these rural crafts are tremendous fun so do give them a try!

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## Rag rugging

Rag rugging is an old craft. The floors of cottages were originally of beaten earth and rugs provided warmth and comfort. Recycling was a necessity for many people and old clothing was cut up and used on a sacking base to make the rugs.

Today we are once again realizing the importance of recycling and although rag rugs are no longer a necessity, they can be beautiful additions to homes and even classrooms and can satisfy many creative instincts.

Our tutor, Chris Mellor, showed us how to work with children to create rag rugs. Individual children or groups can work on squares of hessian measuring approximately 12" or 30cm. The children can create their own designs or one overall design can be attempted. Once all the squares are completed, the squares are sewn together and a backing added to make a giant rug. In one school the rug is used for the children to sit on at story time. Chris assured us that boys are equally happy to take part in this activity as girls, often choosing to work with the colours of their favourite football teams!

### Equipment you will need:

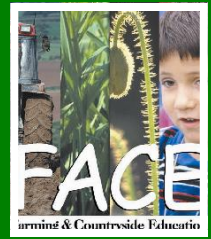
Latchet hooks (search the internet for suppliers)

Squares of hessian. Chris advised machine sewing twice round each square to prevent fraying.

Felt tip pens



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## Method:

Scraps of material. You can use just about anything you can cut into strips, as long as you think it will stand the wear and tear a rug will get. We used scraps about 1" or 3cm wide and Chris advised a finger's length.

Use the felt tip pens for marking an inner square 2cm or  $\frac{3}{4}$ " in from the machine sewing (to create a boundary in which to work). The pen can also be used to draw designs.



There are many techniques involved in rag rugging including

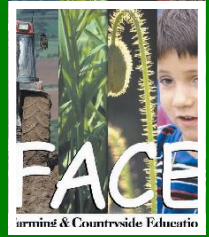
a. Hooking: holding the strip of fabric behind the canvas & pulling a loop through with a latchet hook with the latchet taped back (a large crochet hook will just about do).



b. Prodding: by "prodding" short scraps through the backing from behind with a blunt instrument and shearing the front off to a uniform length (if desired). They tend to feel softer, less knobby & textural and can look very pretty.



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We used a technique working from the finished side uppermost and hooking the small lengths of fabric through so that both ends of the fabric remain visible.

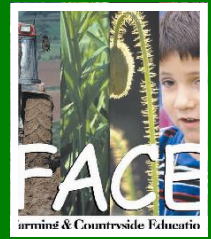
Push the hook through the hessian and pull each scrap part way through before releasing the hook. Continue along the hessian using a variety of coloured scraps to create a vibrant pattern or following a design to create a picture.



**Designs to aspire to:**



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## Felt Making

Felt making is another ancient craft that maintains its popularity all over the world. Felt is made using wool and the fibres are matted together using friction. This is another satisfying craft which can achieve results in a comparatively short period of time.

Clare Wolstencroft taught us how to make the felt and then to produce felt flowers which could be used as brooches, hair decorations or as adornments to be added to accessories.

### Equipment you will need:

A ping pong ball for each person

Wool tops (search the internet for suppliers). Farmers can use wool from their own sheep but for health and safety reasons it should be washed and will need combing before use.

Soap

Bowls of warm water with a squirt of washing up liquid (one bowl of hotter water for the teacher/leader)

Small sharp scissors (health and safety – delegate cutting to teacher/leader if appropriate)

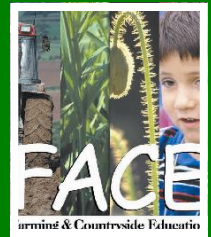
Smallish buttons

Needle and thread (make sure it is small enough to go through the holes of the buttons!)

Safety pins and hair elastics



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## Method:

Each person takes four thin layers of wool top (about 4" or 10cm square). They can be the same or different colours depending on the final effect you want to achieve.

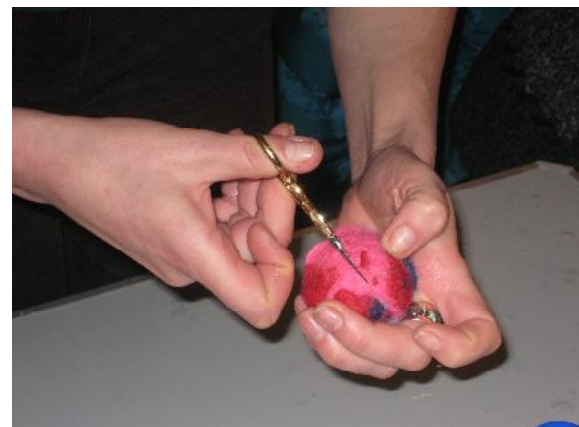
Place the four layers on top of each other but alternate the direction of the fibres.

Now wrap the combined four layers tightly around the ping pong ball and dip it in the warm, soapy water.

Roll the ball briskly in your hands and the fibres will begin to felt. The teacher/leader may need to help smaller children by taking the ball from them and dipping in the hotter water to get the process going.

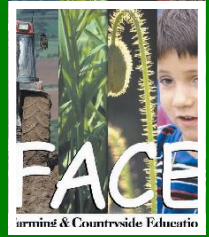
Occasionally soap your hands to make the process easier. Keep going till you have a nice, smooth ball.

The felt now has to be cut with the sharp scissors making a cross shape half way round the ball. (If your flower is to have more than four petals, you will need to adapt the number of cuts.)





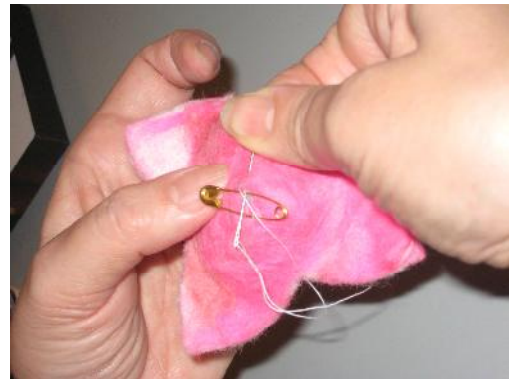
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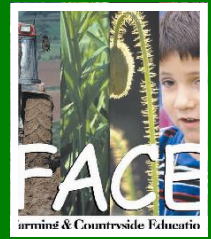
The felt can then be peeled away from the ball.



Sew a button to the centre of your flower and then attach to a hair elastic to make a hair decoration, or to a safety pin to make a brooch or leave it as it is!



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## Spinning using a pencil

Hand spinning is the art of twisting wool fibres into a continuous thread and can be done by hand or by using a spinning wheel. Bobbie Harvey showed us a very simple technique using a pencil!

We began by “combing” fleeces which again can be done with hairbrushes if the more specialized (and expensive) carding combs are not available.

### Equipment you will need:

Sheep's wool

Hairbrushes or carding combs

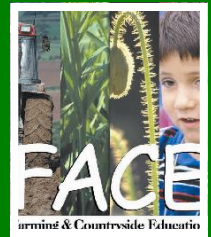
Pencils

### Method:

Using hairbrushes or carding combs, you need to comb out the fleece to remove lumps and tangles.



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Lay the fleece out with fibres all roughly pointing along the line, to make a “sausage” of fibres.

Hold a pencil in your left hand and keep that hand still whilst winding the fleece around the pencil with your right hand until about 30 cm is wound around.

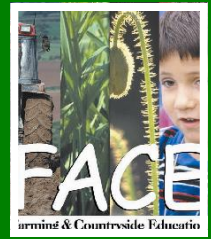
Then pull the fleece gently back off the pencil (allowing the pencil to spin in your left hand). This will start to put a twist in the wool.



Repeat a couple of times and then wind that section onto the pencil and save it, move along the sausage of fibre repeating first steps until you have a thread saved on your pencil.



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## Weaving with sticks

Again, simplicity is key. No looms for us, just two pencils and a length of string!

### Equipment you will need:

The wool you have spun on your pencil (supplemented if you haven't enough)

Two pencils or sticks

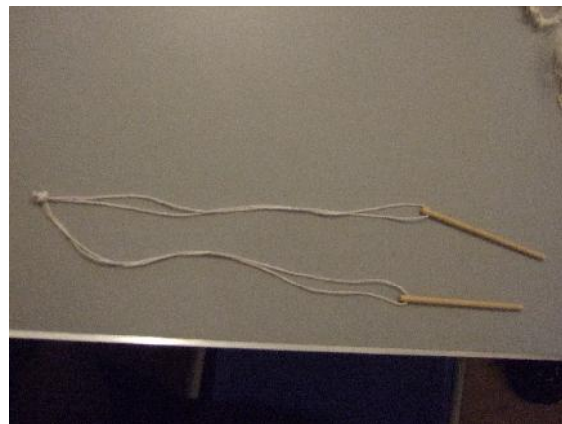
String or wool thread to act as warp thread

Needle

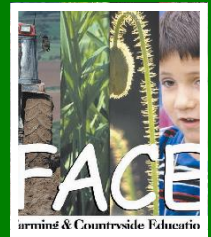
Pipe cleaners

Stick on eyes (from craft suppliers)

Attach string or wool to one end of each pencil or weaving stick to act as the weft thread.



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## Method:

Hold the sticks in your left hand, keeping them parallel with about a 1" gap between them.

Using the woollen thread that you have spun, trap the end with your thumb or make a loop and pop it over one stick. Weave a figure of 8 around the sticks, gently sliding the weave down the sticks as you work but don't push it all off the end until you have made the full length of weaving you require.

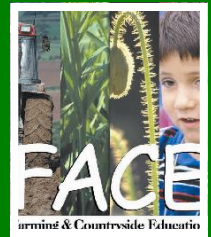


When you have enough (25cm for making a sheep) slide the weaving to the end of the warp threads and knot them as close to the top of your weave as you can.

The weaving can then be rolled up, held in place with a stitch to make a sheep with wobbly eyes and pipe cleaners for legs/ears!



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## Corn dollies

Corn dollies are a form of straw work made as part of harvest customs of Europe before mechanisation. Our expert tutor, Raymond Rush, explained that it used to be believed that the spirit of the grain lived amongst the crop and that at harvest time this spirit would be made homeless. Hence the last sheaf of the crop was woven into a hollow shape to contain the spirit which was taken home until spring sowing. At that point the spirit would be released into the field ready to encourage the growth of a new crop.

There are innumerable corn dolly forms each with its own history which makes fascinating reading.

We learnt how to form a countryman's favour using three straws and the more competent moved on to plaiting five straws to make a spiral.

### Equipment you will need:

The variety of wheat straw we used is called Maris Widgeon. The Guild of Straw Craftsmen provides information about obtaining straw.

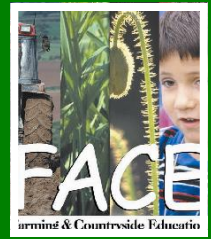


<http://www.strawcraftsmen.co.uk/resource.php#Straw>

The wheat should be soaked in advance of using.



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## Method:

Take two ears of wheat and tie them tightly just below the ear. Cut the stems about 1cm above the first nodule from the bottom and slide the leaf off.

Hold the ears in your hand with the stems pointing upwards. Fold the stems over so that when they are horizontal one points to 12 o'clock and the other 3 o'clock.

Fold 12 down to 6 and 3 across to 9. Then 6 goes back to 12 and 9 back to 3 and so on until all stem is used.

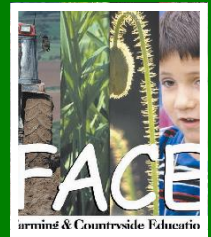


Snip off the excess stem at an angle.

Bend the finished plait into circles and tie in place.



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## Willow Fish

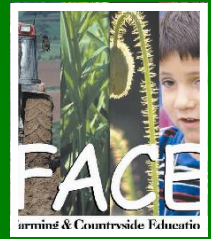
Schools and farms can grow their own willow quite easily on a small patch of land but avoid planting near drains and buildings. Willow is an extremely versatile plant and can be used living or dried for a variety of purposes.

Willow is a very vigorous plant and can grow as much as 12ft or 3.5m in a year. Every time the plant is cut back (coppiced) it will produce new shoots.

Children will enjoy seeing the willow grow and you can grow willow in a variety of different types and colours to use in craft activities. Browse the internet for suppliers and ideas.



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Equipment needed:

Basket willow (needs to be soaked for 24 hours) or use fresh willow.

## Method:

Choose a thicker rod to make the fish shape. Tease it gently into shape by working a soft bend into the rod, otherwise it will snap.

Select a weaving rod and hold the tip of the thin end against the fish's nose with your thumb. Start a figure of eight weave around the two sides of the fish. As you turn the weaver to come round the back around the outside rod, make sure you twist it to keep all the rod's fibres together to stop it snapping.

As you progress along the fish's body start to bring the outside rods back together until they nearly meet.

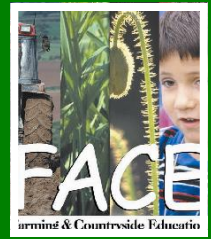
At this point cross the outsides over to make the fish's tail and start a new rod the other side of the cross. If you need to add new rods as you weave, add tip to tip or butt to butt. Make sure the weaver never gets thicker than the outside rods: chop it off and start a new one if necessary.

Children can each make a fish and they can be used to make a combined mobile.





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## Acknowledgments

Our Rural Crafts seminar was organised by artist Bobbie Harvey of FACE  
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Other tutors on the day:

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Clare Wolstencroft (felt making) 01298 837 78 [wolstencroftgc@btinternet.com](mailto:wolstencroftgc@btinternet.com)

Raymond Rush (corn dollies) 01260 224 358