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U. S. Department of Agriculture

Tuesday, April 25, 1933.

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Preparing Raw Wool for Bedding." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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When I looked over the mail this morning, I was reminded of the nursery rhyme -- "Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow." Judging from the letters, a lot of Marys these days are wondering what to do with the fleece from their lambs. Many farms have a big supply of raw wool on hand which has little or no market value at present. How can thrifty homemakers utilize this valuable material at home?

Years ago, before the days of mills and factories, women on farms and ranches made their own wool into clothing for their families. They cleaned it, carded it, spun it and wove it into cloth with their own hands instead of depending on machines. In these present emergency times, many women are returning to old-fashioned ways and are learning the old home arts of their grandmothers. Most farm homes today aren't equipped with spinning wheels and hand looms, but women are using the raw wool in other ways than in cloth. Some are making it into baby quilts, pads, foot warmers, firm pillows, wool comforters and even mattresses. Where money is scarce and raw wool is plentiful, farm families are making their own bedding. To help them, textile specialists at the Bureau of Home Economics have been working on the problem and now have directions ready for cleaning and carding raw wool for comforters and mattresses. If you or your neighbor happen to have some raw wool on hand, send for these directions. Write to this station or direct to the Bureau of Home Economics at Washington, D. C. and ask for the information on preparing raw wool for bedding.

Spring and summer jobs like gardening and canning soon will fill your time, so you probably won't undertake making wool bedding just now, unless you make some very thin wool comforters to take the place of blankets for chilly summer nights. But even if you don't want to make up the wool, this is a good time to wash it and remove the unpleasant "sheep odor," so that it will be clean and ready to work with in the fall. The process of washing raw wool is called "scouring," and the specialists suggest that this may well be done right after shearing in the spring. At this time of year you have the warm sun to dry the wool after washing.

I'm not going into all the details of this process of preparing wool. That would take too long. If you are interested you can send for the leaflet of directions and have them all down in black and white for your own use. But I am going to give you a short picture of the process, just to give you an idea of it

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before you try it yourself. To begin with, I warn you that preparing raw wool at home is neither quick nor easy work. It takes plenty of time and plenty of patience. In fact, once you start the job, you'll appreciate more than ever the work your grandmothers and great-grandmothers used to/to clothe their families. Time, patience, plenty of soft warm water and neutral soap are some of the requirements for scouring the wool. For carding it -- which means combing it out until the fibers are straight -- you also need time and patience and a pair of wool cards, which look something like curry combs. But if you have the time, and the cards, and the patience -- and if you can't sell your wool to advantage, you certainly can economize by making your own bedding. The job won't be so long and hard either, if you do it on a cooperative plan. Let the whole family help. Or groups of neighbors can get together for scouring and carding parties, just as women's clubs have been doing for canning, preserving and soap-making. Many of these old-time jobs go faster and are pleasanter if they're done by a group of workers.

If you have never worked with raw wool before, the specialists suggest that you start out by making a small article first -- perhaps a baby's comforter or a light summer comforter. Then you'll have an idea of the time the process requires. A medium-sized wool comforter takes about three pounds of washed and carded wool. That means about six or seven pounds of wool in its raw state, for raw wool is reduced about a half in weight by scouring and carding. Unfortunately, most wool as it comes from the sheep is not "white as snow," so requires thorough washing and rinsing. To wash the wool, you'll need plenty of good thick suds and soft water, for rinsing especially. You can use rain water for this purpose or you can soften hard water with soda. Make a thick soap solution by heating a pound of sal soda, two pounds of good neutral soap and two gallons of water. Then dilute this to fill three tubs or pails. Use a broad wooden paddle with several holes in it to handle the wool and to lift it from one tub to another. Avoid squeezing or stirring for this mats the wet wool. For the same reason never use a washing machine. Wash small pieces of wool at a time. Rinse in several waters and then spread the wool out in the sun to dry. You can make a good drying table by laying clean boards on saw horses and leaving cracks between so the air can reach the wool and dry it more quickly. Keep the wool covered while drying with an old sheet or some other clean cloth.

When the wool is dry the next process is carding. But I promised not to go into all the details, didn't I? You can write for directions for preparing raw wool to the Bureau of Home Economics, Washington, D. C. Specialists there will also be glad to give you references on spinning and weaving, two other old handcrafts. And they can tell you where you can get supplies for these different jobs.

Tomorrow, I'll answer some of your questions. And the next day we'll discuss another one of grandmother's home arts again popular in these economy times -- homemade soap making. If you want to know how to convert your waste fat into soap, listen in on Thursday.

