

TIPS FOR HARVESTING ANGORA

Contributed by Pat Glenn

After having achieved good grooming habits, you now have a beautiful coat on your rabbit and it is ripe to be harvested by either plucking, (pulling the fibers out), which doesn't hurt the rabbit if you're not over zealous. You may wish to shear or cut to remove the coat. If you cut be careful that you don't cut the bunny. The skin is loose and when you pull the wool up to cut you may accidentally cut the skin.

For the Giant Angora and possibly the Satin Angora, it will work better if you shear or clip them instead of plucking.

Your first harvest may be between 5 and 8 months of age, (older in Giants) and many Satins may need to be clipped at about 6 to 8 weeks of age. You may notice amounts of wool trailing behind the rabbit in the cage, the cage may have more wool around in it, and when you are grooming, large amounts are coming off the rabbit. After the first harvest, you will do it again around every 4 months. Genetics, weather conditions, breeding habits and showing habits can make this time span vary.

I use a paper grocery sack to loosely store my wool in till spinning or sale. The most desirable wool is the plucked from across the top, back and sides. The tummy wool, especially in the agoutis may be a different color, and not as long, so this should be put into a separate bag. Of course, the French have the broken color and white.) I don't separate the white and color because I like the yarn it makes blended together.

Start with a groomed rabbit. Grooming helps stimulate the skin to make plucking easier and you'll need to be able to make a part if you cut. As in grooming, start with the underside. If your English feet and legs have become matted, you may need to trim them. Be careful as the skin is very thin here and the tendons are close to the surface.

Plucking? Start in one area, grasping and pulling out fingers full of the longest wool. Work from that spot on so that you can see where you've been and how much you've taken off. Some rabbits have a new coat coming in, you will see it as must shorter wool, probably guard hairs first. Other rabbits will wait to start a coat until they're virtually bald.

I use my thumb and first two fingers to pluck with. If you grasp too much wool it will be harder on you and the rabbit and take longer to do. As I've gotten some arthritis, I use a metal grooming comb in the same hand as the thumb, to comb, and use my thumb to pull the wool.

In the summer, my French tend to rub a lot of their tummy wool off, so I just check for mats and leave the rest alone. When the tummy is done move on to the top.

If you choose to cut or shear, make sure your scissors or blade is sharp. For scissors, I advise a short blades, pointed tip to increase your control and reduce the chance of cutting the rabbit. I haven't had any experiences with electric clippers, but a friend who has professional shears says that Angora dulls the blade rapidly. The type of pet clippers you can get at K-mart or the pet store may not do the best

job. There are more powerful shears and special Angora blades available--of course they can be expensive.

I've been told that cut wool does not demand the same price as prime plucked, but if you are careful to exclude short-cuts, I feel it is very easy to spin and great for blending with other fibers.

Now to cut that bunny wool. After you've taken care of the underside, make a part, in the wool, down the center of the bunny's back. Choose one side to start with, hold the wool gently down from the part, slip your scissors in and trim a thin row from back to front or front to back which ever works for you. Peel that layer off and put it in your bag and you're ready to cut the next layer. Don't try to cut too large a swatch, it will increase your short cuts and the chance of cutting the bunny. Short-cuts are little pieces of wool cut from the row before it, annoying little pieces if you're spinning. You WILL get short cuts, but you can get most them out of the wool before you store it. I have had great success in getting rid of my short cuts by simply blowing them away. You will see the short cut as you are clipping, so just puff on it with your breath, and unless you hyperventilate very easily, your short cuts will blow away. Then you can take the good wool, bag it, and clip the next row.

On the English Angora, the face wools aren't plucked or cut unless they get badly matted. If you are raising English just for their wool alone or it is your breeding stock, you may wish to trim the muffs and bangs, not real short, just so they'll be easier to groom and care for. Don't trim the ear wool. I usually advise plucking for the French, especially that first baby coat, but I have also cut them. I have told some of my spinning friends, that if their wool seems to be getting too coarse after pluckings, they may want to try alternating plucking and shearing to help keep the coat softer.

As always, do what is going to work the best for you, your bunnies and the uses you have for their wool. Most of all enjoy it. If you have purchased an Angora just for a pet, you may choose to keep the coat trimmed to a desired length. (c) 1997

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