



Fitting Breeding Sheep

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A well presented sheep sends a positive message to both judges and potential buyers. It is always important to have your sheep looking their best when presented for show or sale.

Fitting a breeding sheep for show is a lengthy process that should begin by "cutting out" the sheep six to eight weeks prior to the show. This fact sheet contains information on how to cut out a sheep as well as how to fit the sheep at show time.

Tools

Before you even get started you should have the necessary tools on hand. You wouldn't fix a car without the proper tools, and likewise you don't want to try to fit a sheep without the proper tools. Here are some items you will want to have available.

- electric shears
- foot shears
- soap
- towels
- cards for the body and head
- hand shears
- curry comb
- spray bottle
- blankets
- hoods
- livestock blow dryer (optional)

Cutting Out

Cutting out a sheep involves shearing the sheep, but leaving wool on the top-line, butt, legs, and poll. This gives you an opportunity to shorten the wool before washing as well as an opportunity to shape the top-line and butt of the sheep. You can also trim feet at this time.



Start by shearing the belly and neck of the sheep. Shear the wool off the stifle on the rear legs, but leave the wool on the outside of the leg and on the lower part of the legs. Some people do this with the sheep sitting on his butt, while others prefer to do this on the trimming stand. You can shear the cheeks at this time also. Be sure to leave wool on the poll if your breed of sheep grows wool there.

When cutting out your sheep for show, start by shearing the belly.



Shear across the stifle, leaving wool on the outside of the leg.



Shear the sides of the sheep, leaving wool along the top-line.

Once the sheep is on the stand, you can start by shearing the sides. Completely shear the sides of the sheep back to the hip. You will want to shear just the top of the wool over the top-line, leaving about an inch of wool. When shearing the front end, leave the wool on the lower part of the legs.



Shear the front end and forearms down to the knees.



Leg wool on a sheep should be trimmed neatly.

Blend the sides into the top-line and butt wool with a set of hand shears. You can curry the long woolled areas to help break apart the wool fibers. Finally, card the butt wool, then trim to further blend into the sheared areas and to finish shaping.



Blend the sides into wool at the top-line. Also, trim the top-line to look level



Shear the butt wool to give shape and definition to the rear leg.



The finished lamb that has been cut out should have a level top-line.

The last step would be to shape the poll on sheep with a wool cap and to trim the legs of sheep with wool on the legs. The legs should be trimmed to remove the longest part of the wool. Leave about an inch or two of wool on the lower part of the legs when you are finished.

Bathing

You should plan to bath your sheep five to seven days before the show. Keep pens bedded daily so the sheep stays clean until show day. Also, cut back on the amount of grain you are feeding to keep the manure firmer. This is helpful in keeping your sheep clean. The purpose of washing the sheep this length of time before the show is to allow the wool to "set up" prior to trimming.

Assemble your supplies before you start. Place the trimming stand on a level area where the wash water will drain away. You should also have your hose hooked up with a spray nozzle. Other supplies needed are foot shears, soap, curry comb, and towels. A livestock blow dryer is optional.

Once the sheep is on the stand, start by trimming her feet. You may want to give her a few minutes to relax and adjust to being on the stand before starting to trim the feet. Cold, warm, or hot water can be used to wash the sheep. However, hot water is helpful for softening the grease in the wool and can allow you to get the sheep cleaner and brighter white in color.

When wetting the sheep, start at the shoulder to get the sheep used to the water. then rinse the head and neck and work your way down and back. Use the water pressure to help float as much dirt as possible out of the wool before adding soap and scrubbing.



Begin washing at the front of the sheep and move toward the rear to float dirt out of the wool.

Any type of soap can be used, as long as it is thoroughly rinsed out. If you miss any soap in the wool, you may find yourself showing a sheep with green spots! Many people use Orvis, although others prefer Ivory or Dawn dish soap. Depending on how dirty the sheep is, you may need to wash twice to get the wool a bright white color. When rinsing, begin with the head and work your way down and back. Again, use the pressure in the hose to help "float" out any dirt remaining after washing. After rinsing, squeeze out as much water as you can and then either towel dry or blow dry. A blower is helpful in removing any remaining dirt or hay seeds left after washing.



Be sure to rinse out all of the soap.

When blow drying the sheep, blow at an angle, so that the water and any dirt is blown off the sheep and not down into the skin. Use a curry comb when finished to help break up the wool fibers. This is helpful when carding as the wool fibers are easier to pick up with the card.



If you use a blower, blow the wool at an angle to avoid tangling wool fibers.

Once the sheep is dry, put on a blanket and place in a separate pen in the barn for your show sheep. The blanket should be long enough to cover the sheep without being tight or excessively loose. You can check the correct length by holding the blanket up to the side of the sheep while on the trimming stand. Before placing the sheep in a show pen, add clean bedding and check for any areas that may catch and tear the blanket.



A correctly fitted blanket should match the length of the sheep and not fit too snugly.



After the sheep is in her pen, you can put on her hood. Pin the hood to the top of the blanket where the neck section of the blanket attaches to the body section of the blanket. Allow enough length for the sheep to put her head down to eat. Be sure to use a heavy blanket pin that is designed for this purpose. General purpose pins will not be strong enough to keep the hood pinned to the blanket.

Pin the hood to the blanket at the top of the shoulders, leaving enough length for the sheep to put her head down to eat.

Trimming

Wait two to three days after bathing to begin trimming your sheep. This will give the wool time to set up so that it will trim smooth and remain smooth between trimmings. Start off by putting the sheep on the stand and shearing the belly. Leave the belly-line low enough to blend into the sides.



Shear the belly on the sheep, leaving the shear-line low enough to blend in.

Start your trimming job by using a curry comb to break apart the wool fibers. This will make the wool easier to card and will allow you to pull up all the wool fibers for a smooth trim job. Fill a bucket with hot water and add a small amount of soap; enough to make a foam of bubbles on top. Using a brush, lightly wash over the sheep. Work the brush from front to back to remove the dirt without scrubbing it into the wool. Start at the neck and work your way down and back. Wash the belly last because it will be the most dirty.



Wash lightly with soapy water, working from head to rear.



Curry the wool to break apart wool fibers.

Again, curry the wool and then begin towelling the sheep dry. This is also known as rubbing them out. This should lift off any surface dirt and keep them a bright white color. After drying, start carding the wool. The more you card, the better the wool will set up and thus the more smooth the appearance after trimming. Carding is probably the most important part of fitting. A good card job can go a long way toward a professional appearing trim job.

When you trim, start at one end of the sheep and trim to the other end. In other words, try to trim in the longest stroke possible. To work the hand shears, your thumb should remain still while your fingers pull one blade toward the blade next to your thumb. The shears should be worked quickly, but moved slowly across the sheep. It will take some practice prior to the show fitting to learn the proper use of the shears and to be able to trim smoothly without cutting any holes into the wool or making "cat-steps" across the side of the sheep. If you do cut a hole into the wool, simply recard and trim back over the hole to make it smooth. The finished sheep should have shoulders that are smoothly blended into the body, a level trimmed top-line, a square dock, and a butt with some dimension.



Trim the shoulders to blend in smoothly at the point of the shoulder.



The top-line should be trimmed to a right angle with the neck. Adjust the head piece on the stand so that the sheep is holding its head as it would in the show ring.



Trim the top-line to appear smooth and level.



Be sure the shape of the rear-view is balanced.

On sheep with wool on their legs and poll, you will need to wash these again right before the show. This is often done the day before or the morning of the show. Use a bucket of warm soapy water and place each leg in the bucket to wash. Rinse with cool water by placing the leg in the clean water bucket. Wash the head and poll using a brush and rub out as with the body. Card up the legs and trim off the longer wool to make smooth. As for the head, shape into a cap and make smooth. You may also want to shear the cheeks on your sheep to give her a more youthful and neater appearance.



Blend wool around the neck and ears.

Your sheep should now be ready to show. Put the blanket and hood back on and sit back and relax for a few moments before your class is called. Good luck and have fun!



Trim the poll smooth if your sheep has a wool cap.

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