

Gulf Coast Native

The Gulf Coast or Gulf Coast Native is a North American original, well adapted to an environment that is known for being hostile to the needs of most sheep. The breed is classified as feral or semi-feral, because it does well with minimal to no human intervention. Recently differentiated from the closely related Florida Cracker, the Gulf Coast may have been introduced from the southwest—from Latin American sources—whereas the Florida Cracker likely came in from the southeast, by way of Florida. Most Gulf Coast sheep are white, although there is a subset of dark brown-to-black fleeces.

Breeds that are thought to have contributed to the development of Gulf Coast sheep include Spanish churros and possibly Merinos, French Rambouillets, and, from the British Isles, Southdowns, Hampshires, Dorset Horns, and Cheviots. This *mélange*, along with natural selection for survivability, has resulted in highly variable wool, often much better suited for hand processing than for mills, because an individual spinner can respond to a fleece's unique fiber qualities.



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The irregularities in fiber quality exist not only from one animal to the next but within individual fleeces. Nonetheless, sorting for length, micron counts, and other characteristics makes the manufacture of commercial yarns feasible.

Within all that variability can be found a lot of enjoyable and versatile fiber. Much of it falls within the lower 20s of micron counts, and even the sections that register higher fiber diameters tend to feel softer than expected. As a result,

Gulf Coast wool supplies fiber artists with material suitable for a wide range of textiles, ranging from next-to-skin for the softer components to relatively sturdy outerwear, pillows, or bags for the more robust.

For many years, Gulf Coast sheep have provided human residents of—for the most part—Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi and Texas with useful fiber from resilient, nearly self-sufficient flocks.

Fleece weight	4–6 pounds (2–2.5 kg).
Staple length	2½–4 inches (6.5–10 cm).
Fiber diameters	20–32 microns.
Lock characteristics	Single-coated, open, wavy and/or crimpy, low in grease.
Natural colors	Mostly white; some tan, dark brown, black, and multicolors in patches.



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