

# Hog Island

One of the North American original breeds that for most of its history has lived in a feral state, getting along without much attention from humans, Hog Island sheep take their name from the island off the Virginia shore where they became established. The original introductions, in the mid 1600s, involved a mix of British sheep closely related to the Down breeds. Genetic studies indicate a comparatively close relationship to Southdowns, which are the foundation for all of the classic Down breeds. There's believed to have been some Merino influence, although that's not readily apparent in the wool. The Down-breed heritage comes through in the lock shapes, which are generally rectangular although they occasionally have pointed tips, and in some resistance to felting.

Initial impressions of the wool can be unprepossessing: it is matte, with a dull appearance and disordered crimp. The whites tend to be yellowed or grayish. Hog Island sheep also seem to excel at



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collecting vegetable matter: grass, seeds, twigs, and burrs. If the fiber has already been processed into yarn, this will not be a concern. For the spinner, combs (especially mini-combs) will help remove most of the vegetable matter except burrs, which will need to be plucked out by hand. For worsted yarns, proceed to spin immediately and for woolen yarns card after combing.

Persevere! Hog Island yarns are most often surprisingly pleasant.

They can be fashioned into warm and serviceable sweaters, hats, and blankets. Some will even be soft enough to use next to the skin.



lock photos reproduced to the same scale



lower photos © Deborah Robson

<b>Fleece weight</b>	2–8 pounds (1–3.5 kg), usually in the range of 3–5 pounds (1.5–2.5 kg).
<b>Staple length</b>	Insufficient data; samples I have examined ranged from 1½ to 2½ inches (3.7–6.5 cm).
<b>Fiber diameters</b>	Insufficient and inconsistent data. Estimated 22–32 microns, although what I've seen has been on the stronger end of that.
<b>Lock characteristics</b>	Single-coated fleece, high in lanolin, with locks somewhat rectangular and dense; disorganized crimp.
<b>Natural colors</b>	White, sometimes black (10 to 20% of sheep).