

Karakul (American)

The American Karakul grows one of the most intriguing and practical fleeces on the planet, yet people who make textiles by hand need to learn to use it because it is very much *not* like the familiar fine and medium wools. The animals' fat tails reflect their Middle Eastern heritage, although the breed in North America has incorporated other genetics—including Lincoln Longwool, Cotswold, American Tunis, and Navajo-Churro—to create a distinct population.

Karakuls grow long, double-coated fleeces that come in an unusually broad array of colors, including variations that extend along the length of individual staples. Black Karakuls also gray with age.

Karakul wool is easy and fun to spin into robust yarns. But what to do with them? They are generally not candidates for next-to-skin wear. On the other hand, they felt readily, and have terrific durability. In the Middle East, people make socks from Karakul; most modern North Americans



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would immediately reject that idea. Slippers might be acceptable. And Karakul is a dream fiber for

rugs, bags, pillows, and other items that need to endure hard use over many years. Karakul is made to last.

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| Fleece weight | 5–10 pounds (2.5–4.5 kg); yield 80–85 percent. |
| Staple length | 6–12 inches (15–30 cm). |
| Fiber diameters | Karakul's quality is more important than its fiber diameter, often listed as 29 microns, as an average or a "greater than" orientation point. The American Sheep Industry Association says 25–36 microns, which is appropriate. The inner coat is likely to have micron counts in the 20s and the outercoat in the 30s, or stronger. |
| Lock characteristics | Open, lustrous, with wide bases gently tapering to the tips (a characteristic of double coatedness). |
| Natural colors | Black predominates, although colors include grays and browns, as well as unusual gold and red tones, and some whites. The wool can be solid colored or display shades of color within the staples. |