

Leicester Longwool

The Leicester Longwool* has many names; the predominant alternative you'll come across is English Leicester. It is a key breed in the English longwool family, which originated in the British Isles. It is "key" because of its influence on many other breeds, following the experimentation carried out in the 18th century by Robert Bakewell to increase the breed's productivity as a source of meat.

Although the famous Robert Bakewell didn't care about wool, the sheep retained the ability to grow fleeces bountiful in both length and quantity—so much so that they are often shorn twice a year. The locks are generally a bit finer and longer than the fiber produced by the Cotswold and Lincoln Longwool, but any effort to encourage fineness in the Leicester Longwool runs contrary to the breed's distinct qualities. If you want finer wool, other breeds grow it. Enjoy the Leicester Longwool for its glorious shine, drape, strength, and open crimp.

Spinning these fibers with worsted techniques makes the most of their luster (which also gives dyed colors brilliance) and can result in smooth, durable yarns that have exceptional suppleness. The drape is more pronounced in finer yarns, which can even be used to fashion laces

* Leicester is pronounced LESS-ter.



© Jeannette Beranger/The Livestock Conservancy

and lightweight woven textiles. That said, Leicester Longwool can be great fun to spin with woolen techniques or to use in construct-

ing sound novelty yarns. Leicester Longwool is versatile, durable, and brilliant: just match the yarn weight and structure to your goal.

Fleece weight	5 (half-year)–18 (full-year) pounds (2.5–8 kg).
Staple length	5 (half-year)–14 (full-year) inches (12.5–35 cm), averaging 6–10 inches (15–25 cm); frequently shorn twice a year.
Fiber diameters	(U.S.) White and colored, 32–38 microns.
Lock characteristics	Long, distinct locks with crimp that is well defined from pointed tips to flat bases.
Natural colors	White, black, and a varied gray (called English blue).



© Deborah Robson