

# Heritage Sheep Breed FIBER PROFILE



## Shropshire

Shropshires come from the Welsh Marches, a variably defined region of western England adjacent to Wales. They are members of the Down family,\* and, like the other breeds in the family, carry Southdown blood; during the 18th century, Southdown breeding was added to locally well-adapted sheep. All the original breeds that contributed to the formation of the Shropshire, other than the Southdown, are now extinct. Their legacy endures in this trouper of an animal, hardier than the other Down breeds and a reliable producer of dense, resilient fleeces.

While the Down breeds were developed to maximize meat production, the Down wools are all notable for their remarkable, and valuable, resistance to felting. That characteristic means that—in addition to making naturally machine washable and dryable garments



© Alison Martin/The Livestock Conservancy

and blankets—a lot of Shropshire wool goes to Japan to fill futons. Despite this functional benefit, the Down breeds' colored faces and legs mean that dark fibers may make their way into the shorn fleeces and they are thus considered undesirable for many industrial applications, where pure white wool works best.

A good Shropshire fleece is a delight for handspinning. The staples tend to be flat, with blunt tips. Most often prepared and spun with woollen techniques, to emphasize the cushiony and insulating properties, the wool can also be processed worsted-style and will result in smooth fabrics with increased durability.

\* The Down breeds include Dorset Down, Hampshire, Oxford, Shropshire, Southdown, and Suffolk. Of these, all but Dorset Down exist in North America, and all but Hampshire and Suffolk are rare breeds.

<b>Fleece weight</b>	4½–10 pounds (2–4.5 kg) ewes; up to 14 pounds (6.5 kg) rams; yield 50–75 percent.
<b>Staple length</b>	2½–4 inches (6.5–10 cm).
<b>Fiber diameters</b>	Variable, from 24.5–33 microns, generally 26–29 microns.
<b>Lock characteristics</b>	Dense, resilient, medium-grade, with blocky, rectangular staples that hold together and may be hard to distinguish from each other.
<b>Natural colors</b>	White. There may be a few black fibers, because Down breeds have colored faces. Colored strains may exist or emerge in small flocks. They are generally culled from larger ones.



lower photos © Deborah Robson lock and yarn photos reproduced to the same scale