# Tunis

The American Tunis got its start in the 18th century, around the time of the Revolution, when the Bey of Tunis—a ruler in North Africa—sent some sheep as a gift to George Washington. Those African origins likely explain the breed's tolerance for the heat and humidity in the southeastern United States, although it has a remarkable ability to thrive in a variety of environments, including where it's snowy.



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The breed was almost wiped out during the Civil War, due to the fighting itself and the armies' need for food. Fortunately—because they are nice, practical animals with lovely wool—a small number were salvaged and formed the basis for today's flocks.

Lambs sport cinnamon-colored fiber that fades to cream on the adults, leaving vestiges of the reddish color on the faces, ears, and legs of the grown-ups. The mature wool itself processes into a pleasant, clear white.

As the photos demonstrate, lock formation and crimp profiles can vary. Overall, though, the staple length and fiber diameter fall into a range that's very sweet for hand processing. It's also a versatile wool. A good percentage of fleeces will be useful for next-to-skin purposes for most people, while some will be sturdier and good for objects that need to endure more wear. Either woolen or worsted processing will produce good results, depending on personal preference and intended purpose.



lock photos reproduced to the same scale

| Fleece weight | 6–15 pounds (2.5–7 kg), usually 8–12 pounds (3.5–5.5 kg); yield 50–70 percent. |
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| Staple length | 3–6 inches (7.5–15 cm), generally 3½–5 inches (9–12 cm). |
| Fiber diameters | U.S. breed standard is 24.29–29.2 microns; in the field, expect to find 24–31 microns. |
| Lock characteristics | Relatively open, a bit blocky, sometimes with pointed tips. |
| Natural colors | Ivory to cream; reddish from first and second lamb shearings before the wool lightens. |



4 inches/10cm

lower photos © Deborah Robson