



# BILLINGS FARM & MUSEUM

## SHEEP AND WOOL WEEK:

### ALL ABOUT SHEARING



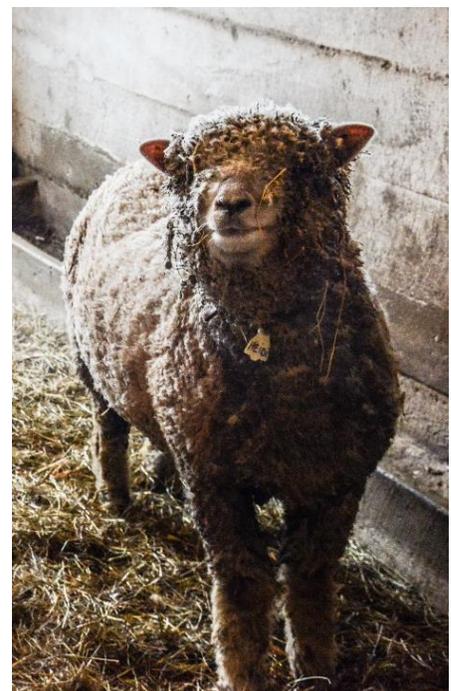
Wool Socks

Sheep are covered in a type of hair called wool. Wool is used to make clothing and fabric among other things because it is very warm and stays dry.

Unlike many animals, sheep do not shed their woolly coats. Instead, sheep need to be sheared every year to remove their wool, otherwise they may overheat or go "wool blind." Sheep are typically sheared for the first time when they are at least a year old. The person who shears sheep is called a shearer. A professional shearer can safely shear a sheep in as little as 2-3 minutes.

Sheep are sheared at different times of the year, depending on the breed of sheep and the climate where it lives. In Vermont, sheep are sheared in the spring so they will have short coats during the hottest months of the year. This also allows them to slowly grow their wool back in time for winter when it gets cold again.

At Billings Farm, we have a breed of sheep called Southdown. Our Southdowns produce between three and five pounds of wool each year. They have white-colored wool and tend to have wool covering most of their body.



Billings Farm Southdown Sheep

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A shearer uses electric clippers to shear a sheep.

Modern shearers use electric clippers. These clippers have a comb on the bottom which goes into the wool first. The comb lines the wool up to be cut. The comb can have two shapes: straight or flared. The straight comb is easier to use. The flared comb has teeth on each side that flare out from the comb. These flared combs allow the shearer to gather a little more wool with each pass. The cutter sits just above the comb and is the part of the clipper that moves back and forth. To keep the clippers from overheating, shearers use an oil to lubricate the moving pieces.

Blade shears are another tool used for shearing. These look similar to scissors except the hinge is farthest from the blades instead of in the middle. Blade shears do not use electricity and leave more wool on the sheep than clippers. This makes them ideal for colder climate areas where sheep need to maintain some wool to be comfortable. Blade shears are not used as often today as electric clippers.



A shearer uses blade shears to shear a sheep.



**A FRESHLY-SHEARED  
EWE NEXT TO HER  
FLEECE AT BILLINGS  
FARM'S 2019 SHEEP  
SHEARING & HERDING  
CELEBRATION**