

Following on from Spinning Flax

October 2017, Wiltshire Guild of SWD

Once you have had a go at spinning flax you may want to find out more so here is a roundup of questions you may have and some of the sources to find your answers.

How to dress a distaff

As in any spinning preparation of the fibre before spinning is key to a good result. There are lots of designs of distaffs and some wheels come with them. Look on the web for the sort you might like to use or make your own with a cardboard cone stuffed with newspaper and fit it on a length of broom handle. You will need to attach the broom handle to something stable or prop it against your legs or under your arm, as in some of the photos of flax spinners on the web!



Riitta Sinkkonen Davies wrote this article for the Journal: very interesting and covers the whole process.
<http://www.thejournalforwsd.org.uk/application/workfiles/resources/art242.pdf>

The WildFibres website has some good picture guides for prepping and dressing a distaff
http://www.wildfibres.co.uk/html/dressing_distaff.htm

The flax processing videos on YouTube by the Zinzendorfs are really comprehensive, and have some very useful info – although he has a boring voice and drones on a lot
<https://www.youtube.com/user/attheHermitage/videos>

Good you tube videos are here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USPPpK1SvHI>

An American dressing a distaff demonstrates another way of doing it.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zaEwRymfyQ>

A link to an interesting newsletter with even more links:
<https://manchesterclimatemonthly.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/flax-growing-handbook-final.doc>

Suppliers of flax, seed and types of flax

Many fibre suppliers provide tops but there are a few who actually provide strick, line flax or the unprepared fibres.

George Weil: recently stocking water retted line sliver and water retted line sliver www.georgeweil.com

Flaxland sells “Suzanne” seed, their own fibre and Dutch line flax (and also runs courses) 4 Ashton Farm - GL8 8SW <http://www.shopping-for-linen.co.uk/index.html>

Wildfibres sell “Marilyn” seed, and also the same Dutch line flax (25p more expensive per 100g – but haven’t compared delivery costs); lots of advice, pictures and they also supply natural dyes (Wild Colours). http://wildfibres.co.uk/html/flax_store.html#more-flax-seeds

Books

Patricia Baines, Linen Handspinning and Weaving, Batsford ISBN 0-934026-52-1 (keep an eye out for it on Amazon or try to get a second-hand copy).

Stephanie Gaustad: Practical Spinners Guide: Cotton, Flax, Hemp published by Interweave. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Practical-Spinners-Guide-Cotton-Guides/dp/1596686693/ref=sr_1_9?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1503832030&sr=1-9&keywords=flax
Good general book on cellulose – uses different spinning method to Baines – American

Zinzendorf: Big Book of Flax – very comprehensive, also expensive
https://www.amazon.co.uk/Big-Book-Flax-Christian-Zinzendorf/dp/0764337157/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1503832124&sr=8-1&keywords=big+book+of+flax

King’s Flax – interesting history of growing flax in the 20th Century in the UK, little about processing
https://www.amazon.co.uk/Kings-Flax-Queens-Linen/dp/0948400781/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1503832168&sr=8-1&keywords=the+kings+flax

Growing your own flax

Instructions for growing the seeds we are giving you translated from the Jaimelelin site:

How to grow your Jaimelelin seeds, or saved seeds from Harriette

THE 6 Grams of LINSEED in the packet cover a half square metre of soil. (NB the plants can grow to nearly 4ft high/1.2m high).

Before sowing, either in your garden or in 2 large flower pots at least 20 cm deep, you need to prepare the soil: pull out all the weeds, turn it over, break up any clods and rake it thoroughly for a fine surface. The linen is not demanding, garden soil in your pots will do. You don’t need to use special soil. Sow all the seeds of the sachet evenly spaced, you could even draw lines with your finger! Or you can broadcast them by hand. Cover the seedlings with a little bit of soil (1 to 2 cm of soil maximum) and gently pat flat by hand.

After about ten days, young shoots a few centimetres tall will appear: you will have to wait almost 2 months to get the first flowers. A flax flower blooms in the morning and the petals, under the effect of heat, fall in the early afternoon. Other flowers will appear the next day. In the fields, flax is not irrigated: rainwater is enough. In this case, make sure that the soil you are using is not too dry; if necessary you can moisten it with a little watering in pots!

For the more ambitious: one hectare of European linen = 900 kg of yarn or 3,750 m² of fabric or 4,000 shirts or 431 sheets or 1,375 chairs in composite linen!

Information about the type of seeds: Bolchoï type flax seeds handed out as part of promotion in France. My stepdaughter checked the international plant variety database: Bolchoï is registered by Terredelin.com (French co-op). It is a spinning flax, resistant to oïdum (powdery mildew) and fusarium and brûlure (scorching?) not GM according to website, took 6 generations of crossing to breed resistance. www.terredelin.com
There is a beautiful 15 minute film on their site: <http://www.terredelin.com/internet/la-decouverte-du-lin/terroir-du-lin/terroir-du-lin-1187.aspx>

Growing Flax – useful handbook online <https://manchesterclimatemonthly.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/flax-growing-handbook-final.doc>

Where to go to find out more

People: Other than us 😊

Riitta <https://riittaweaving.wordpress.com/>

Susie Gillespie: <http://www.susiegillespie.com/> Weaving courses and accommodation. Karen Skeates has done her course

Amanda Hannaford: does courses around the country: <http://www.mandacrafts.co.uk/> Kathy Davies and Harriette Dottridge have done a day course with her.

Magazines

There are a number of magazines dealing with linen and bast fibres and these are some that we know have good articles either about processing or the history of production. You can often buy past issues and links are given here.

The Journal of the Association of SWD

If you want to download any I would suggest the most useful if 242 – where Riita describes the entire process and shows good pictures of how she dresses a distaff.

Issue 190 – Two Flax and Linen Museums (pp12-13), NZ Flax (p14), Hemp (p15-16), Riita S-D (pp18-20), Cornwall Flax Project (pp21-24) (this article available as free download), Flax in Shropshire.

<http://www.thejournalforwsd.org.uk/application/workfiles/resources/art190.pdf>

Issue 204 – Nepalese Nettle Project (pp11-16), Plants to wrap up warm (pp16-17) (n/a)

Issue 227 – Process of Flax (pp16-18), Nettle Fibre in Nepal (pp23-26) (n/a)

Issue 242 – Riita S-D Flax from Seed to Linen yarn (pp7-10) free download here:

<http://www.thejournalforwsd.org.uk/application/workfiles/resources/art242.pdf>

Issue 252 – Flax weaving in NZ (Phormium Tenax) <http://www.thejournalforwsd.org.uk/Product=252> £2.00

Issue 253 – Shrewsbury Flaxmill (pp15-17) <http://www.thejournalforwsd.org.uk/Product=253> £2.00

Issue 254 – Dyeing Uraz Sail (pp13-14) <http://www.thejournalforwsd.org.uk/Product=254> £3.50

Handwoven

Available for \$9.99 each and downloadable from the Interweave/Handwoven website

www.interweave.com/store/weaving/weaving-magazines/weaving-magazines-handwoven

March/Apr 1989 Weaving with Linen

125 May/June 2005 Weaving with Linen without Tears.

T'internet

There's a linen and hemp lover's group on Ravelry which is worth a look:

<http://www.ravelry.com/groups/linen-and-hemp-lovers>

Allan Brown of the nettle spinning video fame has started a Facebook group called "Nettles for textiles" which is incredibly active at the moment and is bringing together a lot of people on the

experimental fringes of cellulose spinning. Worth joining (Liz says). Hopefully this will link to it, but sign into Ravelry first and it'll go straight to the group.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1648679398499874/?ref=bookmarks>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1648679398499874/?ref=bookmarks>

Anne Lander's handwritten notebooks on the Guild website:

Anne produced these charming handwritten and illustrated notebooks and several of us worked to get them online. You have to download each page, but they are full of her experience.

Handspinning Flax: <http://www.westwilts-communityweb.com/site/Spinning-Weaving-and-Dyeing-with-Anne-Lander/Flax-spinning.htm>

Handspun Linen (weaving): <http://www.westwilts-communityweb.com/site/Spinning-Weaving-and-Dyeing-with-Anne-Lander/Handspun-Linen.htm>

Flax 1 and Flax 2: <http://www.westwilts-communityweb.com/site/Spinning-Weaving-and-Dyeing-with-Anne-Lander/Flax-1.htm>

Weaving Linen: <http://www.westwilts-communityweb.com/site/Spinning-Weaving-and-Dyeing-with-Anne-Lander/Weaving-Linen.htm>

Festivals and Museums and further information.

Linen festivals in Europe: <http://www.festivaldulin.org/index.html>

Texture Museum: Kortrijk, Belgium <http://www.belgianlinen.com/interesting-linen-info/flax-museum-texture/>

<https://www.lisburnmuseum.com/>

The Museum and Centre for Linen in Northern Ireland.

<http://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/blog/istituti/museo-del-lino/>

Museum of Linen in Pescarolo ed Uniti, Italy. Near Cremona, roughly between Milan and Venice.

Greve museum in Denmark – interesting website – one for our Grand World Tour of Linen!

<http://hedeboeyning.dk/hedeboeng/kulturhistorien>

www.Jaimelelin.fr

Campaign promoting flax/Linen and hemp production (Chanvre = hemp)

<http://www.mastersoflinen.com/eng/lin/19-la-carte-du-lin>

Info about Linen production in Europe (no Republic of Ireland on the map!!!)

<https://www.kaufmann-mercantile.com/field-notes/irish-linen/>

Please let us know if you find any more good suppliers or links.

Harriette Dottridge, Liz McCarron Heal and Kathy Davis.

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