

Beth K. of Everybuddies Dolls and
Precious Primates presents...

THE ULTIMATE DOLL and SOFT TOY MAKING FABRIC GUIDE

Be prepared for the info-dump of a lifetime as we get way,
way into the weeds of fiber content and other details about
the most important thing in life:
sewing dolls and soft toys!!!

It can be difficult to make sense of all of the fabric options out there, especially when it comes to fabrics for making soft toys (dolls and stuffed animals). What are the differences from one fabric to the next, and what do all of these different terms mean? When you see materials that you like used by other dollmakers, it can feel like a faux pas to ask where they came from. I've also noticed that where information *is* more freely shared, there can be lack of clarity regarding the actual terms or fiber content, and there can even be stigma surrounding the purchase of anything made of synthetic fibers.

Over the years, I have spent an unhealthy number of hours scouring websites, looking at customer reviews, requesting swatches, lurking in Facebook groups, pestering other makers, trying-and-erring and, of course, I have spent over fifteen years sewing with different kinds of fabrics. I am unable to control myself when it comes to craft supplies so I've tried it all and I don't discriminate. I'm also a total geek for fabric identification. In short, my obsession has led me to create this guide that I hope will help you find the fabric you need, and save you some time!

This guide covers fabrics used for “skin” fabrics for anthropomorphic (e.g. mostly people-looking but also including animal dolls that have people-like bodies) dolls. It also discusses plush fabrics that may be used as doll hair or for the entire body of an animal plush (e.g. teddy bears). This guide does not cover fabrics used for doll clothing as these are essentially apparel fabrics—but I will discuss those when I create my guide to designing doll clothing!

Terms

Natural versus Synthetic

Fabrics/textiles can be made of natural or synthetic fibers. If you want to really get into the weeds about it, even synthetic fibers originated (way back when) from something organic. But I digress. Natural means it came from a plant or an animal. Synthetic means it came from a man-made substance, usually petroleum based, like polyester. Other synthetic substances include acrylic/modacrylic and nylon.

Natural plant fibers include cotton, flax, hemp, jute and more. Natural cellulose fibers include bamboo and other forms of rayon. Natural animal fibers, or protein fibers, come from sheep's wool, mohair goat hair, silk and more.

Ethics: most feel that natural fibers are better for the earth both in terms of their production as well as for the end user. I mostly agree, but in my opinion, this gets dogmatic and I like to challenge this notion that synthetic is *always* bad. I take my time to explore all angles of a textile and really consider whether it's the best fit for my project. I also have researched the issue and learned that one can make the argument that the carbon footprint of recycled polyester is ultimately lower than for organic cotton. On the other hand, some people say that synthetic fibers are better from a vegan perspective. But keep in mind that most animals like sheep *need* to be shorn in order to remain healthy, and proper removal of a fleece is not hurting them. Those who tout synthetic fibers as being animal-friendly should also consider the fact that production of petroleum products and harvesting of natural rubbers is detrimental to wildlife even though it doesn't entail the use of an actual animal product. There are many sides to the issue, and only you can decide what's best.

Pile

Pile just refers to the fibers coming out of the base fabric, as in velvets and velours, faux furs and other plush fabrics. Pile can be low or high, curly, straight, etc.

Nap

When a fabric has a pile of any sort, it will have a nap as well. The nap is the direction that the fibers lay. If you've ever run your hands over a piece of velvet and seen that you can draw a picture on it, that's you brushing the nap in different directions. If you're sewing with a piled fabric, you'll want to make sure that the nap is facing in the direction that you want!

Woven Doll Skin Fabrics

What is woven fabric?

Woven fabric is fabric that is made from threads woven in a weft and warp. If you look closely, the threads go over and under, usually in a grid-like fashion, almost like a basket. Woven fabrics tend to have very little to no stretch unless they have something like Lycra or spandex added to the fibers. Sometimes woven fabrics do have some innate stretch, or ease, because they may be woven a little more loosely, or because the nature of the weave is that it does not go in the criss cross grid that I described. An example of this would be twill fabric (but you probably won't be using that for doll skin...although I have seen some beautiful brushed twill fabric that would be a dream for dolls...alright, I'm getting off track). Linen is another woven fabric that often slips and slides around a bit and may stretch more in different directions—but it still will not have as much stretch as an actual knit.

Although generally non-stretch, woven fabrics do stretch more on the horizontal grain (weft) than vertically (warp). If you ever have a piece of woven fabric and you aren't sure which way to lay it out (maybe it's a scrap and you can't see the selvedge), just give it a tug in a few directions. If you're tugging perfectly

vertically, it will feel the most taut and will hardly stretch. If you're stretching horizontally, it will have some snap or give. If you're tugging on the bias, which is the diagonal grain, it will stretch a lot. You generally always want to lay your pattern pieces out so that the warp is exactly vertical and the weft exactly horizontal. Even though woven fabrics don't stretch as much, your doll will still come out looking distorted if you cut your pieces on the wrong grain.

Cotton Broadcloth

Cotton Broadcloth is the same as quilting cotton. It's a medium weight woven fabric that has a pretty tight/close weave, feels pretty smooth and is mostly opaque (meaning you can't see through it) while not being too heavy. It's very pleasant to work with. Not all broadcloth is of the same quality.

Other woven cotton fabrics, such as voile, lawn are too lightweight (so, more sheer and not as strong) to use for doll making. Cotton poplin is similar to broadcloth but tends to be finer/lighter but sometimes higher quality with a denser weave. It's often used for button down shirts, and sometimes for quilts. I recommend **Kaufman Kona Cotton** for a cotton broadcloth for dolls—it comes in a great range of skin colors and is a decent quality. You can get this fabric from DollMaker's Journey, Weir Crafts and many independent sellers on Etsy. You can also get it from Fabric.com/Amazon, but I recommend doing that only if you have a particular shade in mind and can't find it elsewhere. You can also get Kona at your local Joann's, but mine only carries one skin color. Some of their color names have changed or been discontinued so you may need to poke around to find the one you're looking for.

Pros: Super easy to work with, comes in wide range of colors, affordable. Ideal for traditional/vintage-inspired cloth dolls or ragdolls.
Cons: Not much "give," otherwise not many cons unless it's just not the right fabric for your project.

Linen

Linen fabric is typically made from the flax plant, but the term linen technically refers to the weave and type of fabric, not the fiber (you may also see “cotton linen” or hemp linen which just means that it’s made with 100% or a cotton blend). It tends to be a bit of a looser weave than cotton broadcloth. Many dollmakers use linen because it tends to have a nice, rustic, warm look to it and comes in many different colors. I find it a bit challenging to work with for dolls because it does tend to slip around, making it difficult to get your grain lined up when cutting out your pieces and therefore sometimes resulting in less exact results. If you use the linen without washing it first this may be a bit easier to resolve. If you wash linen, it will get very wrinkly and you will need to iron it before working with it (but the wrinkliness is one of the things people like about linen garments). Be sure to choose heavier weight linens and a smaller seam when sewing dolls with linen, so that the firm stuffing does not strain the looser weave. Many doll makers like to use **Kaufman Essex Linen** for human and animal dolls. This is a cotton/linen blend and it comes in many beautiful colors, with totally solid options, more heathered options and even stripes.

Some linens are “slubbed” or “nubby” meaning that there are parts of the yarn that are a bit thicker, creating an irregular or even a grid-like pattern. This can be appealing if you want to incorporate that texture somehow.

Your local Joann Fabrics may also have nice linens, however, be very careful not to purchase linen blends that include polyester or rayon fabrics. There is nothing wrong with those for garments, if that’s what you want, but they will not lend as nice of a feel for dollmaking. Rayon is a cellulose fiber that has a slippery, drapey feel—not helpful when making soft toys. I recommend purchasing linens like Essex from independent Etsy sellers, such as [AA Cotton Creations](#) or from your local indie fabric shop.

Pros: Beautiful, rustic look.

Cons: can be pricey, can be slippery and fiddly, or stretch where you don't want it to.

Canvas

Many doll makers choose to use some form of cotton canvas for dolls. This is a much heavier fabric than broadcloth as the fibers are thicker (picture what a tote bag is made of). It will be a bit more challenging to turn your doll and you'll want to leave plenty of little places on narrow limbs to turn this fabric; you'll also want to avoid dolls that have lots of seams or darts; but the plus side is that it will be very strong.

Pros: Very strong and durable, stuffing lumps won't show

Cons: Bulky and hard to turn seams sometimes

Velveteen

There are a range of short pile fabrics that fall into the “velvet” category. What differentiates them is their fiber content, the fiber content of the backing and whether the backing is knit or woven. Here we’re referring to woven-backed cotton velveteen. It tends to be shorter and stiffer/more stable than velvet and definitely more than velour (which is typically knit-backed and stretchy). It can be difficult to find cotton velveteen. I have not purchased any yet, but if I did, I would start with Blackberry Primitives or Olympia Woolworks—their hand-dyed fabrics look so delectable!

Pros: Lustrous, soft, velvety feel

Cons: Can be expensive

Wool Fabrics

It’s less common to see dolls made of wool fabrics, probably because 100% wool tends to be pricey. I have done it before and it’s really nice for the right project. Wool can be made into all types of fabrics—knits to wovens, thick to thin. You’ll want to choose a wool fabric that is as densely woven as possible, such as a wool

melton or other coating. The only challenge is that it can be difficult to find melton type fabrics that aren't mixed with nylon. But if you aren't a purist about wool, as I am, that might be fine. If you get 100% wool fabric that seems too loosely woven, you can also wash it and dry it—this will shrink it to some degree, tightening up the fibers. I recommend Dorr Wool store for a range of beautiful solid and textured wool fabrics, and I also recommend trying Olympia Wool works, Blackberry Primitives or even just doing an Etsy search for hand-dyed wool if you want wool that has a less solid and more gradated or hand-dyed look. There are so many beautiful possibilities. The nice thing about using wool is that it creates a luminous look especially when hand dyed. The drawback is that, if not tightly woven enough, your seams may pop if you're doing fingers or other small curves, so it may be best for simple patterns.

Pros: Soft, luminous appearance; wool will absorb “smell of home,” ideal of comfort objects.

Cons: Seams can pop on small curves; very expensive

Flannel

I think that a very high quality flannel, such as Portuguese flannel or the brushed twill I described, would actually be ideal for a doll. However, it can be difficult to find high quality flannel yardage that is tightly woven enough and will not pill substantially (pilling is when the loft or extra fluff on a fabric balls up over time). Flannel also doesn't typically come in a wide range of skin colors. But hey, don't take my word for it! Give it a try.

Pros: Soft

Cons: Can be looser weave, can lose loft over time

Felt



Felt is actually neither a knit nor a woven. It is created by taking wool (or polyester or rayon) fibers and agitating them until they clump together and form a fabric. I am an evangelist for 100% wool felt, at least for a soft toy. You can find a range of gorgeous, 100% wool felts from many places, but my favorites are A Child's Dream or Weir Crafts Holland/European wool felts. They're quite thin but very substantial and strong. They also offer thicker and more "rustic" felts. Polyester or blended felts tend to be less strong and tend to look worse over time and pill. Felts can be nice for making simple, jointed dolls. I don't recommend

them for complex dolls. I also don't recommend them for large dolls only because it can be very expensive to purchase all of that felt!

Pros: gorgeous, durable and comes in wide range of colors

Cons: a bit bulky, and very expensive if you need yardage

Knit Doll Fabrics

What is a knit fabric? Picture a sweater—the fibers are connected with tiny little loops, creating little V's on the knit side, and horizontal loops on the purl side. Not all knits look exactly like that, as there are different ways that they can be knit, but it's the same general concept of connected loops. Knit fabrics make up your favorite tee shirts and, honestly, most of the textiles that are used in clothes today except for jeans.

Because of the way it's made, knit fabric almost always has stretch, even if no additional substances like Lycra are added. Like a woven fabric, knits will stretch more on the weft or bias than on the warp. Some knits do have extra stretch added, which creates something called negative ease that we won't discuss since it's not relevant. I definitely do not recommend making dolls with knits that have extra stretch added.

Knits are most popular with soft sculpture dolls, meaning dolls where the shape occurs by manipulating the stuffed doll with thread. Knits are also the preferred fabric for Waldorf/Steiner type dolls, which usually have a hard wool ball for the head which is then covered with the knit fabric.

Fleece



There are two types of fleece that someone may be referring to: sweatshirt fleece and PolarFleece (this is brand name). Sweatshirt fleece is exactly what it sounds like—the fabric your sweatshirts are made of. It's knitted on one side, and has fluffy loft on the other side. It feels amazing until the fluffy part balls up and doesn't feel fluffy anymore. I have never used sweatshirt fleece for dolls but I have seen others do it, using both the knit and fluffy side. The key is to purchase cotton or other natural fiber sweatshirt

fleece. It's not available in many skin tones so you may need to dye it yourself. Dharma Trading and Organic Cotton Plus will have it. You can also check the Birch Organics fabrics line as they typically have what is most likely high quality organic cotton sweatshirt fleece available.

The fleece that I use often for dolls is both the actual PolarTec brand as well as the anti-pill fleece from Joann Fabrics. Anti-pill refers to a physical agitation or

brushing mechanism (not a chemical addition/change) that happens in the manufacturing process which makes it so that the loft of the fabric will not ball up with use. Anti pill fabrics do still pill a bit and change over time, but nothing like lower quality fleeces such as blizzard fleece line from Joann's.

This fleece can come as "double velour," meaning that both sides have the same texture, or single-side velour, where the right side has the velour like texture and the back/wrong side has more of a loose brushed look. My absolute favorite fleece is the Polar Tec brand which I purchase from Mill Yardage.com—this is the same fabric used on fleece jackets from Patagonia and other popular brands. You can also get a more limited variety of colors of Polartec from The Rain Shed. It's pricier than the anti-pill fleece from Joanns, but the quality is outstanding.

Polartec fabrics are also Oeko Tex certified and most are 85% recycled. I use the 200 series for dolls. But I also use the Joanns anti-pill because it's good quality and comes in a nice range of colors that don't usually change.

Fleece has natural stretch because the actual weave is a knit. Because of this, you can do some thread sculpting to your dolls, but it's not as stretchy as interlock or jersey knits.

Pros: Soft, durable, cozy, doesn't fray

Cons: Can be hard on your machine to sew with this over long periods

Polyester knit fabrics (dolls skin)

Many traditional soft sculpture dolls are made with some version of this polyester fabric which, to me, looks pretty much like a poly version of the Waldorf doll interlock, but the actual type of knit may not technically be interlock—I'm not sure. I believe this is also the type of fabric used to make Cabbage Patch Kids. You can purchase this through Dollmaker's Journey. It has a sort of shiny finish and is smoother looking than cotton knits. Admittedly, I have not used this fabric yet.

Pros: Smooth, stretchy and comes in skin tones. If you like to paint your dolls, this provides a good surface for that.

Cons: Unsure

Interlock/Waldorf fabric



Waldorf dolls are almost always made with this fabric. It is usually a cotton interlock, which means that the knit stitch is on both sides, as opposed to cotton jersey which has a knit and purl side. To the left is Laib Yala light weight interlock.

The nice thing about using an interlock is that it does not curl at the edges, making it very easy to cut and sew with.

Some Waldorf doll fabrics *are* actually like a jersey, with a purl side. The example which comes to mind is the Laib Yala brand heavy doll fabric which is often used for the

body and the lighter fabric used for the body (see next page).

I hear many doll artists referring to these fabrics as pique or tricot, which is inaccurate. Those are actually terms for entirely different kinds of knit fabrics that are constructed differently. It's just interlock or jersey.



Interlock is similar to ponte or double knit fabrics which you may encounter in garment sewing. **Laib Yala** and **Dewitt Engle** are the two most popular Waldorf doll fabric brands. The Olive Sparrow is a great Etsy shop carrying a range of colors of both brands and she is very knowledgeable. Weir Crafts also carries a line of heavier weight doll fabrics— I have never tried them but I've heard good things.

I have used A Child's Dream line of medium weight doll knits and I liked them quite a bit. They were more affordable and came in wider yardages than Dewitt Engle and Laib Yala, and the colors are very nice. But, I do love Dewitt Engle for the incredibly soft feel, too (see photo on next page).

Although the dollmaking knits specifically milled for this purpose are great, you can use cotton interlocks from other companies, too. I've used Birch Organics



bouncing basket-doll on your hands.

interlock in a grey color for a Waldorf-inspired baby gorilla doll. I've also used the heavy interlock from Organic Cotton Plus to make doll prototypes and as an inner doll armature. Keep this in mind if you need to make a doll that has non-human skin colors. Do not purchase the inferior interlock from Joann Fabrics, not even to make testers/prototypes. It behaves differently and is poor quality. Do not ever use a knit fabric that has extra stretch added. When you add extra stretch, the doll will blow up like a balloon and you'll have a

Pros: Lovely colors, natural, soft warm appearance and feel, often GOTS or OEKO-TEX certified

Cons: You really need to use the triple stitch function when sewing, which creates a lot of extra sewing time, and your machine may also be cantankerous with knits. Can be pricey, and come in narrow yardages. Best for Waldorf dolls or dolls that will be thread sculpted.

Suedecloth/alova/craft velour/microfiber type fabrics

There are a few different types of fabric that are 100% polyester and which are technically knits, yet might not look knitted on the backside. Many also don't have nearly as much stretch as many other knits that we've discussed.

Alova



You know how when a company wants to have a plush made with its logo and the plush is made with a slightly scratchy fuzzy fabric? That's alova. Or, maybe you remember getting plush toys with your Happy Meal made of this fabric. I agree, that doesn't sound very enticing, but I still like this fabric for reasons I can't quite explain. It has a very slight pile to it, but is not as dense or soft as something like velour. It feels almost like a felt. Alova is also often used on stuffed animals on the parts where a heavier fur fabric would be too unwieldy, like inside of the mouth, the snout or beak or the paws/fingers/toes. Alova is also sometimes referred to as costume suede, and you may have seen a version of this fabric on cloth diaper supplies websites. You can find this at Joann's and there are a few different versions of it, often with the term "costume" in the name.

To me it almost seems like the backing is sort of melded together (it is plastic, after all), and this makes it extremely strong and it will not fray. So, for things like fingers and toes this is really helpful. I have also noticed that many commercial plush puppets are lined with the wrong side of the alova. I often use alova to test

my pattern designs because it isn't too expensive, doesn't fray and I can easily mark on it to show which changes I want to make.

Faux Suede and Suedecloth

There are also related fabrics called suedecloth or faux suede—generally made of polyester. These are often found in the upholstery fabric or costume fabric section. They range in terms of quality and texture—with some made to resemble suede and others resembling more of a chamois leather. Some are completely non-stretch while others are very stretchy.

In terms of suedecloth or faux suede intended for dollmaking, I have used a fabric called called “Doe Skin” (see photo below) offered by Dollmaker’s Journey several times—it’s also available from CR’s Crafts . This does have a slight stretch to it. It comes in different skin tones and has a slightly nicer finish than the Joann Alova. Many of my first cloth dolls were made with this or with alova because they have a smooth, soft feel, come in human skin tones and are super

easy to work with.

Some bear artist suppliers also carry additional forms of faux suede that are a bit pricier—these are used for bear feet soles and other details.

When it comes to using actual upholstery fabrics, keep in mind that many of these are chemically treated for stain resistance. If you are making dolls for children, you may want to steer clear.



Craft Velour

Another related fabric is craft velour, which I have only ever seen offered at Dollmaker's Journey and CR's Crafts. This is fuzzier and looks a lot like the soft side of hook-and-loop or Velcro. It also reminds me of what typical Muppet-type puppets are made of (there is actually a distinct range of fabrics called Puppet and Antron fleece that I have been meaning to explore, but I suspect some of them are similar to this). I have made some dolls with this before. It does have a bit of a synthetic glow, but it's a nice option to have and it's inexpensive.

Alova/faux suede/craft velour Pros: Doesn't fray, easy to work with, gives slightly softer, smoother texture than plain cotton but doesn't have a high loft or plush look. Inexpensive and comes in skin tones. A great choice for small fingers and toes.

Alova/faux suede/craft velour Cons: Has a synthetic look, may have a more commercial look as well.

Velour

Velour is typically very stretchy. Some Waldorf doll artists like to use velour as the body for sack/bunting type dolls. It curls on the edges like a jersey knit (the backing is knit) so can be unwieldy to work with. Most velours on the market have a poly-blend backing even if the right side is cotton, because the poly is needed for stability. Both Weir Crafts and A Child's Dream carry velour in nice skin tones: peach and brown (Weir) and honey and camel (ACD).

Pros: soft, warm appearance.

Cons: very stretchy and challenging to sew with.

Velboa

Velboa is the very short pile fabric used on many commercially made toys that you've likely had, such as all Beanie Babies. I haven't had any luck finding it

in many human skin tones. It's non-stretch and characterized by a short dense pile. I would actually love to use this fabric for my dolls, I just can't seem to source it anywhere in the full range of skin tones.

Pros: Soft feel without being too lofty.

Cons: very hard to find in skin colors

Minky



Minky has become very popular in recent years. The most popular minky company seems to be Shannon Fabrics. The Cuddle line is their basic minky which is a lot like velboa, but with an ever so slightly longer pile, and ever so slightly tufted pile—whereas with velboa the fibers look exactly uniform. If velboa is a shaved head after a week, minky is more like a full head of newborn peach fuzz. It has a softer, silkier feel than velboa. Minky has a bit of stretch to it. The backing is usually a bit

slippery-feeling, and it can be a little challenging to sew. You will also want to have some tape or a vacuum handy to collect all of the fuzz that it sheds when you cut it. Minky is used most commonly on kawaii or anime style plush dolls.

The Shannon line has a nice range of colors, especially brown tones. They used to have a lighter flesh colored tone but it seems to have been discontinued. I recommend getting Shannon minky from independent Etsy sellers, such as [Lizzy's Biz Fabrics](#) or Cali Quilt Co, because you can get smaller cuts and it's easier to ask for help if you are trying to determine which shade is best.

I have been wanting to try Rovi and Co., an Etsy seller who actually has her own line of minky manufactured. It looks even better than Shannon because it looks like a slightly shorter and straighter pile that might be more conducive to doll making—like velboa but much softer and silkier. She also has some beautiful tones, including nice options for all skin colors. She's very friendly, and the fact that she has a unique line manufactured means she can be much more helpful and responsive about the product.

Joann Fabrics does carry different minkys, but generally I don't think they look as high quality as these other options. There are also a few other companies such as Michael Miller that produce minky fabrics.

Pros: soft and silky, works as “skin” fabric while still having some loft.

Reasonably priced and comes in wide range of colors.

Cons: A little challenging to sew with. Messy.

Plush/Pile/Faux Fur Fabrics

Let's take a look at longer pile plush fabrics that you may use for doll hair or furry creatures and animals. You might sew these as part of the actual doll pattern to resemble doll hair (as with my Lil' Buddy pattern) or create a wig or even a little patch of hair to sew on your doll after. Or you may sew all or most of the body of your soft toy with fur. Keep in mind that, the smaller the toy, the harder it will be to sew with a thicker or longer pile fur. Tiny toys tend to work best with sparser mohair fabrics (see below) or one of the pile fabrics described above.

Minky

We have already discussed short pile minky, but minky (at least in my mind) also encompasses longer pile fabrics that still have that very silky feel to them. Picture those really soft blankets or dog beds that you can buy at TJ Maxx or even the supermarket. These fabrics feel like that but have a wrong side backing that is knit and is usually a little more flimsy or soft or shiny compared to other faux fur fabrics. Many of these fabrics come with embossed patterns, or the nap may go in different directions to resemble a particular animal hide. They may have curly or straight fibers. The fibers may be very short (such as Shannon's Cuddle Seal) or around 2" (such as Shannon's Luxe Cuddle shaggy—shown below).





Shannon Fabrics has a huge line of fabrics that fit into this category. They work nicely for doll hair or for the entire body of a plush toy. They're not the easiest to work with, however, because they're so slippery. I have used the Luxe Cuddle Shaggy for doll hair and it's very cute. Even though these are usually polyester just like the other furs I describe below, for some reason the fibers lay and handle differently. I think of them as being lighter and wispier, as well as silkier. I have also found that the fibers do not come to as much of a paintbrush point as the faux furs described below. That is, they can look somewhat choppy on the longer pile fabrics such as the luxe cuddle shaggy. For this reason I don't like them as much for more realistic animal dolls or realistic anything. They work better for

simple toys. These types of fabrics have become very popular with manufacturers of plush for very young children.

Pros: Soft and silky, lots of fun textures and lengths.

Cons: Challenging to sew with, can have choppy look. Messy.

Synthetic fiber faux fur



This is the kind of fabric that nearly all of your stuffed animals are made from. It looks like real fur and is usually made with polyester, acrylic or a combination of both. It comes in very short (sometimes referred to as “mink” or “beaver”), medium and as long as 3-4”. The backing is knit, and usually more rigid than minky, but still has some give and will stretch if stuffed tightly. Not everyone loves it for this reason. Faux furs can come in completely solid colors or they may have spots, tipped colors (think of a wolf’s fur) or other variations. The pile may be uniform or varied in length, with longer and shorter tufts to help resemble a feathered look. In these cases, the backing may show little dots where those longer tufts are attached.

If you like to shave your fur at all, you’ll want to keep in mind the color of the backing fabric and whether the fur is one solid color or different colors closer to the backing.

Shannon is once again a very popular company providing a range of furs of pretty good quality. For a solid fur of decent length (but not so long that it’s really challenging to work with) I like their luxury shag line, especially for doll hair.

Big Z’s Fabrics is another vendor I’ve really been wanting to try. They have their own line of furs called Eco Shag and they have a nice line of different furs that have variegated or tipped coloring that looks really nice for animal pelts.

You can get synthetic faux furs with a woven backing. Tissavel is a company which makes higher quality synthetic faux furs that often have a woven backing and may have a more luxurious feel and appearance than typical faux furs, although they don’t come in as many longer and hyper-realistic varieties as the others.

I use synthetic furs a lot for both doll hair and for plush animals. The synthetic nature can definitely be a drawback, especially when little fibers come off of the doll and you find them floating around your house looking...plasty. However, the nice quality furs shouldn’t shed except where they’ve been cut. This is one way to assess for quality if you’re in a fabric store. Gently pull at the fabric pile (toward the middle, not near an edge) and see if the fibers easily come out. If they

do, give it a pass. Also examine the backing—is it very rough and scratchy or overly stiff? I would avoid this as well. Look for one where the backing is still flexible and fairly soft. Avoid backings that look loosely or sloppily knitted or warped.

You can definitely shave down and felt into these fabrics if you want to add needle felted features (see below). The backing is not very attractive or anything you want to accentuate in your creation, so if the shaved part is exposed you'll want to leave a short amount of fur—this is why you want to be sure it will look ok shaved. In the above photo, the bottom of the fibers is a grey color whereas the tips are gold and black. I shaved down the muzzle and around the eyes.



Pros: Very realistic looking, and comes in wide range of textures, colors and lengths

Cons: Hard to sew with just because of the extra bulk; requires careful attention and will be harder on your machine. Very messy to work with. Can stretch.

Mohair/alpaca and other fabrics for heirloom toys

The top choice (in many cases, the only choice) for bear artists and heirloom toy makers is mohair (sometimes alpaca) fur. A popular manufacturer is Steiff Schulte or Heimboldt. These furs tend to be more sparse than those previously mentioned and this often lends a more antique or rustic look to the toy. They are usually woven backed with cotton fabric and then the mohair fibers (which come from goats) are attached. The fibers may be a little curly or wavy, or mostly straight. You won't generally find very long pile fabrics of this sort, except that there is a denser Schulte fabric of about 2.5" pile available from some websites. These fabrics tend to be very expensive due to the natural fibers and the production process, but they definitely level up your toy making game and, paired with the right design and finishing touches, can produce a really special heirloom toy. Many artists appreciate the stability and attractiveness of the cotton backing. The backing can be exposed and contribute to the look of the piece. Some artists will shave down the muzzle area, for example, of an animal, and then reattach some of the fiber that they shaved off.

Johnna's Fabrics on IG shows off fabrics sold by Intercal which is the only US distributor of Heimboldt fabrics. You can find a few mohair furs in shops like CR's Crafts and some Etsy shops, like Serendipity Dollworks (smaller cuts) as well.

You can also find a very large variety including some longer pile options from the UK website MohairBearmakingSupplies.com.

Pros: Gorgeous, natural, timeless.

Cons: Not available in as many longer pile or dense pile options, so best for small dolls or more traditional looking bears. Very expensive. Few US-based retailers.

Vendors

Some of my favorite vendors mentioned throughout who I purchase from time and time again—all have excellent customer service and most are willing to send free swatches.

[Weir Crafts](#) (also a great place to get core wool for needle felting or doll stuffing, along with other needle felting supplies)

[A Child's Dream](#) (Waldorf)

[Dollmaker's Journey](#) (a large range of cotton and synthetic, woven and knit fabrics)

[CR's Crafts](#)—also a great place to get Locline armature, eyes and joints

[Dorr Mill Store](#) (wool)

[Mill Yardage](#) (PolarTec)

[Bear Dance Crafts](#)—mostly Waldorf style

[Olive Sparrow](#)—mostly Waldorf style

[The Rain Shed](#)—PolarTec as well as some stretch knit fabrics

[Dharma Trading Co.](#)—has a wide selection of most all of the fabrics we've discussed—the only draw-back is they tend to sell white or natural versions, so you'll need to dye it yourself.

[Organic Cotton Plus](#) has a variety of woven and knit fabrics from natural fibers. I highly recommend their cotton interlock (the heavier version).

Vendors I have not tried...YET...but I WILL:

[Rovi and Co](#)

[Olympia Woolworks](#)

[Blackberry Primitives](#)

[Intercal/Johnna's Fabrics](#)

[Big Z's Fabrics](#)

[Serendipity doll works](#)—Waldorf but also has small cuts of long pile Schulte mohair that's typically only available from UK sites; also magnets and glass beads

Vendors I buy from, but have mixed feelings about:

Fabric.com—they frequently misrepresent fabrics with their website photos and are notorious for cutting faux fur yardage the wrong way, which wastes fabric and creates a huge mess. They do this despite the many complaints in the reviews. They charge a lot for swatches and shipping is slow. Now that they're with Amazon, shipping seems faster. I order from them when I know exactly what brand and line I'm looking for (such as Shannon) and I am willing to accept their one, sometimes two (!) yard minimum. They have a wide variety and you can see if it's reorderable.

Joann Fabrics—I have a love-hate relationship with this store, mainly because it's a big box store and with that comes challenges. But for many of us, this is all we have nearby and I also have fond memories of going here as a youngster. And, it's probably obvious from this document that I use their fabrics a lot.

Pro Tip

Pictures can be deceiving. If you think you've landed on a fabric color that will work for your project, try Googling it or doing an Etsy search (for example: Kona Cotton Ice Parfait). You'll see that not all of the pictures look the same—but if 70% of them do, that's probably the closest approximation. Read customer reviews, especially on larger sites, and you should be able to guess as to what hue you're really getting.

Examples of Dolls I've Made:

Doll made with Kona cotton broadcloth:



A doll made with Doe Skin/suede cloth:



A doll made with alova:



A doll made with Birch Organics interlock fabric:



A doll made with A Child's Dream cotton interlock:



A doll made with Dorr Mill wool (some of which I dyed) with needle felted fur and face



A doll made with PolarTec fleece and Shannon luxury shag hair:



A chimp doll made with Dewitt Engle interlock and covered with brushable mohair knitted yarn:



Sleepy Time doll made with anti-pill fleece head and flannel body (sewing pattern available at [this link](#)):

