Unwinding the Nøstepinne

HEAVENLY BRESSER

Photos by Matt Graves

Use a nøstepinne to create a variety of center-pull ball styles. How do they impact twist?

It wasn't until I became a handspinner that I started developing a deep sense of appreciation for tools of the past. Oftentimes, it appears that traditional tools are frowned upon or pushed aside as worthless. However, I believe there is a deep connection between a fiber artist and her traditional tools. These tools, in return, can provide a sense of comfort or act as a visual reminder to slow down and enjoy the passing moments. The nøstepinne, in particular, has proven its worthiness in the eyes of many handspinners and makers of the past. While the cultural meanings may have changed over time, these tools can still be found in the hands of spinners today. Why are they so special?

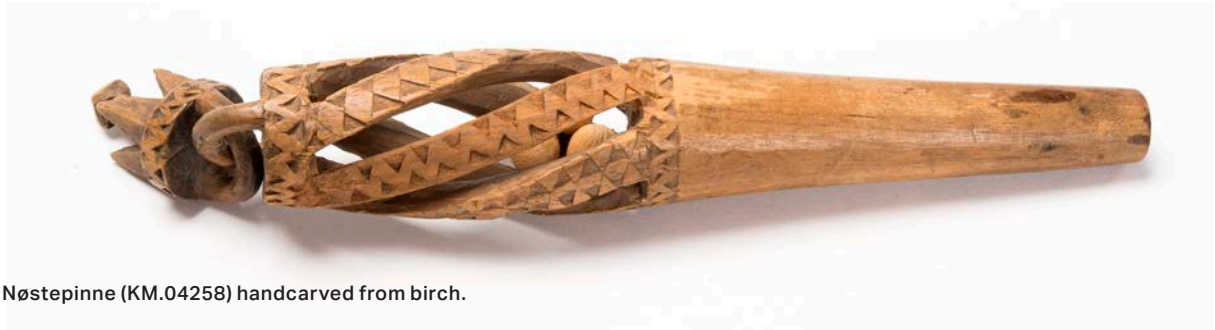
The nøstepinne has many names in Scandinavia, such as a *vindepind*, *wickeldorn*, and *nystepinne*. This traditional tool is used to manually wind a center-pull ball of yarn. The nøstepinner of the past vary greatly in design and shape. Some would feature intricate hand carvings or even cutouts in the handle that left a round ball of carved wood encased; others would have a simple, utilitarian design.

While researching information about nøstepinner, I encountered several historical nøstepinne examples with cultural context for some of the more ornate designs. I read that in some traditions, the nøstepinne was an engagement gift, which was handmade by a male suitor in hope of having it received by his potential wife. One can only imagine how much time, skill, and effort was needed to create such a unique gift.

After learning some of the history behind this tool, I became eager to test its capabilities. As a spinner, I thought it was interesting that some resources mentioned that the use of this traditional tool could impact twist. I wanted to learn more, but first I would need a nøstepinne! I decided to turn my very first nøstepinne using a wood lathe and a mahogany wood-turning blank, which was just begging to be used. Once I had a nøstepinne in hand and ready for winding, I moved forward with plans to put it to use.

As with other simple tools, there are many techniques for actually putting a nøstepinne to use. For the sake of this experiment, my plan was to test three methods of winding with handspun samples and report the effects on the twist of the resulting yarn. As I worked, I took twist measurements on the inner strand and outer strand of each center-pull ball. To improve accuracy and minimize human error with angles, I decided to use protractors with clear markings for each degree and a magnifier if necessary. For calculating the twists per inch (tpi), I created a 3-inch guideline on grid paper. When measuring the inner and outer strands, I took the measurements at least 12 inches from the end to compensate for the initial winds around the nøstepinne as well as any loosened plies toward the end of the yarn.

Furthermore, I spun five yarns of various fiber content and ply structures. The first was a two-ply 75% baby alpaca and 25% peduncle wild silk yarn, measuring 13 wraps per inch (wpi). The second was a two-ply mixed blend of Merino and trilobal nylon measuring 6 wpi. The third yarn was a not-so-consistent singles with a mixed blend of Merino, Tencel, and other fibers, measuring an average of 11 wpi. The fourth was a two-ply, hand-processed East Friesian wool measuring 8.5 wpi. The final yarn was a three-ply, hand-processed Shetland wool that measured 11 wpi. The winding method for each yarn was chosen at random.



Nøstepinne (KM.04258) handcarved from birch.

Courtesy of the Stiftelsen Nordmøre museum, photo by Ragnar H. Albertsen

Note: In the photos, I demonstrate winding with the right hand holding the yarn and the left hand holding the nøstepinne. Reverse hands if desired..

METHOD ONE: KEEP IT ROLLING

With this method, the hand holding the nøstepinne does the majority of the work. This is the method I used for the three-ply and singles yarns.

1 To get started, hold the nøstepinne in one hand, create a slipknot, and attach it to the top of the nøstepinne.

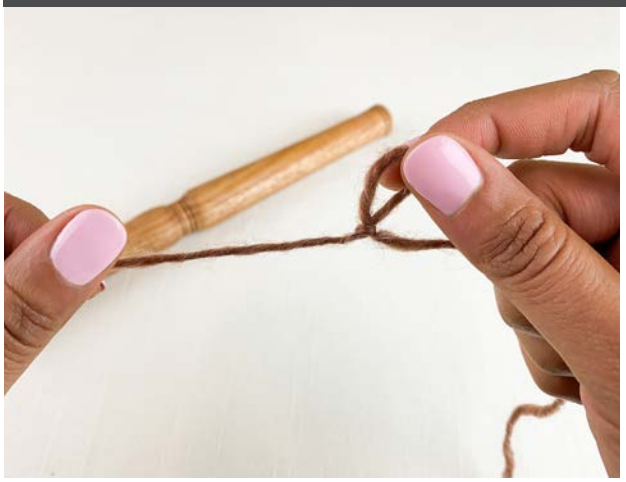
2 Allow a length of the working yarn to move close to the center of the shaft. Use the thumb of the hand holding the tool to press the yarn against the shaft, while the other hand winds the yarn around the shaft to create a base.

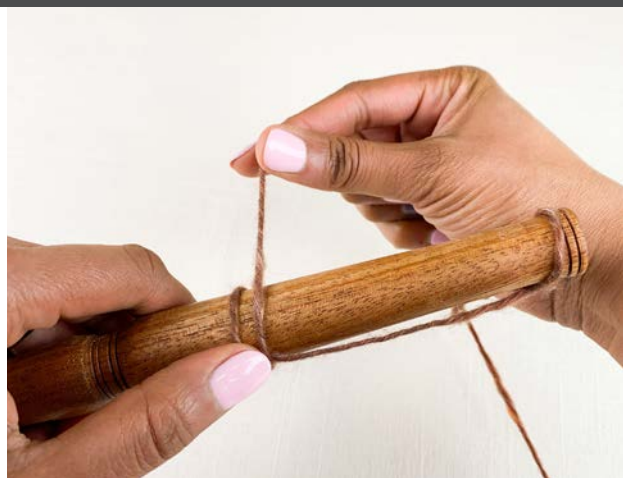
3 After winding five or six times for the base, position the yarn-holding hand so the fresh length of yarn extends several inches away from the nøstepinne.

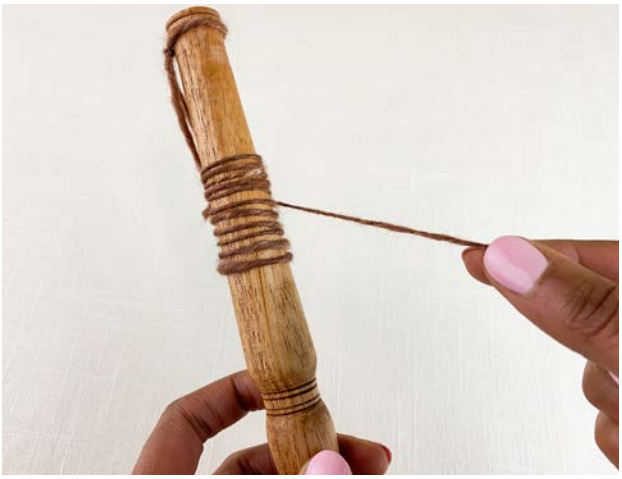
4 While maintaining a gentle hold on the yarn with one hand, allow the hand holding the nøstepinne to rotate the tool clockwise. As yarn starts to wind on, pivot the nøstepinne to wind the yarn on at an angle so the ball is building over the base wraps.

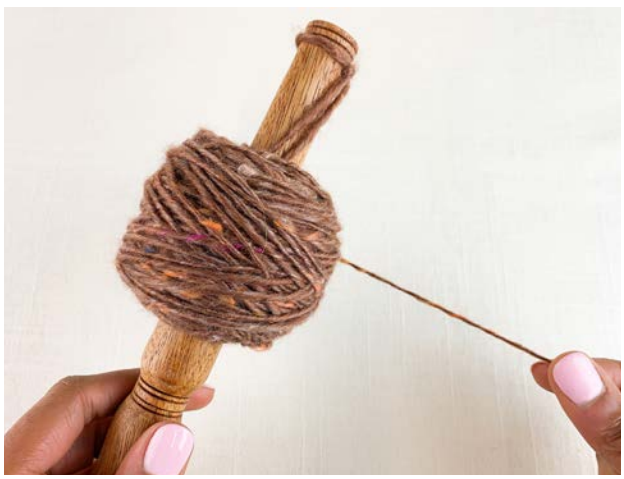
5 Continue Step 4, keeping close watch on the ball as it builds to avoid a lopsided center-pull ball. *Note:*

Method One: Keep it rolling









Photos by Heavenly Bresser unless otherwise noted

Other Ways to Get Started

1. Instead of a slipknot, wrap the end to secure the yarn on top or on a separate groove down the shaft of the nøstepinne.

2. When using the slipknot method, use a short tail or hold the tail and secure it in the center during the initial winds.

Allowing the yarn to wind on close to the shaft will create an elongated ball. Conversely, building up the ball over a small section of the shaft creates a flat-topped and flat-bottomed ball.

METHOD TWO: CORNER TO CORNER

With this method, the hand holding the nøstepinne shares the load with the yarn-holding hand. This is the method I used for the two-ply East Friesian and two-ply Merino/nylon blend.

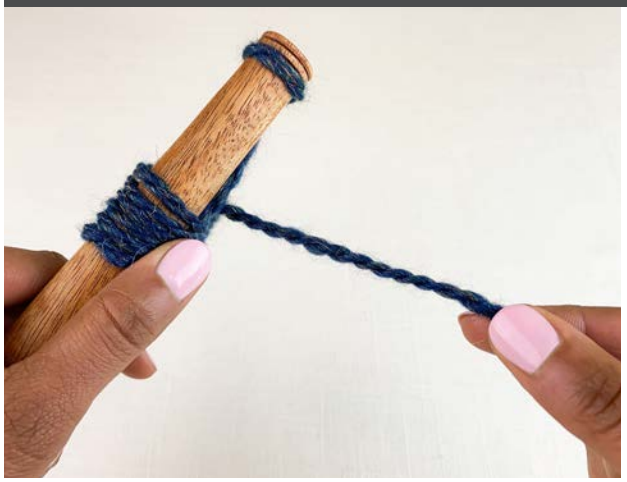
1 Attach the yarn and create a base by following Steps 1–3 from Method One.

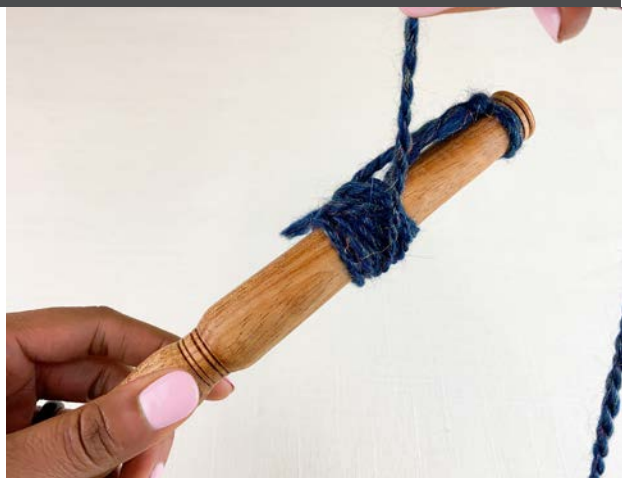
2 Starting at the bottom right corner and ending at the top left corner, wind the yarn around the front of the nøstepinne.

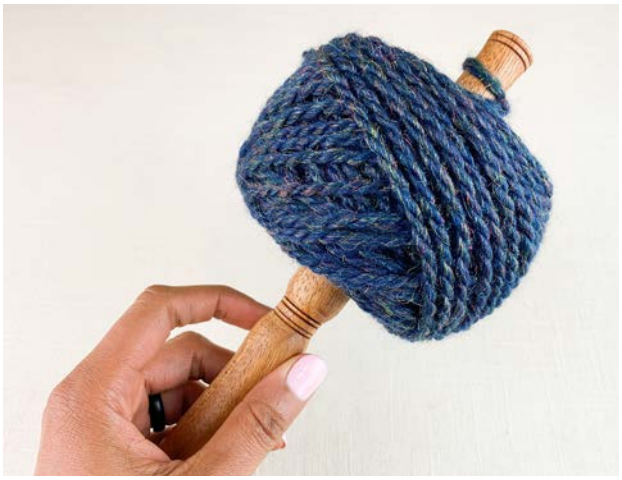
3 Rotate the nøstepinne clockwise a little.

4 Repeat Steps 2 and 3 until finished winding.

Method Two: Corner to corner







METHOD THREE: FIGURE EIGHT

With this method, the hand holding the nøstepinne bears the majority of the work. This is the method I used for the two-ply alpaca/silk blend.

1 Attach the yarn and create a base by following Steps 1–3 from Method One.

2 Turn the nøstepinne so that it is almost parallel to the floor.

3 Wrap the yarn over the base layer by carrying it from the bottom right to the upper left corner.

4 Wrap the yarn around the back of the shaft. The yarn should come from the bottom left corner this time. Complete the figure-eight shape by forming an X on top of the base layer of wraps.

5 Bring the yarn strand under and around the shaft of the nøstepinne.

6 Rotate the nøstepinne slightly toward your body.

7 Continue creating figure-eight wraps so that each one is positioned next to the previously wound figure eight.

Method Three: Figure eight

Heavenly Bresser's Nostepinne Winding Results

	Initial Ply Twist Angle	Initial TPI	Inner Ply Twist Angle	Inner TPI	Outer Ply Twist Angle	Outer TPI
Method One *Shetland 3-ply*	44°	3.8	42°	3.7	45°	3.9
Method One *Singles*	28°	6.0	27°	6.0	27°	6.0
Method Two *Merino/nylon 2-ply*	37°	2.2	32°	1.9	37°	2.1
Method Two *East Friesian 2-ply*	24°	2.7	20°	2.0	27°	3.0
Method Three *Baby alpaca/silk 2-ply*	20°	3.2	17°	2.7	21°	3.2

RESULTS

Method One produced minor, subtle changes in the yarn after winding. This method had the least effect on the inner strands of the center-pull balls. Method Two had the greatest impact and created the most dramatic change in the twist angle and tpi. The East Friesian, specifically, had a significant amount of twist removed from the inner strand after winding, resulting in a 0.7 difference in tpi, while the outer strand had more twist after winding compared to the unwound yarn. The Merino/nylon blend had almost no change in the outer strand after winding, but the inner strand measured 5° less than its original twist angle. Method Three resulted in some change, but this was more noticeable in the inner strand than the outer one. Of all the yarns tested, the singles yarn in Method One displayed the least amount of overall change.

After winding various balls of yarn, I can see why these tidy center-pull balls were once worn by knitters in the Nordic tradition. When hooked or pinned to the body, the knitter was free to roam and knit, pulling the yarn easily from the center of the ball. Yarns wound in this form stay put when knitting and crocheting and are portable even when multiple yarns are needed for colorwork.

I must admit that these findings caused me to wonder, "How does winding by hand compare or contrast to a ball wound on an electric winder?" For now, I will enjoy my therapeutic winding sessions with my nøstepinne as I mentally unwind from long days.

Resources

Lind, Vibeke. *Knitting in the Nordic Tradition*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2014.

Mielke's Fiber Arts. "Using a Nøstepinne to Wind Two Styles of Center-Pull Balls of Yarn." youtube.com/watch?v=toNeWx0FOjA.

Shroyer, Nancy. *The Interweave Guide to Managing, Measuring, and Making the Most of Your Yarn*. DVD. Fort Collins, Colorado: Interweave, 2016.

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Heavenly Bresser is the owner of Heavenly Knitchet. She is an award-winning handspinner and teacher at major fiber events all over the United States. Aside from spinning and teaching, she can be found dyeing fibers and making jewelry. Her goal is to inspire, encourage, and uplift other fiber artists. Visit her online at heavenlyknitchet.com.