



Each of Davidson's **seven sheep** yields about five pounds of usable raw wool. The wool is sent to a mill in Michigan to be cleaned and processed into batting-like fiber called roving.



This **one-pound ball** of wool is enough to make a sweater or at least four scarves, Davidson says. She estimates she uses about 1,000 pounds of wool a year, including commercial textiles that supplement her stock.

Davidson has owned this **spinning wheel** for 20 years. As she feeds roving onto the bobbin, a foot pedal powers the wheel, which helps twist the roving into yarn.



Davidson mixes wash-fast acid **powder dyes** with water and squeezes dye onto roving in a pan filled with water over a double burner. The fiber "has to cook" so the dye sets, she says.

Davidson estimates that she sells **15 types of yarn**. In homage to her Dancing Leaf Farm brand, she tries to give them dance-related names, such as Hip-Hop and Sock Hop.



Spin artist

Md. woman dyes and makes her own yarn

BY KRIS CORONADO

Dalis Davidson stands in her loft, its tables and the stair railing bursting with yarn in shades of purple, blue and green in varied textures. It all exists today thanks to the arrival of a gal named Clarabelle in 1986. "I started out with one sheep as a pet," explains Davidson, 57.

Although she has been the owner and sole employee of Dancing Leaf Farm (www.dancingleaffarm.com) since she launched it in 1988, dyeing and spinning her own yarn in a workshop behind her house, she stumbled into the job inadvertently.

After buying a home and small barn in Barnesville, in upper Montgomery County, Davidson got sheep to keep the grass short. Pretty soon, she started wondering what to do with the wool from their annual shearing. Two years later, she learned to dye and spin the wool into yarn. Then, of course, she had a lot of yarn on her hands, and so learned to knit.

Two decades later, Davidson is no knitting newbie; she continually adds patterns to her Web site. And dyeing her own textiles is her forte. She sells her yarn at events such as the Countryside Artisan's Spring Studio Tour in rural Montgomery and Frederick counties (April 20-22) and the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival in Howard County (May 5-6).

Here, a look at her operation.



Davidson uses a **drum carder** to combine bits of silk and mohair with roving to create multi-textured yarn. She feeds various fibers under the small drum, which mesh with fibers on the larger drum as she turns the crank.



Davidson favors the **electric wheel**, which she bought two years ago, for its speed. The electric wheel fills its bobbin in 30 minutes; the manual one takes nearly an hour.