



Pashmina Goat wool

In the highest altitudes of the Himalayas, Pashmina goat wool is produced by nomads from four Cashmere goat varieties: Changthangi, Malra, Chegu and the Chyangara or Nepalese. This wool is attached to many ancient legends, with the most famous describing Pashmina shawls measuring three by six and half feet of such fineness that they can easily slip through a woman's wedding ring. This wool comes from the underfleece of the domestic goats of the Changtang, the high plateau of Western Tibet.

Fiber: Pashmina goat wool

Harvest method: Cut from goats in the spring to ensure maximum harvest then sorted by hand

Used for: Woven textiles of extremely fine quality, especially shawls

Micron: 12-15

Compares to alpaca: Very fine, rare, geographically unique



Merino Sheep Wool

Perhaps the most world-renown of the fine wool breeds, Merinos are raised on large tracts of land in New Zealand and Australia. Sometimes referred to as the "king" of wool sheep breeds, their breeding history is extensive and rigorous. Pure white, they produce copious fiber, but require specific conditions and care, including a pollution-free environment. Merino wool is strictly regulated by Australia and New Zealand where rigorous protocols are applied at all stages.

Fiber: Merino wool

Harvest method: Shearing

Used for: Elite woolen garments for next-to-skin wear

Micron: Remarkably fine; microns as low as 11; under 16 microns is referred to as superfine.

Compares to alpaca: As fine or finer but higher scale relief



Shetland wool

Environmentally friendly practices are used to produce Shetland wool from sheep whose genetics are derived from ancient Scandinavian breeds. The sheep are referred to locally by the Gaelic-Norse names for their specific wool colors and patterns and colored fleeces are encouraged. The Shetland Island region is home to the Fair Isle design, begun in fishing sweaters, which must wear well and be very warm to protect against North Sea spray and wind. A good quality Shetland fleece can weigh upwards of several pounds.

Fiber: Shetland wool

Harvest method: Shearing

Used for: Traditional fisherman sweaters in Fair Isle pattern as well as light-weight worsted cloth or heavier weight, harder wearing fabrics and tweeds

Micron: Around 23

Compares to alpaca: Meant for outerwear, higher micron



Vicuña Wool

The wild living ancestor to the domesticated alpaca, vicuñas are considered a national living treasure of Peruvian heritage. In the past, their populations reached near-extinction until strict state-imposed protections were enacted. Vicuña wool is very, very fine and unrivaled in softness, comfort and beauty. However, each small animal only gives a little wool and for a single sweater the annual fleece of six animals is needed. The distinctive color of the wool, a particular cinnamon-honey hue, is unique to vicuñas.

Fiber: Vicuña

Harvest method: Shearing after regulated annual state-sponsored round up, after which they are returned to the wild

Used for: Luxury garments

Micron: 12.5 – 13

Compares to alpaca: Sometimes even finer than alpaca fiber but harder to come by and far more expensive



Cashmere Goat Wool

Synonymous with luxury and fineness the world over, tiny desert goats from Mongolia produce the wool, yarn and garments that define haute couture quality and style. Free-roaming cashmere goats are combed at molting and their precious fiber sold by subsistence nomads to large Chinese fiber processing plants.

Fiber: Cashmere

Harvest method: Combing

Used for: Luxury garments sought the world over

Micron: Not to exceed 19 microns, rigorously monitored

Compares to alpaca: Similar

in many respects, cashmere currently more well-known and alpaca production far more environmentally friendly



Qiviut Wool

From Greenland and the austere Arctic tundra comes qiviut, the wool of the musk ox. Not truly an ox but rather a large member of the larger goat family, they shed summer wool as they pass through vegetation while grazing. However, this is not the highest quality wool they produce. When they are hunted by native populations for food, the people then sell their pelts to be shorn for the highest quality wool. Because the skins are so excessively heavy, they are not used for leather.

Fiber: Qiviut Wool

Harvest method: Gathered from vegetation during molt, combed from oxen and shorn from pelts

Used for: Garments worn by native population to protect against extreme cold, luxury garments

Micron: 12-14 average

Compares to alpaca: Remarkably clean, requires little processing, smaller quantities available because it comes from wild animals



Angora Goat Wool

Originally from Turkey, angora goats, which produce mohair, now thrive in South Africa. While their fiber has a relatively large diameter, with the best at about 23 microns, it makes up for it with other remarkable qualities. Mohair is soft yet strong, with remarkable elasticity. Naturally white, its luster is extremely bright and appealing. Angora goats live semi-wild in rocky savannah and are shorn twice a year. Their fiber absorbs dye exceptionally well and is made into products as diverse as distinctively fuzzy, haloed knitwear to ski skins for alpine traversing. While the Mohair is relatively coarse, other unique fiber characteristics are more important than fineness in Mohair, unlike many other luxury wools.

Fiber: Angora goat wool is called Mohair

Harvest method: Goats are bathed and then shorn in spring and fall

Used for: Yarn, carpets, doll wigs, climbing ski skins

Micron: Relatively high; the finest is 23

Compares to alpaca: Larger micron, different uses



Taewit Wool

Originally created by a Soviet breeding program, Kyrgyzstan is home to the remarkable goats that produce Taewit wool. They are thought to have been developed by crossing Orenburg cashmere goats and Kyrgyz goats. Generally sold to Chinese traders by the nomad goatherds who live at high elevations, Taewit wool is used like cashmere.

Fiber: Soft, fine and warm

Harvest method: Combing in spring

Used for: Luxury garments specifically marketed as regionally produced

Micron: Very fine, comparable to cashmere

Compares to alpaca: Discovered only after fall of Soviet Union. Fine, warm and soft. Rare.